



Enlightenment and Dissent

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Editorial

We are glad to be able to report that the 1983 issue of the journal, which was devoted to the celebration of the 250th anniversary of Joseph Priestley's birth, was well received by subscribers and reviewers alike, and that we are thereby much encouraged to proceed with our venture. Our gradual steps to financial solvency have been very substantially aided by grants from the Hibbert Trust and The British Academy, to whom we send our warmest thanks. We still need, however, to raise our rates of subscription and we hope that our subscribers will bear with the current rates, which we hope to maintain for some time to come.

The celebration of anniversaries, whatever other merits it may have, serves to concentrate attention, and we are emboldened by the reception of our last issue to look forward to another such occasion. 1989 will give us an opportunity to celebrate the bicentennial anniversary of the opening events of the French Revolution, and though this may now seem a long time away, it is as well to give potential contributors some indication of our intentions. If to forewarn as well as to be forewarned is to be forearmed we hope that this indication will produce a sheaf of contributions, particularly upon the influence that the Radical Dissenters had upon the development of political thought.

While, as editors, we take what care we can to see that what we publish is factually accurate, we do not undertake to endorse the opinions and judgements of our contributors. Where these are controversial, and no doubt some are more so than others, we extend to all our readers an invitation to criticize and the right to reply. It is highly unlikely that there will ever be complete unanimity as to the best interpretation to be given of, say, Joseph Priestley's influence on subsequent thought, and we should like our pages to reflect whatever disagreements on this and other topics there may be. So we should like our contributors to do what Price and Priestley took great delight in doing, namely, exercise the arts of candour.

In our last editorial we omitted to thank Peter Lord for his design and production of the logo for the titlepage. We apologize for that omission and in thanking him for that very valuable contribution we also thank him most warmly for producing the design for the current issue. The motto we have chosen neatly summarizes the beliefs and aspirations of the leaders of Rational Dissent; we hope that in our own project we too may catch some of the fire and warmth of their convictions.

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

JANSENISM AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Geoffrey Bremner

The relationship between Jansenism and the Enlightenment in France is one of those subjects which, though not exactly central to the study of eighteenth-century ideas, remains a persistent, nagging problem.¹ Successive academics have obviously felt that there must be something there, that a significant link must at some level exist between Jansenists and *philosophes*, but anyone with an informed general knowledge of the period might well be forgiven for asking why. Indeed, Dale Van Kley, before going on to give one of the best analyses of the problem in recent years, says: 'in their general view of God, the world, and man, no two groups could be more opposed than were the Jansenists and the *philosophes* in eighteenth-century France'.²

One thing that the two groups do have in common, of course, is that they are both parties of dissent. Jansenism, having originally come to prominence in opposition to the Jesuits, and in particular to that aspect of Jesuit doctrine known as Molinism,³ soon found itself forced to take up a political stance. Even before the publication of the *Augustinus* in 1640, Jansenism had been in conflict with authority, and during the reign of Louis XIV it was subjected to an official campaign of persecution, which resulted in the destruction of the buildings of Port-Royal des Champs in 1710, and the promulgation of the Bull *Unigenitus* in 1713. The process by which a religious sect quite rapidly came to be seen as a threat to the stability of the state is admirably summarized by René Taveneaux in the introduction to his selection of Jansenist political writings.⁴ He stresses at the same time that the political views of individual Jansenist writers did not display the homogeneity we might expect, but the point I want to make in this article is that the persecution which Jansenism suffered from official and (sometimes barely distinguishable) Jesuit sources, inevitably led to its being seen, both by outsiders and its own adherents, as a clearly delineated group. The term 'party', which I used above, thus has some justification. Moreover, there were times, during the Fronde, for example, when it would even be seen as a faction.

The story of Jansenism in the eighteenth century offers less public drama, but an extraordinary proof of the tenacity of this sect. Perhaps the best two pieces of evidence are the continuous publication of the clandestine journal, *Nouvelles ecclésiastiques*, from 1728 until 1803, ably chronicled by D.A. Coward in a recent article,⁵ and the fact that the Jansenists could convincingly claim responsibility for the expulsion of the Jesuits from France in 1762.⁶ Moreover constant references to Jansenism and Jansenists (real or fictional) in the literature of the century bear witness to the fact that they had acquired an image in the public consciousness, even if they become increasingly difficult to circumscribe and define in reality.

An image also attached to the word *philosophe* in the writings of eighteenth-century France, and there is a good deal of evidence that, as the century went on, the *philosophes* acquired an image of themselves, if not a self-induced status. Indeed, Robert Shackleton has addressed himself to the question, 'When did the French "Philosophes" become a party?' concluding that the cohesive process was completed around 1750 to 1753.⁷ It would be a difficult task to establish how far this sense of cohesion among the *philosophes* was fostered by the awareness of being different, by the fact – implicitly discounted when we refer to the eighteenth century as 'The Enlightenment' – that most of the thinkers who characterize eighteenth-century France for us were widely seen in their own day as a small avant-garde group of non-conformists, increasingly influential, but still subversive and potentially dangerous. In this latter respect, *philosophes* and Jansenists had much in common.

The consideration of how the two groups were seen by the public at large leads us on naturally to ask how they saw each other. If we consult the *Encyclopédie*, the first port of call for anyone seeking the views of the *philosophes* on more or less anything, the picture is confusing. Turning to 'Jansénisme (Hist. ecclés.)' we find a generally historical treatment of the sect and the controversies surrounding it, but very little in the way of an opinion. As often happens with the *Encyclopédie*, we find rather more information under an unexpected heading, the article 'Bayanisme, ou Baianisme (Hist. ecclés. & Théol.)', to which we are led by a cross-reference, but here too the result is disappointing. The doctrines of the sixteenth-century theologian Baius are classified as 'erreurs', and the article nowhere departs from the official line. When we reach Jansenism the article is equally unexceptionable. 'Jacques Janson, professeur de Théologie à Louvain, voulut ressusciter les opinions de Baius, et en chargea le fameux Cornelius Jansenius, son élève, qui, dans son ouvrage intitulé *Augustinus*, a renouvelé les principes et la plupart des erreurs de Baius'. What follows is a standard account of the controversies, explained in rather more detail than in the article 'Jansénisme'.

The article 'Unigenitus' has an interesting history,⁸ but again, the version which was finally printed is of little interest, treating the conflict surrounding the Bull as a kind of contest between two 'partis', and playing down the religious importance of the dispute. Only the article 'Jésuites', attributed to Diderot,⁹ is more lively, written as it was just after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1762. Despite a disclaimer at the end, it is unequivocally anti-Jesuit, and consists largely of a list of their crimes against reason and order. 'En 1641, ils allument en Europe la querelle absurde du jansénisme, qui a coûté le repos et la fortune à tant d'honnêtes fanatiques'. The description of the Jansenists as 'honnêtes fanatiques' is followed a few pages later by 'sombres enthousiastes', and the phrases reflect opinions expressed elsewhere by Diderot of the Jansenists as misguided but well-meaning fanatics.

There is however an indication of more positive hostility, if not from Diderot personally, at least on the part of the *philosophes* as a whole, when he writes: 'Les Jesuites se sont brouillés avec les gens de lettres, au moment où ceux-ci allaient prendre parti pour eux contre leurs implacables et tristes ennemis'. Certainly the relationship between Jansenists and *philosophes* during the mid-century was something less than peaceful coexistence, and any hope of a happier state of affairs was destroyed when d'Alembert in 1765 published (anonymously) his *Sur la destruction des Jésuites en France, par un auteur désintéressé*, in which it was claimed that the expulsion of the Jesuits was the work not of the Jansenists but of the *philosophes*. A full account of the quarrel which ensued is given by Dale Van Kley.¹⁰ If the attitude of the *philosophes* towards the Jansenists lay somewhere between indifference and hostility, we could hardly expect the Jansenists to be anything but suspicious of the *philosophes*. since, whatever their views on secular matters, they were, either openly or implicitly, godless, and there is no need to emphasize this point beyond referring to Havinga's book on the attitudes expressed in the *Nouvelles ecclésiastiques*.¹¹

It seems then that, on a practical level, the two parties were bound to be potentially hostile, their differences flaring up more openly when circumstances offered an area of conflict. Any more important relationship between them must be found on a deeper level, as two forms of response to a stage in the history of society's consciousness of itself. Here too it might be thought that this is an area where no comparison is possible, since on the question of original sin, which would seem to be fundamental, they were totally opposed. After all, if there is any point on which commentators are agreed, it is that Enlightenment thought rejected, implicitly, if not always explicitly, the concept of original sin, encouraging the notion that man was in charge of his own destiny. Why then, in a climate of opinion which apparently encouraged advanced thinkers to move in this direction, should there have been this following for a sect which gave its affirmation to original sin in such an uncompromising and extreme way? For it seems that Jansenism, together with its in other respects very different Protestant counterpart, Calvinism, went as far as it is possible to go, while still remaining Christian, in affirming the primacy of original sin.

The most interesting and fruitful explanation of the nature and origins of Jansenism has been given by the Marxist writer, Lucien Goldmann, in a book published nearly thirty years ago, *Le Dieu caché*.¹² The detailed thesis of this book, associating the spread of Jansenism with the ambivalent status of the 'noblesse de robe' at a rigidly demarcated period in the early seventeenth century, was, and is now, viewed with considerable caution. Unfortunately, this thesis has tended to discredit the whole book, with its brilliantly penetrating discussion of the characteristics of Jansenism and its relationship to the period during which it came into being. The underlying idea of the hidden God remains central to any attempt to understand the way in which the

human condition was envisaged at that period.

When we look at the attitudes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and compare them with those of earlier times, we get the impression that God has progressively withdrawn from an active involvement with his creation. The medieval notion that God was omnipresent and that the events of our lives could be interpreted as divine interventions slowly gave way in people's minds to a more austere conception of a God who, having created the universe, had then left his creatures to find their own way to salvation. This growing perception of a hidden or absent God, *Deus absconditus*, had two important and somewhat contradictory results. On the one hand it led to a feeling of insecurity about the world, on the other it brought an awareness of greater independence and power to the human beings who inhabited it. The feeling of insecurity did not of course come from any belief that the world itself had changed: natural disasters no doubt came with roughly the same force and frequency, the actions of human beings were probably distributed in about the same proportion along the scale of good and evil. The difference lay in the *status* of these events and actions. Where once they had had their source in the mind of God and thus had a guarantee of rationality, even if that rationality was not understood, now they could only originate in the workings of the universe itself, which seemed to offer no rationale for its own phenomena.

Looking at Jansenism in this light, one can see that its doctrine of original sin is an expression of this relationship with God. The fact that, for the Jansenists, divine grace is not something to be worked for and won along a path which is already revealed to us, but rather a gift in the hands of a God whose criteria are beyond our understanding, expresses the new awareness of a world in which there is no necessary relationship between the ways of men and the will of God. The Jansenist God is an Augustinian God, whose characteristics are repose, stability and timelessness, a being representative of all that man, caught up in the external flux of a chaotic world, is not. Another aspect of the Jansenist view of the fall, that Adam, by preferring himself to God, reversed the relationship between the will and the passions, allowing the passions to rule his conduct, as well as emphasizing the gulf between man and God, also foreshadows an attitude found in Enlightenment thought, and to this I shall return.

If we see this gulf between the divine and the earthly as part of a conceptual structure, that is, as a manifestation of the form in which the human condition presented itself to human beings themselves, then it is possible to see a parallel example in men's conception of earthly authority. This structure is particularly evident at the time of the great mid-seventeenth-century Civil War, the Fronde (1648-53), and it is one of the ways in which the French experience of the 'seventeenth-century crisis' seems to have differed from the English. In an article of this length it is not possible to provide convincing

evidence, but it can be said that the dominant opposition throughout the Fronde was between those who were on the side of authority and those who were not. By this I mean that the monarchy preserved its status as the official authority throughout the conflict. The opposition was not, as in the Civil War, between two relatively clearly delineated sides, each with a religious and secular ideology, and one of which contained the King. Rather it was a confused, changing struggle which circled *round* the King. Although the aims of the rebels, whoever they happened to be at any given time, were to limit the increasing absolutism of the monarchy, they were not on the whole calling into question the power or legitimacy of the monarch, but seeking a place for themselves in his counsels.

The French *parlements*, different in function and scope from the English parliament, never had the power to unite behind them a large and influential section of the population which might have counterbalanced the power of the King; nor was there a widely based religious movement to oppose the traditional Catholic authority of the monarchy. The effect was that those who fought against the King found themselves cut off from the religious and secular authority, in a world which, lacking any external standard of moral conduct, was unstable, unpredictable, and dependent only on the criteria of effective action. This awareness of two worlds, one of which represented stability and absolute moral and religious values, while in the other choices were conditioned purely by the changing face of circumstance, seems to have characterized French perception of reality throughout the *Ancien Regime*. I am not suggesting that this perception was *caused* by the Fronde, simply that the Fronde was a striking expression and symptom of that awareness, and a phenomenon which helped to confirm it. There is therefore a rightness about the fact that royal authority eventually triumphed, thus asserting itself as a permanent stable source of authority, a role which was forever lost to the English monarchy.

To say that the monarchy remained a stable source of authority might be thought reactionary, if not totally naive, when one considers the amount of criticism which was directed at the institution during the eighteenth century, and for that matter during the seventeenth. In fact the statement needs to be qualified, for the situation is a more complex one. Perhaps the best way to characterize it is to say that the monarchy was respected as an instrument of power, but distrusted as a source of truth. As a power, it was felt to ensure the stability of the state and the possibility of civilized life; as a source of truth it was distrusted in so far as, backed up by the doctrine of divine right, it claimed to embody the will of God and the absolute values of justice and morality which derived from it. We thus have an institution which acts as a guarantee for the continuance of religious and social life, but not for its absolute validity, and it is at this level that the parallel with the Jansenist attitude is most evident, in that the Jansenist God also ensures the existence of the universe but offers no enlightenment as to its ultimate values. Existence goes

on within a framework, a form, but the form neither shapes nor is shaped by the existence within it.

Now a description such as I have just made would probably be widely acceptable as applying to Jansenism, but fits less well into the general view of Enlightenment thought. Jansenism is seen as a faith which rejects the things of this world because they are not, as the Jesuits claimed, stepping-stones to salvation, but simply irrelevant to it. Enlightenment thinkers on the other hand are regarded, and rightly so, as reformers who put their faith in the perfectibility of the world through man's agency. But if, as I have implied in the preceding discussion, we interpret the two movements not in terms of their attitude to original sin, but as forms of reaction to Authority, which I think is a more fruitful way of looking at the problem, then the points of comparison became clearer. I am writing the word 'Authority' with a capital when used in the sense it had for the Enlightenment, and as it appears in the article 'Autorité' in the *Encyclopédie*, as a term standing for the various people and institutions (the 'establishment' as we should now say) which claimed to embody the religious and secular values of society.

Seen in this light, Jansenism comes into its own as a positive force in the society of the *Ancien Régime*. Historians have often found it something of a mystery that a sect believing in man's invincible attraction to evil should not encourage all its adherents to withdraw from the world to seek the total conversion to the love of God without which salvation is impossible; it is no longer a mystery if we interpret the Jansenist doctrine of original sin and salvation as simply part of an attitude which rejects the claims of secular Authority to represent God's will, to reveal what is by its nature hidden and unknowable. If we accept this view it is no surprise to find that, together with those who did indeed retire from the world to Port-Royal, and those who understandably became involved in polemics against Jesuits and Enlightenment thinkers, there were many who wrote on political and economic matters, and from a number of different standpoints.

Indeed, the opinions expressed by Jansenist writers in this area present a problem in themselves precisely because of the wide range they cover. It is impossible to say that there is a Jansenist line on most political problems, but one can discern a dominant preoccupation, and this is especially evident in the long-running dispute over the Bull *Unigenitus*. Since the promulgation of this Bull in 1713 had such immense repercussions, since it brings into prominence a sensitive area where religious and secular concerns intersect, and since the dispute highlights the Jansenist attitude towards Authority, it is worth examining in more detail. The Bull had been personally requested by Louis XIV, who was anxious to have Papal support in his efforts to crush the Jansenists. It took the form of a condemnation of 101 propositions contained in *Le nouveau testament en français, avec des réflexions morales sur chaque verset pour en rendre la lecture plus utile et la méditation plus aisée*, by the

Jansenist priest Pasquier Quesnel, published in its final form in 1692. The King was quickly disabused of his hope that the French bishops would accept the Bull without protest, but the opposition did not really flare up until after his death in 1715. It concentrated round the Papal comment on proposition 91, in which the Bull declared that even the fear of an unjust excommunication should not prevent anyone from fulfilling their Christian duty, since the Church was the final object of loyalty. The implication was that the Pope's authority took precedence over the King's, and the comment was read, rightly, as an attack on the strong tradition of Gallicanism within the French church.

Two questions might be asked at this point. The first, why the King should not be a Gallican, is not strictly relevant to this article, except to say that the Jesuits, who had the favour of the King, were ultramontane. The second, why the Jansenists were Gallican, is more relevant. Gallicanism and Jansenism were separate movements during the seventeenth century, even though most Jansenists happened to be Gallican, but because the Bull was primarily anti-Jansenist and secondarily anti-Gallican it forced the two movements together, or such is the general interpretation of developments.¹³ In fact there is nothing surprising about the fact that the Jansenists should be of Gallican persuasion. Their rejection of the idea that any temporal power could interpret the will of God led them naturally to give primacy to the secular authority which could ensure the possibility of religious life rather than to a Pope who, apart from being without civil power, laid claims to infallibility, claims which were implicit in the Bull *Unigenitus*. The considerations which led them to espouse the Gallican cause were thus based both on tactics and on principle. The same could be said for the subsequent issues in which they became involved, but the dominant principle tended always to be the role of Authority, and one of the chief preoccupations of the theorists was to strike some kind of balance between Authority in its positive function as a guarantee of security and in its negative one as an oppressor of religious freedom, as a usurper of the role of God.

A good example of this kind of thinking can be found in the *Apologie des jugements rendus en France contre le schisme par les tribunaux séculiers*, by Maultrot and May.¹⁴ This was published in 1752, during the quarrel which followed the decision of 1749 by the Archbishop of Paris to deny the sacraments and burial in consecrated ground to anyone who refused to submit to *Unigenitus*. The passage I quote is from their discussion of Proposition 91.

Or quelles plus mortelles atteintes peut-on porter a un Royaume que de faire ainsi dépendre la couronne du souverain, du caprice et de la volonté même injuste du Pape? Si l'autorité des rois est respectée, si leur vie est en sûreté, c'est principalement parce que la religion apprend aux peuples que leur personne est sacrée, que Dieu seul peut leur ôter le sceptre qu'il leur a mis entre les mains, et que jamais il n'y a de raison légitime de se révolter

contre eux. Ces maximes sont inviolables. Ce sont elles qui entretiennent la paix de l'Etat. Les attaquer, c'est le livrer à tout ce que la sédition et la guerre civile ont de plus affreux.

This combination of respect for the sovereign's authority, associated with peace and order within the state, and distrust of the Pope's, which is seen as anything but infallible, is typical of much Jansenist writing. Moreover, the concern with civil order reveals a tradition which goes back at least to the Fronde, a century before.

It should not be thought however that Jansenist political theory was automatically pro-King and anti-Pope. I have spoken already of a structure of thought, and the structure underlying this attitude is one which accepts authority as a form of guarantee against civil disorder, but rejects it as a supposed repository of absolute values. With a rather different emphasis one can see the same structure operating in the works of other political thinkers. It was almost a commonplace in the political writings of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to insist on the need to respect the existing laws of the state, however inadequate and unjust they were felt to be. We find this, at an interval of a century, in both Descartes and Montesquieu. This attitude seems contradictory and even hypocritical to modern eyes because it rests on two assumptions which we no longer share with that period. One is that political reform – or any other kind of reform – consists in restoring something which has been lost. The other, which partly follows from it, is that a state which loses authority over its people quickly descends into chaos.

The belief that something has been lost is evidenced not only by the practice common among political theorists of recounting the historical process by which kings had gradually usurped the powers which had originally resided with the people, but on a deeper level by the obsession with the state of nature. Here we have the conviction that if only we could go back to some 'natural', pre-political origin of man then we should discover what he was really like and so be able to imagine a society based on his true nature, genuinely responding to his needs. The popularity of the notion of a social contract, often imagined as actually having been made at some time in the past, is another aspect of this belief in a state of perfection, existing somewhere in the past, and from which mankind has since 'fallen'.

The fact that society is believed to exist in a degenerate form both encourages reforming ideas and discourages any actual change which threatens to hasten the downward flight towards chaos. This fear is exacerbated in the case of France by the fact that the sovereign has drawn all the power to himself, so that stability and security are felt to depend on his personal existence. As a result we find *philosophes* advancing a wide range of new ideas, ranging from limited practical reforms to idealistic Utopian constructions, but never, at least in the mid-century, suggesting that the

existing governmental structure should be overturned, and this not for fear of censorship, since this could be avoided by the standard devices of anonymity and publication abroad, but for the reasons I have just given. Within a more restricted area, but in a comparable way and for comparable reasons, we find the Jansenists doing the same. Even the content of some Jansenist writing is similar to that of the *philosophes*, but the point I want to stress is that these two movements of dissent are chiefly interesting to us in that they respond in a parallel way to the challenge of the *Ancien Régime* and thus throw as much light on the structure of that society as they do on themselves.

There is a further point, perhaps a more controversial one, but to my mind more fundamental, which again suggests a parallel reaction both to the *Ancien Régime* and to the deeper problems of eighteenth-century society. I have said that it is more fruitful to see both the Enlightenment and Jansenism as reactions to Authority than as interpretations of the doctrine of original sin, but there is, I think, a level at which the two concepts merge together. Both the Jansenist accentuation of original sin and the *philosophes'* rejection of it, and the ambivalent attitude of both movements to Authority can ultimately be interpreted as expressions of a fundamental uncertainty, not just about the nature of truth but about its accessibility. Whether the concept of original sin is rejected, or interpreted as man's definitive separation from God, it represents our total alienation from the source of truth and value, and also results in the distrust of any Authority which itself claims to embody them.

That the loss of absolute values should lead to a search for a different kind of truth, based in the nature of man himself, is a consequence which is generally acknowledged, regarded in fact as a prime characteristic of Enlightenment thought, and I have also tried to show that it leads to a freedom of thought on a practical level in Jansenism. But the positive awareness of our alienation from truth is not part of the standard picture of the Enlightenment, for we tend to think of the *philosophes* (as perhaps they thought of themselves sometimes) marching confidently forward to a new world of knowledge, justice and light. Yet there are occasional glimpses of a different attitude, and the most striking representative of it is, as one might expect, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. His *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1775) has often been described as a secular version of the story of man's fall from grace, and in this respect it is comparable to many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century accounts of the development and decline of man from the state of nature to his position in contemporary society. In another respect Rousseau's *Discours* is distinct, avowedly distinct, from all other interpretations in that it posits a state of nature which is *qualitatively* different from civilized society. As Rousseau points out, all other hypotheses about the state of nature had projected into natural man qualities which were already social (family bonds, sociability, competitiveness, etc.). What Rousseau does is to strip man of every feature

which makes social life possible, reducing him in fact to a rather unaggressive kind of animal.

The important fact about Rousseau's state of nature is not that he goes much further than any other writer, but that his hypothesis implies a conceptual leap. His state of nature is not simply the distant starting point of a steady, albeit disastrous, progress towards contemporary society, but a radically different condition from which, as he repeatedly stresses, there is no reason why man should ever have emerged. The growth of the society we know from this original state is thus incomprehensible, and, what is more disturbing, fortuitous. The history of mankind is not, as far as Rousseau is concerned, a natural and necessary process, the fulfilment of our destiny as rulers of the earth, but a pure effect of chance. Moreover, in a passage which has probably been more mulled over by critics than any other in this discourse, he describes his state of nature as 'un état qui n'existe plus, qui n'a peut-être jamais existé, qui probablement n'existera jamais'.¹⁵ Whatever we take this controversial statement to mean, it is certain that in making it Rousseau reduces natural man to a problematical status. On one level a qualitative and apparently unbridgeable gulf separates natural man and civilized man; on another, the true origin of man, that is, the truth of human nature, is wrapped in mystery, perhaps even non-existent except as a heuristic device. Rousseau's dichotomy between natural and historical man could therefore be described not just as a secular version of the Fall of Man, but as a secular working of the problem of the Hidden God.

Rousseau's interpretation of the human condition stands, as I have said, in opposition to the main body of Enlightenment thought, but there are traces of a comparable awareness in other writers, and most notably in Diderot. Whereas Rousseau's attack was directed at the conventional assumption that man is pursuing a steady path towards his natural, enlightened, heritage, Diderot's doubts were centred around a particular aspect of that assumption which gained widespread currency during the third quarter of the century, the belief in sensibility, and its power to foster natural truth and sincerity as a basis for social life. The work in which these doubts are most evident is one which is ostensibly concerned with the art of acting, *Le paradoxe sur le comédien*. Here he suggests that the much prized virtue of sensibility is not in itself a force for good, but simply the expression of natural human forces which are in themselves neither good nor bad (like Rousseau's natural man), and are in any case incommunicable. Communication, and social intercourse in general, is possible only through an artificial process based on our need to exercise power over others and on the skill with which we do it. We imagine a suitable role for ourselves and then act it out. Social values, so it is implied, are necessarily based not on truth but on artifice, and are completely arbitrary. The nature within us is powerless to give value to our acts.¹⁶

By a different route, then, and with different intentions, Diderot has come

to a conclusion analogous to Rousseau's. Both thinkers suggest that the truth of nature, whether we seek it in our collective past or within our own psyche, is of a different order from social truth, subject to other standards, and ultimately irretrievable. Only Rousseau and Diderot express so forcefully the qualitative difference between the ultimate truth about the human condition and our everyday experience of reality, but one can find similar, if less cogent, examples in other writers and other fields of enquiry.

The natural historian Buffon repeatedly stresses that the operations of nature and the workings of the human mind are of a different order: all we can do is to perceive in nature the relationships which lie within our own comprehension, 'y reconnaître plutôt un ordre relatif à notre propre nature, que convenable à l'existence des choses que nous considérons'.¹⁷ The existence of absolute truth is doubtful and its nature unknowable: 'L'absolu, s'il existe, n'est pas du ressort de nos connaissances, nous ne jugeons et ne pouvons juger des choses que par les rapports qu'ils ont entre elles'.¹⁸ Buffon, although certainly an original thinker, is not usually numbered amongst the *philosophes*: another writer, this time in the field of aesthetics, the *abbé* Charles Batteux, was quite definitely not a *philosophe*, and his views were in some ways very traditional, but we find in his chief work on aesthetics this strange and significant assertion: 'Chercher la poésie dans son origine, c'est la chercher avant son existence'. He goes on to explain: 'Les éléments des arts furent créés avec la nature. Mais les arts eux-mêmes, tels que nous les connaissons ... sont bien différents de ce qu'ils étaient quand ils commencèrent à naître'.¹⁹

It is paradoxical that these thinkers should all be setting out, in their various fields of enquiry, to establish the truth of man and nature in the uneasy awareness that this truth is ultimately undiscoverable. It is a phenomenon which can only be accounted for by their conviction that the world as it then existed was degenerate, fallen away from a now irrecoverable state of perfection. All historical periods have their unquestioned assumptions, beliefs which are taken for granted and thus define both the distinctive character and the absolute limits of their thought. Dissent, whether in the religious or in the secular thought of the *Ancien Régime*, seems to be characterized by the tacit or open affirmation of the definitive nature of the Fall, of man's irreparable alienation from the sources of his being. The paradox of those Enlightenment thinkers who optimistically planned for a better world on the basis of a knowledge which they knew could not be found is comparable with the attitude of the Jansenists, enthusiastically pursuing both the religious and the secular life in a world whose truth was hidden from them by the nature of their own God. It is on this level that the relationship between Jansenism and the Enlightenment is most evident, not as a record of interaction, but as separate manifestations of a parallel way of thinking, a thought-structure inseparable from their own age.

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¹ The most recent bibliography on the subject can be found in Van Kley. See note 2.

² Dale Van Kley, *The Jansenists and the expulsion of the Jesuits from France, 1757-1765*, (New Haven and London, 1975), 234.

³ A doctrine first given formal expression by Molina in *Concordia liberi arbitrii cum gratiae donis* (Lisbon, 1588), according to which the Fall simply involves a deprivation of grace, which man is thereafter free to choose or reject at any given time.

⁴ *Jansénisme et politique*, ed. René Taveneaux, (Paris, 1965).

⁵ D.A. Coward, 'The fortunes of a newspaper: the *Nouvelles Ecclésiastiques*, 1728-1803', *British journal for eighteenth-century studies*, 4 (1981), 1-27. See also M. Albaric, 'Une page d'histoire de la presse clandestine: *Les Nouvelles Ecclésiastiques*, 1728-1803', *Revue française d'histoire du livre*, 27 (1980), 319-332.

⁶ Dale Van Kley, especially chs. 7 and 8.

⁷ Robert Shackleton, 'When did the French "philosophes" become a party?', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 60 (1977), 181-199.

⁸ See R.N. Schwab, et al., *Inventory of Diderot's 'Encyclopédie'*, *Studies on Voltaire and the eighteenth century*, 80, 149.

⁹ See J. Lough, 'The problem of the unsigned articles in the *Encyclopédie*', *Studies on Voltaire and the eighteenth century*, 32, 354; and J. Proust, *Diderot et l'Encyclopédie*, (Paris, 1962), 536.

¹⁰ Dale Van Kley, ch. 8.

¹¹ J.C.A. Havinga, *Les nouvelles ecclésiastiques dans leur lutte contre l'esprit philosophique*, (Amersfoort, 1925).

¹² Lucien Goldmann, *Le dieu caché. Etude sur la vision tragique dans les Pensées de Pascal et dans le théâtre de Racine*, (Paris, 1955).

¹³ See Taveneaux, 37-39.

¹⁴ Taveneaux, 140.

¹⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, ed. Lecercle, (Paris, 1971), 61.

¹⁶ For a fuller examination of this question, see my article, 'An interpretation of Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien*', *British journal for eighteenth century studies*, 4 (1981), 28-43.

¹⁷ George-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, ed J. Piveteau (Paris, 1954), [Corpus général des philosophes français, XLI, 1], 10A.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 372A.

¹⁹ L'abbé Charles Batteux, *Les beaux-arts réduits à un même principe*, (Paris, 1746), 319-320.

DAVID WILLIAMS AND THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY DISTINCTION BETWEEN CIVIL AND POLITICAL LIBERTY

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The Place of Civil and Political Liberty in Williams's Writings

David Williams's *Letters on political liberty* first appeared in 1782.¹ It consisted of seven open letters addressed to a Member of Parliament, in fact James Martin, the independent and reform minded member for Tewkesbury.² The letters were prompted by some conversations between Williams and Martin about 'the steps and prospects of Associated Counties, Parliamentary Enquiries and City Remonstrances' about which Martin is represented as having betrayed some uncertainty.³

Martin had been elected to the Committee of an Associating County.⁴ These Associations, formed after the model of Christopher Wyvill's Yorkshire Association of 1779, were an early British prototype of popular pressure groups whose aim was to rally and sustain support for Parliamentary reform. Characteristically a general meeting would be called in the county town on the promptings of the local Whigs; a petition would be presented and circulated for signature; and an executive committee would be appointed to promote the petition's objects and to correspond with other likeminded Associations. In the *Letters* Williams powerfully attacks the political motives of these Associations as in reality little more than vehicles for the recovery of Whig political supremacy; their absurd strategy, as he viewed it, of appealing to a corrupt Parliament to reform itself; and their haphazard political organization which belies their pretension to speak for the body of the people.⁵ These criticisms of the Associations, however, are only a platform for Williams's deeper purposes. For he wishes to sketch nothing less than a proper organization of the people so that they can constitute a National Convention with no need to petition their appointed government, since they would have the constitutional authority to command it.⁶

This remarkable set of letters, written in a style both passionate and urgent, is by its own profession an essay in the first principles of government viewed as a science.⁷ In an unpublished manuscript Williams was later to note: 'All the other works, such as those of Burke, Paine, Mackintosh, Cartwright are polemic — they contend on *known* principles — but they make no advance in the Science' (Williams's (ironic?) emphasis).⁸ Williams's picture of a science is taken over from empiricism with the particular object of political science being to establish those principles, supposing government to be a contrivance of men, which best promote 'the utmost security and happiness from associating in communities'.⁹ The arguments by which Williams hoped to establish these principles were in part historical, with Alfred singled out as the great historical model of a constitutional architect,¹⁰ and in part analogical. Here he relies on a highly detailed analogy between the body politic and animal physiology. The established science of biology serves as the closest

model for the projected science of politics, the latter only wanting its own Haller.¹¹

The real interest of the *Letters*, however, is not to be found in its conception of politics as a science, but rather in its novel account of the distinction between civil and political liberty, which enjoys pride of place as the science's subject matter. Not only is this distinction the central nerve of the *Letters*, but equally of three other important works which were soon to follow: the *Lectures on political principles*, *Lessons to a young prince* and *Observations sur la dernière constitution de France*.¹²

These four weeks, jointly constituting Williams's mature political theory, introduce this distinction into his published writings and give to it its fullest development. His earlier, *A plan of association on constitution principles*, which was written immediately after the Gordon Riots of June, 1780, defends the formation of neighbourhood self-defence committees, on the model of Alfred's tythings and hundreds, as the only constitutionally defensible means of effectively safeguarding individual security and public order by contrast to the constitutionally reprehensible expedient which had just been used of calling in the army on the orders of the King.¹³ But where in the *Plan* Williams's justification for the restoration of Alfred's political constitution rests on its ability to protect peace and security; and where in the still earlier *Letter to the body of protestant dissenters* Williams argues that such a constitution would promote *civil* liberty, his defence of it in the *Letters* is that it would realize a condition of *political* liberty.¹⁴ This condition, the *Letters* passionately insists, the Whig Revolution of 1688 had done nothing to restore, however much it may have increased civil liberty.¹⁵ Thus it is that the distinction between political and civil liberty points to a reinterpretation of British political history in which an original pre-Norman political liberty had been largely lost while only a fragile and less valuable civil liberty had since been gained. Although in this political history political and civil liberty have never been jointly enjoyed to a high degree, Williams's political theory looks forward to a time when this regrettable deficiency will be put right.

These four works are also set off from Williams's later political writings which are by turns more inconclusive in tone, more obscure in expression and more guarded about the prospects for reform. Where in the 1780's the occasion for achieving reform appeared to be close at hand, the timetable has been pushed well into the future by the early 1800's.¹⁶ More than that, Williams's historical claim about the realization of political liberty under Alfred is abandoned.¹⁷ The contemporary contrast between an England still enjoying the elements of civil and political liberty alike and France, whether under the terror or Napoleonic despotism, which enjoys neither replaces the historical contrast between England after 1688 and England under the 'immortal Alfred'.¹⁸ Swept away is the radicalizing doctrine which had

contributed an acerbic edge to Williams's earlier political judgements that 'no species of despotism can be so dreadful, as that of a free-constitution half-formed, where all its abuses assume the authority of establishments'.¹⁹

A tangible sign of the change in Williams's political outlook is found in his renewed proposals for self-defence committees. In the *Letters* such committees were to be established without reference to government and were to serve as vehicles for the realization of political liberty. In his later *Regulations of parochial police*, however, such committees are only to be established through legislative enactment and they will only be empowered to nominate their leaders and not, as earlier, to appoint them.²⁰ The need to exercise a tight disciplinary control over the activities of such committees appears to be a residue of Williams's experience of and reflections on the French revolutionary experience.

A more theoretical sign of change is Williams's new-found scepticism about the viability of a system of equal representation. In the 1780's as we shall see, such a system had been grafted onto Williams's animal analogy for the body politic, and the sensibility and political liberty of the body politic were largely explained through this idea. Later, however, while the weight of Williams's argument for his political vision shifts entirely to his increasing unchecked and baroque analogy with animal physiology, the idea of representation is being detached from it.²¹ In a very expressive and poignant passage of a letter to Joel Barlow in 1804 Williams remarked:

If popular Representation be suspected to be an Illusion - it will be demanded What is the Truth which has occasioned it? What has actually taken place? And what principle, in political Society, is calculated to secure the Liberties of its members? These are Labors for a political Hercules; who should be far my superior in Genius & Knowledge; should be in a state of tranquility & leisure; & should, from his age, have the hope, to see or hear of in some happy country the fruits of his Meditations & Labors -²²

Williams claimed in his only recently published autobiographical sketch that he withdrew from the political arena after his return from France in February of 1793 'not from fear ... not from change of principles, but from despair occasioned by the ignorance of reformers to whom power seemed to have been delegated only by chance'²³. His political despair, however, appears to have led to a deeper break with his earlier views than he was perhaps prepared to acknowledge.

The Distinction Between Civil and Political Liberty

The substantive business of Williams's *Letters* begins with his distinction between civil and political liberty. Others are accused either of failing to draw the distinction or failing to draw it properly.²⁴ Williams starts from the better

understood idea of civil liberty. 'Civil liberty', he says, 'is the result of laws or regulations which define the boundaries of men's actions as citizens of the same community and leave them free within those boundaries'²⁵. He adds that a society enjoys civil liberty when 'all interference of individuals with each other is regulated by laws'²⁶. Presumably the closer a society approximates to this condition, the greater the civil liberty it enjoys.

Such remarks as these owe a great deal to Montesquieu's *Spirit of the laws* and Locke's *Second treatise of government*, for example, and Williams is far from claiming any great novelty for what he has to say about civil liberty. Disagreements with his predecessors on this score are on points of detail. It is for his views about political liberty that he wished to claim credit. Political liberty, in his view, is the less developed and worse understood notion²⁷.

Williams's remarks on civil liberty are most charitably taken not as the full statement of an account of the idea, but merely as an outline of its subject matter and the concepts which are to be used in formulating such an account. Too much is left indeterminate for them to be taken in any other way. What, for example, is to be counted as an interference? And, more importantly, by what criterion are interferences to be regulated by law? The general welfare? Harm to others? The rights to others? Williams gives no clear answer.

In other works, however, Williams is much more specific about the importance of the principle of the rule of law to an account of civil liberty. One of the most eloquent expressions in his writings of his concrete understanding of civil liberty is his attack on the arbitrary power held by governmental administration through general warrants, which were notoriously used to crack down on Wilkes and the *North Briton*²⁸. Indeed, there are several passages in Williams's writings where civil liberty appears in danger of being reduced to whatever liberty the law permits so long as this liberty is enjoyed under the rule of law. In the *Lectures*, for example, Williams imagines someone putting the following questions about the liberties enjoyed by Englishmen: 'Are we not ... in the secure possession of our property? Are we not in all cases tried by our peers, on fixed and known laws? What is civil liberty'²⁹? The context shows that Williams imagined such questions to be conversation stoppers rather than conversation openers. Again, in the *Letters* there is a description of civil liberty as simply 'arising from the administration of justice to individuals'³⁰. In showing this disposition to reduce civil liberty to the rule of law, Williams was only reflecting one more powerful strand in the tradition of civil libertarian thought, which could be easily illustrated by citing passages from Locke and Montesquieu.³¹

In the 18th Century the notion of civil liberty had developed principally against the background of the contrasting notion of natural liberty. Natural liberty was generally conceived to be the liberty to which we would have a right even in the absence of civil society and where the content of the right did not

presuppose bringing such a society into existence. One disagreement among theorists of civil liberty was whether civil liberty consisted of all the liberty defined by the natural right to liberty (the position of Burlamaqui and the American, Nathaniel Chipman, who believed that only independence and not liberty had to be sacrificed on entering civil society) or, far more commonly, a residue of this liberty (the position of Hutcheson, Locke, Priestley and Blackstone, among others). On this latter view some of the liberty which would have been enjoyed as a right in a state of nature had to be sacrificed on entering civil society so that the residue could be enjoyed with security under the rule of law. One natural temptation, as we have noticed, was to mark off this residue simply by reference to the rule of law and, in the case of Locke, the further constraint that consent had been given to the sacrifice of liberty. Given this background of theory, one evident motivation for anyone wishing to mark a further distinction between civil and political liberty would be to take into account that liberty which was, or could be, an artifact of the establishment of civil societies.

In *The philosopher* Williams situated himself within the main tradition of viewing civil liberty in the light of natural liberty. But while the idea of civil liberty figures prominently in this book, there is no mention of the distinction between civil and political liberty. As in the tradition, civil liberty is conceived as consisting of the most important of our natural rights³², although Williams for his part did not believe that a state of nature ever actually existed.

In *The philosopher* Williams sets a tremendously high value on civil liberty. He says: 'I would lose my life to obtain that improvement of civil liberty, which every society has a right to'³³. Such unqualified praise for civil liberty is out of the question in his later works where he viewed civil liberty in the light of political liberty. Thus we find him remarking in his *Lectures*: '... the introduction of civil liberty into states destitute of political or constitutional arrangements, is attended with few advantages; ... those advantages are alloyed by inconveniences from tumults, factions or contentions - and ... it remains a problem whether liberty be a blessing or a curse'³⁴. Williams thus came to believe that much of the value civil liberty has derives from its enjoyment under the condition of political liberty to which he attaches higher priority. What then is political liberty?

Williams says that political liberty 'has a reference merely to the grand division of the state: the popular, the executive, and the legislative; and consists in their freedom from the encroachments of each other'³⁵. A little further he adds: 'A well-constituted state must have a body of men to make laws; a person or persons to represent the community to foreign nations and to execute the laws for the preservation of civil liberty; and a power left in the people (which I call its political liberty) to repel all encroachments, and to confine all the members of the community within the limits of their offices'³⁶. These two remarks effectively distil the essence of Williams's account of political liberty, but they stand in need of an extended commentary

A first point is that the distinction between civil and political liberty is intended as a distinction between kinds of liberty with the account of political liberty being strictly parallel to that of civil liberty. More particularly, each is understood negatively as consisting in the absence of interference with the conduct of whoever possesses it: individuals in the case of civil liberty and certain collectives and offices in the case of political liberty³⁷. One immediate and well-understood consequence of this way of considering political liberty is that it has no application to a direct democracy where the people directly govern themselves. For such an account presupposes a contrast rather than a unity between a people and its government. Another consequence is that it parts company from a different style of account which defines either liberty in general or political liberty in particular, not as absences or restraints, but as the possession of powers, and the powers of self-determination or self-government in particular. Richard Price offered just such an account of liberty in general in his *Observations on the nature of civil liberty*; Benjamin Constant was to offer such an account of political liberty in particular (or, more famously, 'the liberty of the ancients') in express contrast to civil liberty which was viewed by him in terms of the absence of governmental restraints.

So far, though, I have only been looking at the first of the two remarks I quoted from Williams's *Letters*. There is an immediate difficulty, however, when we turn our attention to the second. For there Williams identifies the political liberty of the people as a power, not of self-government as such, but of control over government. After having characterized political liberty as the absence of restraint is he now confusing such a condition with a power? Is there a muddle, then, at the very heart of Williams's account of political liberty? To deal with this difficulty properly we first need to take notice of one way in which Montesquieu influenced Williams's views. For in his *Lectures* Williams, partly echoing Montesquieu, remarks: 'Political liberty may be defined, the condition of a whole people, *secure* from danger, or apprehension, in its collective relation to the government it has appointed' (my emphasis)³⁸. The role of the 'political' in the expression 'political liberty' is not simply to identify one kind of liberty, but also to define the condition under which the liberty must be enjoyed: as secure against certain encroachments. In following Montesquieu on this point, Williams was agreeing with many of his contemporaries, although not quite all. One dissenting voice was that of the lawyer Richard Hey who attacked Montesquieu for confusing liberty with security.³⁹ In much the same vein Bentham's friend, John Lind, argued in effect that instead of a distinction between civil and political liberty what was wanted was a distinction between liberty, indifferently characterizable as civil or political, and security, civil or political. What commonly went under the designation of political liberty, he thought, amounted to nothing more than political security.⁴⁰ Williams, for this part, applied the security condition evenhandedly to political and civil liberty alike.⁴¹

On Williams's account the community's political liberty is violated if the executive encroaches on the legislative or vice versa;⁴² if these divisions of government, whether singly or jointly, encroach on the people by overstepping the limits of their offices⁴³; but equally as well if the people meddle with, and encroach on, the government in the conduct of its appointed tasks.⁴⁴ In the *Letters* Williams uses the Lockean division of government into executive and legislative; sometimes in the *Lectures* he resorts to Montesquieu's division into executive, legislative and judicial.⁴⁵ But what is fundamental to Williams's outlook is not any particular division of governmental powers; rather it is the relation of government, whatever the division, to the people. For on his view any encroachment of one division of government on another is at the same time a violation of the political liberty of the people. The encroaching division exceeds the powers the people have entrusted to it.

Williams takes it as fundamental that government is to be seen as a delegation of the people. His object is not to re-examine this tradition's foundations, but to settle some of its unfinished business. Thus the basic criticism he directs against Locke, for example, is that 'the mode of asserting, recovering or preserving the people's rights he does not point out'.⁴⁶ Locke's failure, however, is critical for the project of establishing political liberty in the community since, so long as the lacuna he left remains unfilled, the liberty constitutive of political liberty cannot be secured. Most of Williams's positive contribution to the theory of political liberty consists in his plan for achieving this security for liberty.

Understandably enough, Williams's central preoccupation was with devising a way of making government properly answerable to the people. Indeed, in the remark quoted a little earlier from the *Lectures* Williams carelessly seemed to make the community's political liberty equivalent to the satisfaction of this condition alone. Williams's full conception of political liberty, however, also lays down requirements on the people in its treatment of its governments and on the security against encroachment that government must enjoy. Not only must the government not be improperly encroached upon, it must also have a security against such interference. But since the people's sovereignty requires that its power and its power alone be uncontrollable, on what foundation can the security of government against encroachment be set? Yet if this security be wanting, the overall scheme for the community's political liberty comes unhinged. When, albeit rarely, Williams faces up to such questions directly, his answer turns on his proposals for the organization of the people. The object of this organization is to ensure that when the people collectively act, their actions, while on occasion they may be mistaken, are as a rule characterized by the exercise of public reason rather than some arbitrary will or passion.⁴⁷ Public reason will be the foundation of the security government enjoys as well as the people's security in relation to their government.

There is a certain peculiarity in Williams's characterization of both civil and political liberty which needs to be pointed out. For the sketches he offers identify each concept not only by reference to whose liberty needs protection against encroachment — individuals in the one case and certain collectives and offices in the other — but also by reference to the encroaching agent. Individuals are pictured as those who interfere with another individual's civil liberty; collectives and offices encroach upon the political liberty of other collectives and offices. In brief, likes encroach upon likes. This is a serious drafting error. For Williams leaves no way open of characterizing the encroachment of unlikes upon each other relative to his distinction of liberty into kinds; and the danger, of course, is that uncharacterizable situations relative to a theory will be either ignored or not counted as threats to liberty. This oversight assumes greater significance in the light of the higher priority Williams attaches to political over civil liberty.

There is also a related issue arising from the parallelism of political and civil liberty which Williams never addresses. For the political liberty of the people, collectively considered, cannot be enjoyed unless the people individually considered, also have certain liberties such as an absence of restraint on the exercise of any of the electoral powers which properly belong to them or the liberty to express their ideas. But how are these liberties to be characterized in terms of Williams's distinction? Since these liberties belong to individuals, it would seem that Williams ought to classify them under civil liberty. But then there are other claims he wishes to make about the relation between civil and political liberty which do not sit well with such a classification. For one thing such liberties cannot also be assigned a lower priority than political liberty, since their possession by individuals is partly constitutive of the collective's political liberty. For another, Williams maintains, at least some of the time, that civil liberty can be had without political liberty and vice versa. But this general view could scarcely be thought to apply to these particular liberties. Accordingly, this seems to be a further point on which Williams's views need some sorting out.

Williams, Montesquieu and the Language of Liberty

Williams says that he found in Montesquieu a forerunner of his attempt to distinguish civil from political liberty. Montesquieu's language was admittedly different. In Bks. XI and XII of the *Spirit of the laws* he distinguishes what he calls political liberty in relation to the constitution from political liberty in relation to the subject. The former most closely corresponds to Williams's political liberty; the latter, to his civil liberty. While Williams thought that Montesquieu's account of the distinction was a failure, he was quick to add: 'I must acknowledge if Montesquieu had not made it, I might never have attempted another. It is thus the mistakes of genius may contribute to the advancement of knowledge'.⁴⁸

Actually the full scope of Books XI and XII, judging from their titles, is the

laws which form political liberty in relation to the constitution and the *laws* which form political liberty in relation to the subject, respectively. This distinction between laws corresponds to Montesquieu's distinction between political law, which relates governors and governed, and civil law, here encompassing criminal law, which concerns the relation in which individuals stand to each other. This correspondence offers one inducement for adopting Williams nomenclature of political and civil liberty over Montesquieu's clumsier neologisms. Indeed, there is one passage buried away in Montesquieu's discussion of Roman history, where his talk is of *liberté politique* and *liberté civile*.⁴⁹ In characteristic fashion Montesquieu does not mark their difference by abstract definition, but by representative episodes of Roman history. The rape of Lucretia, which led to the establishment of the Roman Republic, established political liberty; the reaction to the crime of Papirius, who confined in his own house and physically abused a debtor, signals the establishment of civil liberty, since the notoriety of the incident resulted in the abolition of this power of confinement creditors had over debtors. It is also worth noting that there is a passage in Rousseau's *Social contract* where civil and political liberty are also spoken of in parallel to civil and political law.⁵⁰ The language of legal classification, accordingly, seems to have been a major source of the language of liberty's divisions.

During the period, however, the use of the expressions 'civil' and 'political liberty' was anarchic. Some political theorists used the expressions interchangeably.⁵¹ Others translated unfamiliar talk about political liberty into the more familiar idiom of civil liberty.⁵² Still others wished to draw a distinction, but one would be very hard pressed to say what it was.⁵³ Priestley, surveying the general scene, was led to remark: 'Both the terms being in the language, it will be better to assign them ... different significations than to use them promiscuously as is commonly done'.⁵⁴ Bentham on reviewing a set of such assignments drew a different conclusion: 'I would no more use the word liberty in my conversation when I could get another that would answer the purpose, than I would brandy in my diet, if my physician did not order me: both cloud the understanding while they influence the passions'.⁵⁵

So much for Montesquieu's language; now to the substance of his distinction. In Bk. XI Montesquieu says: '... the political liberty of the subject is a tranquility of mind arising from the opinion each person has of his safety. In order to have this liberty it is requisite the government be so constituted as one man need not be afraid of another'.⁵⁶ To have such a government would be to have political liberty in relation to the constitution. In this formulation, however, it seems that Montesquieu, unlike Williams, was not intending to distinguish two kinds of liberty, but rather two strategies for securing one and the same liberty: the liberty of the individual subject. The one strategy is direct and depends importantly on protections to liberty built into the criminal and civil law itself: the care with which offences are acknowledged and defined; the procedures by which they are tried; the punishments meted out from them;

the remedies available against wrongful action. The other strategy, by contrast, is more general in its operation and less direct in its effects. It depends on the arrangement of the institutions of government by the constitution so that, at the very least, the more direct protections will not be disregarded by arbitrary action where they already exist and they will be established where they do not. Such constitutional security for individual liberty will be achieved, according to Montesquieu, through the division and balancing of governmental powers along the lines of the English constitution.

Among Williams's contemporaries in England one person who reflected a version of Montesquieu's position in the idiom of civil and political liberty was the constitutionally conservative lawyer and judge, Edward Christian. Civil liberty he understood to be the impartial administration of equal and expedient laws — a loose account because, among other things, many laws fail to have the liberty of the subject as their subject matter — and he defined political liberty as the security with which from the constitution, form and nature of the established government the subject enjoys civil liberty. Political liberty, then, is *defined* in terms of civil liberty just as Montesquieu's political liberty in relation to the constitution had been defined in terms of political liberty in relation to the subject. There is, however, this difference. For Christian it appears that political liberty simply cannot exist in the absence of civil liberty whereas for Montesquieu the connection is not nearly so tight. He wished to accommodate the possibility that exceptionally the one condition might be found without the other while maintaining the definitional dependence of the one condition on the other. Approaches to political liberty such as these, however, leave it an open question just what form of government will actually provide the security required. Christian for his part uses his account in the service of scepticism about the need to reform either the English parliament or English law. Unlike some of his contemporaries, he supposed that such reforms far from being essential to the establishment of political liberty would destroy a political liberty which already existed.⁵⁷

While for Montesquieu, then, there is one liberty and two kinds of security for it, there are for Williams two liberties, each with its attendant securities. Montesquieu's account, as seen from Williams's perspective, errs most basically by overlooking the liberty of collectives: of the divisions of government to which the people delegate powers and of the people themselves, collectively considered. Not that Williams overlooks the connection between political liberty as he defines it and civil liberty. Indeed, once in the *Letters* he extravagantly declares that 'civil liberty cannot be enjoyed in a high degree; nay cannot subsist without political liberty'.⁵⁸ So while Williams does not believe that political liberty is definitionally dependent on civil liberty or a causally sufficient condition of it, he appears to make it a necessary condition for a high degree of civil liberty. Yet this claim is at variance with a point Williams had made on the page preceding: 'At the Revolution of 1688 provisions and arrangements were made, which

introduced a *high state* of civil, while they almost wholly suppressed political liberty' (my emphasis).⁵⁹ Clearly he cannot have it both ways, and while the latter remark seems more typical of Williams's considered outlook, the conflict between the two remarks suggests that he hasn't altogether sorted out the relation between the two liberties.

From the difference between Williams and Montesquieu on the nature of political liberty flow many of the other differences between them. For while Montesquieu had looked to the opposition of the great divisions of government as indispensable to political liberty in relation to the constitution, Williams saw political liberty's foundation in a proper organization of the people which yields to them unanimity and through it controls over government. So where Montesquieu views opposition creatively, Williams takes opposition, faction and tumult, which he revealingly groups together, as diagnostic of a failure of political liberty. The English constitution which Montesquieu judged to have political liberty as its object Williams irreverently describes as 'one of the most awkward and unmanageable fabrics which has ever been produced by human folly'.⁶⁰ If an English constitutional arrangement exhibiting political liberty was to be found, one had to look much further back to the 'immortal Alfred'.

Political Liberty as Participation in Government.

Much more historically influential than Montesquieu has been another view of the nature of political liberty which was developed by Joseph Priestley in one version and by Richard Price in another.⁶¹ This view helps to set Williams's account into much sharper focus.

Priestley, who claims credit for what he describes as an innovation, takes civil and political liberty to mark a distinction between two kinds of liberty, and not two levels of security for one and the same liberty.⁶² Indeed, it is a prominent feature of his account that he insists liberty of whatever kind be kept distinct from conditions which merely serve to secure it. For Priestley, civil liberty consists in the power an individual in a state of society retains over *his own actions*; political liberty, in the power individuals possess over the *actions of others*, whether this power is directly exercised in holding government office or, more remotely, in nominating or voting for such officers as one's representatives.⁶³ On another of Priestley's characterizations of the distinction, political liberty is a function of who governs; civil liberty, of the extent of government.⁶⁴

Priestley's *analysis* of political liberty, unlike Montesquieu's, requires a certain form of government if political liberty is to be fully realized. The more democratic the government and the more direct the democracy, the more perfect the political liberty. His analysis also makes it easy to imagine the possibility that civil liberty might be enjoyed without political liberty, and vice versa.⁶⁵ Priestley believes, however, that *some* measure of political liberty will

tend to secure civil liberty, although he is careful to reject the suggestion that the greater the political liberty, the greater the civil liberty or the more secure its enjoyment.⁶⁶ Indeed, he is as insistent as he is about underlining the distinction between civil and political liberty because he wishes to deny the existence of such a relation.

What matters for Priestley is maximizing civil liberty, not perfecting political liberty. Political liberty's value is largely instrumental for increasing and securing civil liberty. But maximizing civil liberty is, on Priestley's view, compatible with variations in the degree of political liberty enjoyed, the right range for any society to be determined by cautious experiment with one's eye fixed all the time on its effect on civil liberty.⁶⁷ While Priestley is certainly not indifferent to political liberty, he assigns to it a much lower priority than to civil liberty.

Price is less relaxed about political liberty than is Priestley. Where Priestley classes political liberty as a kind of liberty co-specific with civil liberty, Price sees civil liberty as embracing a certain measure of political liberty and inconceivable without it, at least in a certain measure. To understand the source of this difference we need to understand how Price applies civil liberty to communities and to individual citizens, and the relation he sees as standing between them.⁶⁸

Following on from his general conception of liberty as self-determination or self-government, Price regards a community as civilly free if and only if it is self-governing. This condition not only requires the absence of foreign domination of the community, but equally that all its citizens should have a certain share in its government.⁶⁹ Civil liberty as applied to an individual is an analogue of the community's civil liberty. To have civil liberty an individual must enjoy his rights to life, liberty, property and good name.⁷⁰ But by itself this condition is not sufficient. For Price, reinvoking his general conception of liberty, claims that these goods must also be *secured* to the individual *through his being his own legislator*, which Price takes to be equivalent to membership in a civilly free community. A person may enjoy freedom under government while his condition is that of civil slavery if he is subject to a will alien to his own, just as a community lacks civil liberty even if it is subject to benign domination. Since Price also subscribes to the maxim which was later to attract Mill's unrelenting attack that 'A people never oppress themselves or invade their own rights', he believes that a certain measure of political liberty is not only necessary for civil liberty, but also sufficient.⁷¹

While Price differs from Priestley in analysing political liberty as self-government rather than as a power over others and also in attaching a greater value to it, both share three important theses which set their outlook off from Williams's:

- (i) that political liberty is constituted by participation in government;
- (ii) that, consequential on (i), perfect political liberty is only realizable in small states;
- (iii) that political liberty competes with other political objectives and, having been achieved in a certain measure, must be subordinated to some of them.

The practical consequences is that, all things considered, perfect political liberty is not an ideal worth pursuing. Where Price and Priestley can be seen as drafting variations on a Lockean political outlook, Williams owes at least as much to the inspiration of Rousseau.⁷²

The Constitution of Political Liberty

Where Price and Priestley see political liberty as consisting in participation in government, Williams thinks of it as the secure constitutional control by a people over its government. A consequence of the exercise of this constitutional control will be the election by the people of Parliamentary representatives and indeed much more. Thus in his *Observations* Williams is ready to propose that army officers, judges, government ministers as well as many other officials be chosen by voting. But not only does Williams not describe the power to elect some or all of one's governors as constituting self-government, he denies that by itself it will be sufficient to constitute a state of political liberty either.⁷³ Where many political reformers thought that a thorough Parliamentary reform would be enough to establish as much political liberty as would be desirable, Williams argued that such a reform would be consistent with the further subversion of political liberty if it were achieved by means conceding the constitutional supremacy of Parliament. The campaign undertaken by the reformers of petitioning Parliament to enact such a reform, however, would do just this. To find the roots of political liberty one would have to reach deeper.

The key to the people's constitutional security for Williams is in their proper organization independent of their appointed government. Until such an organization is carried out, the individual members belonging to a community could constitute a populace, but not a people. In his *Lessons* Williams offers this description, ostensibly of Alfred's constitutional scheme, but in reality an expression of his own political ideals:

The political structure of that great prince has all the necessary properties and effects of an organized body. The head and the extremities are permanently united; not by occasional election, or by pretended delegations of national power. The whole surface of the body, by minute subdivisions, is formed to receive and transmit instantaneous impressions, external and internal; all the parts are held to their office by the general force, without commotion and without violence; and the public will being enforced by the public strength, is a law which nothing in the community can dispute or resist.⁷⁴

In his *Lectures* Williams further notes: 'Political bodies ... should have their members united vitally and not by mere bandages as contracts and treaties'.⁷⁵

The organic imagery is graphic, but what political organization is it intended to support? Start with the minute subdivision on the body's surface. The smallest of these correspond not to individual citizens, but corporate entities. They are tythings consisting of ten neighbouring families, whether or not they own property. The tything elects a representative, a tythingman, who will be answerable for its conduct and strictly bound to represent its will to the next highest subdivision, the hundred, where the tything men by arbitrating and reconciling their differences come to express the will of the hundred; the hundred is likewise linked to a thousand; and so on as far as one needs to go depending on the particular community's size. As the scale is ascended through a progression of representations of representations (indirect representation being a key feature of the scheme), Williams believes that the less are general judgements influenced by individual or local interests. Williams is fond of comparing this organizational structure to that of an inverted army.⁷⁶ It can be accommodated to and hold together, so it is claimed, a community of any size whatever. Since such an organizational structure constitutes political liberty, Williams believes that political liberty is not diluted by size. The largest community can have a political liberty as perfect as the smallest.

It is basic to Williams's outlook, then, that representation need not dilute political liberty, however much it generally does, so long as the representative can be held to account for strictly representing the will of the body he represents.⁷⁷ Williams believes this result is achievable by repeated subdivisions where the conditions for holding the representative to account are formally the same at every stage. In all cases the representative would be answerable to a functioning deliberative body consisting of no more than ten electors.

It is a feature of this organizational structure that, while it depends on representation, all citizens belong to some deliberative body, if only a tything, but that the size of all deliberative bodies is strictly limited. Where some found in the tumultuous political life of 18th century England symptoms of political liberty and political health, Williams diagnosed these symptoms as bespeaking an opposite condition. It indicated the absence of that political unanimity which the political structure constituting political liberty has as its proper object. In particular, Williams finds in the large public assembly an institution pandering to individual ambition and factional interest. He remarks in the *Lessons*: 'I never saw an assembly exceeding twenty, whatever the abilities of the members, that was not more disposed to passion and tumult, than to reason and judgement'.⁷⁸ Here there is perfect accord between Williams's views and the strictures Godwin passed on political associations in his *Enquiry concerning political justice*.⁷⁹ Where a large assembly proves to be necessary,

Williams invariably selects the leanest option and mitigates the anticipated evil by proposing that the assembly's business originate from small committees. The organizational principle at work in structuring the community is thereby reapplied to the organization of the assembly.⁸⁰ Committees become the assembly's tythings. This restraint on the size of assemblies is the foundation for public reason within the community.

One principle which must govern this organizational structure if political liberty is to be realized and on which Williams places great weight is unrestricted Intellectual Liberty. In his earlier *Letter to the body of protestant dissenters* Williams had remarked: 'the inalienable and universal right of private judgement; and the necessity of an unrestrained enquiry and freedom of debate and discussion on all subjects of knowledge, morality and religion. This may be called *Intellectual Liberty*'.⁸¹ In his *Nature and extent* Williams scandalized his readers and reviewers by saying: 'I do not see, why thieves should not be allowed to preach the principles of theft; murderers of murder; seducers of seduction; adulterers of adultery; and traitors of treason'.⁸² But Williams does not defend the right to Intellectual Liberty as a requirement of civil liberty, but rather as one of political liberty. As he sees it, to set restrictions on the expression of such opinion in a community would be as absurd as blocking an individual's organs of perception.⁸³ As such a measure would result in the atrophy of the individual's capacity for enjoyment and knowledge, so the analogous restriction on Intellectual Liberty would atrophy the community's powers of public judgment, thought and happiness. This line of argument anticipates that of Alexander Meiklejohn, for example, who defends an unrestricted right to free speech as an indispensable condition of a genuinely democratic society.⁸⁴ Indeed, Williams takes this line of argument farther. For he also defends the principle of ready access to information held by government and about its activities, and he also argues for measures which will promote the exercise of these rights such as the elimination of taxes on newsprint and other printing supplies, the dissemination of information about inventions in printing, and so on.⁸⁵ The protection of Intellectual Liberty and access to information are for Williams the key to the community's instantaneous sensibility.

In his *Letters* Williams focuses attention onto the role of the lowest subdivisions of the community's political structure, the tythings and hundreds, the primary assemblies which he was later to describe as 'the real and most effectual schools of the people'.⁸⁶ Given the patent inadequacy of police protection in the England of the 1780's, Williams believed that the conditions were ideal for people locally to organize themselves into such corporate units. Initially they would do so for the purpose of self-protection. If they did, the resulting police power in local neighbourhoods ought to be perfectly adequate to protect the local inhabitants in all ordinary circumstances and even against outrages of the magnitude of the Gordon Riots, or so Williams believed. There would then be no need to establish a

national police under the control of the executive division of government or to rely on a standing army. But once such a structure existed for the purposes of self-defence, it was equally in place for all the purposes of political liberty and would serve as the foundation of the public force needed to back up the public will.

Although Williams makes some suggestive remarks about the apex of his political structure in the *Letters*,⁸⁷ it is not until the *Observations* that he elaborates on them. There he describes two fundamental institutions: a National Convention and, more unusually, a complementing Constitutional Council.

The National Convention would meet every fourth year as a matter of course and more often during periods of national emergency when it could be convened on the authority of the Constitutional Council.⁸⁸ When the Convention met, it would also assume the role of an ordinary legislative assembly, but its fundamental role would be to make alterations in the constitution. This role it possesses uniquely. That Williams proposes that the Convention should meet this often is a striking indication of his doctrine of indefinite constitutional perfectibility. This doctrine, which he first asserted in *The philosopher*,⁸⁹ is not tempered by an romantic enthusiasm he may have felt for 'the immortal Alfred'. Others may have seen Alfred's constitution as the unalterable heritage of a semi-divine lawgiver in a golden past and as still possessed of legal force, but these were certainly not Williams's reasons for advocating its general restoration.

Where the Convention determines the content of the constitution, the Constitutional Council safeguards it.⁹⁰ Williams, noting the limitations of periodic conventions, remarks: 'Tho' this periodical provision for the purity and virtue of government, will have considerable effect, it will not prevent many of those disorders, which in an interval of three years, may affect the best-imagined government, if suffered to be independent of the people'.⁹¹ The Constitutional Council whose members are to be elected from across the community rather than by district for year-length terms is to serve not as a part of government, but as its continuously functioning overseer. It discharges its responsibility in times of emergency by convening a Convention. It also functions as a quasi-ombudsman, being empowered to receive complaints of a non-criminal character whether about individual governmental officials or the operations of governmental departments. Unlike an ombudsman, however, it would not be a creation of government and it would have the power of final disposition over complaints.

The Council's most important function, however, is as the center of the community's information network. It would serve as the general repository of all important 'informations, plans, inventions, etc., respecting the republic'⁹² and it would also have a duty to make accessible and indeed to disseminate

information on public transactions through papers financed at the community's expense. It is a notable reflection of Williams's general outlook that he should combine together in a single office the distribution of information about the activities of government together with a patent office for new inventions. While the one kind of information is seen as promoting the right relation between a people and its government, thereby preserving the community's constitutional integrity, the other promotes public well-being through its assistance to the development of science and industry.

Once one stands back from Williams's account of political liberty and views it critically, questions and difficulties crowd in. One cannot but be struck for example, by the contrast between the claimed historical precedent of an Alfred who, as head of government, creates a political structure and the restoration of this structure without reference to the standing government by voluntarist methods such as the institution of a neighbourhood police. In light of this difference consider now an observation made by Williams about county associations in his *Letters*: 'If public distress had driven the majority of the people of this country into such associations, that majority would have had no right, though it might have had force, to control and correct the excesses of the executive and legislative powers. For the other division of the people not having been consulted, and not under the obligation to attend the summons given, they would have reasonably complained of the same kind of injustice which had associated the majority'.⁹³ But how, practically-speaking, is this condition to be satisfied? Furthermore what is to be said, apart from hand waving about the irresponsible power of the people, if those currently possessed of power should mobilize it against the first steps taken to establish a neighbourhood police? And, supposing such a police to be established, what is to stop it from degenerating into vigilante committees acting outside the rule of law?

Or, somewhat differently, how successful is Williams in preserving the distinction on which he relies between those bodies responsible for the business of government and those charged to act as constitutional overseers of its activities? Does not his description of the National Convention, for example, appear to fudge this distinction?

Or, yet again, how clear is it that an hierarchy of representations will more successfully yield the will of the community than a scheme of direct representation?

If we set these questions and difficulties to the side, however, it is clear that Williams at least gestures towards a distinctive view of political liberty which sets his view apart from the others we have considered. To begin with, Williams clearly points out that the conditions which Priestley, say, considers as constituting political liberty such as the right to vote or stand for office can be satisfied by a scheme of government which makes Parliament and not the

people sovereign. Williams, for his part, develops a conception which makes strong local institutions a key requirement for political liberty. Moreover, while he accepts the necessity of representation he preserves participation in a deliberative body as essential for political liberty. He argues that intellectual liberty is a prerequisite for political liberty and he makes imaginative suggestions for new institutions, such as the Constitutional Council, and new functions, such as the ombudsman role of this Council. All in all, the nearly total neglect of Williams and his political thought is to be regretted, rather than a condition deserved.

Shadows

Williams wrote his *Regulations of parochial police* against the background of a threatened French invasion of England. In it he draws attention to the puzzling contrast between France's unusual ability to turn back external threats to its sovereignty and its internal anarchy.⁹⁴ On Williams's account, while the patriotic young left Paris to defend France's frontiers, far more Frenchmen converged on the capital. The newcomers consisted largely of those whose lives had been disrupted by the destruction of the old social order: minor government officials such as tax collectors, the servants of now impoverished aristocrats, those dependent on the Church for their livelihood. Williams believed that comparable disruptive causes would have disastrously similar effects in England unless precautionary measures were taken. A French invasion could precipitate such a chain of events and the ready he proposed was the revival of self-defence committees, this time based on existing parishes.

What is of interest here is not so much the organization of these committees as their powers and over whom they would be exercised.⁹⁵ In particular, these committees would be empowered to register all local inhabitants, noting their occupations and probable means of subsistence. Proprietors of public houses, coffee houses and other facilities offering accommodation would likewise be required to register any guests. If the committee was dissatisfied with the account given of any of these guests and if it had proofs of ill-intentions or actions, it would be empowered to initiate proceedings against the guest in a summary fashion.

The full thrust of these provisions becomes clear when Williams discusses the treatment of servants in particular. No one could lawfully employ, receive, dismiss or permit the departure of a servant without recording the action in the Parish Register, the servant being provided with a certified copy of the recorded entry. Without this as proof of his *bona fides*, the servant could not lawfully offer himself for employment as a servant and would be subject to being treated as a vagabond. Moreover, all associations of servants would be declared illegal in order to prevent the use of corporate methods from subverting the intent of the law. Once an individual had been summarily declared a vagabond by a court of the Quarter-Sessions he could be confined

or impressed into the Army or Navy. Williams also contemplates the extension of this apparatus by declaration to other groups such as clerks, journeymen, porters and, generally, 'all others dependent on luxury, or on the demands of mere convenience'.⁹⁶ The pamphlet chillingly concludes by remarking that the effect of this application of the law would be the 'expelling *the idle, the lazy and ill-employed*; forcing the Political Body to throw out on its surface all its diseased humours, and leaving the limbs at liberty to repel the assaults of its enemies' (Williams's emphasis).⁹⁷ The biological analogy resurfaces once more to throw a disturbing light on Williams's conception of civil and political liberty.

These are drastic measures about which Williams feels no apparent qualms, discomfort or regret. They evidently apply unequally within the community with their weight falling heavily on special classes. Their sanctions are applied without proof being required of an individual performing some demonstrably harmful action. Membership in a class deemed to have such a potential is sufficient. Against the application of these sanctions there are few protections or appeals. The aim of the measures, Williams says without betraying any irony, is to protect the last outpost of Europe that still retains the element of civil and political liberty.⁹⁸

The proposals might have been dismissed as symptomatic of nothing more than a case of post-French Revolutionary hysteria were it not the case that in his *Letters* in 1782 Williams had described one upshot of his proposal for local policing as 'clearing that parish of vagrants, beggars, and all those useless and pernicious wretches who daily heighten the enormity of poor rates'.⁹⁹ Earlier still in the *Plan of association* he had spoken of local associations clearing out 'all neighbourhoods of disorderly and suspicious persons' as well as vagabonds.¹⁰⁰

What is the source of this apparent blind spot in Williams's political thought? Here we need to distinguish two strands contributing to his views about the foundations of civil and political liberty?

The first and more attractive strand is reflected in a remark from the *Lessons*: 'The first law in this species of constitution is the general will, that every citizen without distinction of birth, possessions or talents, enjoy the great objects of society — liberty, property, and security'.¹⁰¹ This remark fits well with the tradition of thought already remarked upon that civil liberty is properly to be regarded against the background of natural liberty. Just as natural liberty would be equally everyone's right in a state of nature, so too is civil liberty in civil society.

The second strand is illustrated in Williams's *Letters* when he remarks that one of the major errors of the Revolution of 1688 was to make the rights of civil and political liberty 'originate in the property, not in the industry, talents

and virtues of the people'.¹⁰² The implication is that an individual's claim to civil and political liberty lies in his possession of one or more of these characteristics. Similarly, in the 2nd and 3rd editions of the *Letters* Williams says: 'the first order of men, consists of those who occupy or cultivate the soil, and produce food. The second, of those who stimulate the former, whose invention and industry offer such conveniences as heighten the enjoyment of life. The third, of those who convey from one class, or from one nation to another, the produce of all kinds of talents ... These three classes, constitutes the *People*'.¹⁰³ He then makes clear that this account of the people is exclusionary: 'As in the fermentation of natural bodies, a froth or scum will arise; so in the agitations or competitions of political classes, a worthless or vicious *Populace* may be produced. Persons mistaking the scum for the body which throws it off; or confounding the *Populace* with the *People*, are to be pitied or despised...'.¹⁰⁴

This second strand has two distinguishable effects on Williams's view of voting eligibility. In his *Letters* Williams says that all men who are neither criminals nor vagabonds (in the *Observations* he also mentions the insane) should be empowered to vote.¹⁰⁵ The first effect is the total exclusion of members of certain classes who by reason of their membership in them are presumed to fall short of the criteria for the rights associated with political liberty. More interesting, however, is Williams's attitude towards the extension of voting right to servants. While he betrays some ambivalence in the *Letters*, he recommends such an extension.¹⁰⁶ In the later *Observations*, however, Williams's resolve weakens. Now he says that servants who have reached a certain age (although he is unclear about whether this would be the same age as for everyone else) are to be given such rights 'after certain evidence of good conduct'.¹⁰⁷ Thus a character test must first be passed which, if anything, might well exacerbate the dependence relations whose evil consequence Williams would like to alleviate through the general extension of voting rights. But, crucially, it is also a test where the onus falls not on the side of excluding the candidate, but of including him.

In taking note of these illiberal features of Williams's view, it must be remembered that he supported the extension of voting rights, including the enfranchisement of women under certain circumstances.¹⁰⁸ What is of greater interest is the source of these illiberal features within his political theory. For they do not arise from the assignment to political liberty of a higher priority than to civil liberty — although this is certainly something that needs to be worried about — but rather because his theory offers too narrow a foundation for liberty of either kind. The disfranchisement of vagabonds, for example, goes hand in hand with a readiness to deny to them the ordinary protections associated with a robust view of civil liberty as well. Neither is the source of these illiberal features the abstract conceptions of political or civil liberty as such. It is rather the particular interpretation Williams gives to his organic picture of society against whose background he elaborates those conceptions.

It would seem, on the face of it, that the abstract conception of political liberty should be capable of surviving modifications in the organic analogy.

Conclusion

In the last half of the 18th century one of the important disputed issues in British political theory increasingly became the distinction between civil and political liberty. Differences arose about whether there was a proper distinction to be drawn by these designations, about what account was to be given of the distinction and about the relative value of the liberties distinguished. David Williams was a major contributor to this debate.

Certainly some of the particular institutions which he proposed have their roots in suggestions made by other theorists. James Burgh's grand national association for restoring the independence of parliament, for example, is a prototype of a convention (although where it is a prototype, Williams has the genuine article)¹⁰⁹; and others such as the anonymous author of *An historical essay on the english constitution* had recommended a revival of some Saxon political structures because of their usefulness, for example, for purposes of police.¹¹⁰ Williams, however, not only developed such suggestions, but, unlike Burgh say, he also justified them by reference to a conception of political liberty. This conception of political liberty had some strikingly original features which marked it off from the views being advanced by many of his contemporaries.

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¹ For biographical sketches of Williams, see Professor David Williams, *DWB*, 1031-2; Rev. Alexander Gordon, *DNB*, xxi, 390-3; and Williams's own apologia *Incidents in my own life which have been thought of some importance*, (henceforth *Incidents*), ed. Peter France (Brighton, 1980).

The 1st edn. of the *Letters on political liberty* (henceforth *Letters*) was published anonymously (London, 1782). The anonymity was not long preserved. Ralph Griffiths in his marked copy of the *Monthly Review* (Bodleian Library Copy, lxvi (1782), 551-5) notes in the margin 'Said to be by David Williams'. *The European Mag.* 2 (1782), 134-6, publicly reveals the author's identity. The 2nd edn. with major additions was published in 1784 [see Brissot's review in *Journal du Lycée de Londres* (mai 1784), 311-35] by Evans under Williams's name as author [see *English Review*, III (1784), 97-100]. The 3rd edn. first appeared in 1789, published by Ridgeway.

One of the more striking instances of the *Letters*' influence is Joseph Gerrald's *A convention the only means of saving us from ruin* (London, 1793). Gerrald, singling out 'the Letters of that truly enlightened man David Williams' (p.90), makes proposals for a national convention which are transparently derived from Williams's work.

² *Incident*, 25.

³ *Letters*, 5-6.

⁴ Martin, prosperous banker and one of the few Dissenters with a Parliamentary seat, was invited to join the Gloucestershire Committee for Parliamentary Reform on 7 March 1780 (*Minute Book*, D1356, Glouc. Record Office), but he is not recorded as having attended any of its meetings. The first two editions of the *Letters* are addressed to him as a member of such a Committee.

Jebb moved Martin's election to the Society for Constitutional Information on 1 March 1782 (*Minute Book*, TS 11,1133, Public Record Office). Martin was almost immediately elected President on 29 March. Williams's letters are dated between 4 and 15 March with an addendum of 15 April on the Irish volunteers. On 19 April Martin presented a copy of the *Letters* to the Society.

Williams later viewed the *Letters* in the light of events following their initial publication (*Incidents*, 25), notably the meeting of reform leaders at the Thatched Cottage on 18 May where they unanimously resolved to petition Parliament from the Collective Body of the People on the defeat of Pitt's reform resolution (C. Wyvill, *Political papers* Vol. 1 (London, n.d.), 424-5). Williams dated this meeting as the birth of English Jacobinism. Martin was present at this meeting as well as at another held in May, 1785 where a last-ditch effort was made to revive the flagging reform movement around Pitt's weak reform proposals. Martin abstained on the crucial vote (*Ibid.*, Vol. II, 462).

Martin, whom Jebb had thought to groom as a leader around whom a new political party might coalesce, later wrote to Wyvill on 24 May 1792, saying that he had for some time withdrawn from extra-Parliamentary political meetings 'On the idea that a regular attendance in the House of Commons is sufficient public duty for any one man' (Wyvill Papers, ZFW 7/2/71/18, N. Yorkshire Record Office).

⁵ The absurdity of petitioning Parliament to reform itself is a principle which goes back in Williams at least to his *Treatise on education* (London, 1774), 23.

⁶ The idea of a Convention does not appear as such in the 1st edn. of the *Letters*, but it does in later editions (see 3rd edn., 76-79). In his *Observations sur la dernière constitution de la France* (henceforth *Observations*), trans. Cit. Maudru, (Paris, 1793), 9-10, Williams describes his unsuccessful attempt 20 years earlier to persuade Franklin to use his formidable powers as a publicist to call a convention on the growing rift between Britain and America.

⁷ *Letters*, 2-5.

⁸ National Library of Wales MS. 10336E. The manuscript, although undated, appears to have been written circa 1791.

⁹ *Letters*, 3.

¹⁰ 'We seek, in vain from the political sages of Greece, the models or even the outlines of a free political constitution'. *Egeria* (London, 1803), 113.

¹¹ For these methodological strictures, see, e.g., *Observations*, 9 and *Egeria*, 13. While the analogy is generally with an animal or human body, Williams claims the vegetable world would serve equally well (*Egeria*, 21-22).

¹² *Lectures on political principles* (henceforth *Lectures*), (London, 1789); *Lessons to a young prince* (henceforth *Lessons*), (London, 1790).

¹³ *A plan of association* (henceforth *A Plan*), (London, 1780), 28.

¹⁴ *Letter to the body of protestant dissenters* (London, 1777), 36.

¹⁵ The proposal to restore the Saxon constitutional structure was made by Williams in his first published work *The philosopher in three conversations* (London, 1771), 2nd conversation, 28.

¹⁶ See, e.g., *Preparatory studies for political reformers* (henceforth *Preparatory studies*), (London, 1810), 108; *Egeria*, 79.

¹⁷ *Egeria*, 158, where Williams also refers critically to the *Letters* for the first time. The most recent direct reference to them in his published work had been in *The history of Monmouthshire* (London, 1796), 119, where it had been approving.

¹⁸ See *Regulations of parochial police* (henceforth *Regulations*), 4th edn., (London, 1803), 10; and *Egeria*, 294.

¹⁹ *Letters*, 50.

²⁰ *Regulations*, 4th edn., 29, for the necessity of an Act of Parliament. The restriction of the power of local committees to nomination is peculiar to the 4th edn. in contrast to the 1st (London, 1797) and so marks a further falling away from Williams's original ideal between 1797 and 1803. Compare p.28 of the 1st edn. with p. 39 of the 4th.

²¹ See *Preparatory studies*, throughout.

²² Williams to Barlow, 29 Nov. 1804, Pequot Collection, Beinecke Rare Books Library, Yale.

²³ *Incidents*, 34.

²⁴ *Letters*, 7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁶ *Loc. cit.*

²⁷ The idea of civil liberty is likewise used as a foil to religious liberty in *Essays on public worship* (London, 1773), 2; 'Civil liberty, in this country, is a subject of general disquisition; it is well understood and great degrees of it are enjoyed. Religious liberty is not so well understood, and but small degrees of it are enjoyed'.

²⁸ *The philosopher*, 1st conversation, 54-5.

²⁹ *Lectures*, 136.

³⁰ In Locke's case this tendency appears to be most clearly marked in Ch. IV, para. 22 of his *Second treatise of government*.

³¹ *Letters*, 49.

³² *The philosopher*, 1st conversation, 52-53.

³³ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁴ *Lectures*, 236.

³⁵ *Letters*, 8.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁷ In *Preparatory studies*, 98, Williams offers a different account on which 'The body, whether natural or political, is free, if it executes its own will; whether that will lead to good or evil'.

³⁸ *Lectures*, 134.

³⁹ Richard Hey, *Observations on the nature of civil liberty, and the principles of government* (London, 1776), 35.

⁴⁰ John Lind, *Three letters to Dr. Price* (London, 1776), 74, 87-8; see also J. L. de Lolme, *The constitution of England* (London, 1810), 245, who expresses similar qualms about confusing liberty with security.

⁴¹ *Lectures*, 234-5.

⁴² *Letters*, 8.

⁴³ *Loc. cit.*

⁴⁴ *Lectures*, 134, 228.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁴⁶ *Lessons*, 30.

⁴⁷ *Letters*, 69-71.

⁴⁸ *Lectures*, 132.

⁴⁹ *Spirit of the laws*, Bk. XII, Chap. 21.

⁵⁰ *Social contract*, Bk. III, Chap. 1.

⁵¹ See, e.g., W. Blackstone, *Commentaries on the laws of England* (London 1768-9), vol. 1, 68, 121; Adam Ferguson *Principles of moral and political science* (Edinburgh, 1792), Vol. II, 457; John Lind, *ibid.*, 72 ff.

⁵² See, e.g., R. Hey, *ibid.*, 33-35.

⁵³ See, e.g., the entries in the *Encyclopédie* whose articles on *liberté politique* and *liberté civile* were each bowdlerised from both Bks. XI and XII of *Spirit of the laws* rather than corresponding to the division between the books.

⁵⁴ Joseph Priestley, *Lectures on history and general policy* (London, 1826), 305.

⁵⁵ See Bentham Mss., University College London, 100/170. For relevant discussions see also 100/153-8; 100/167-70. Bentham generally prefers 'constitutional liberty' to 'political liberty', but uses both expressions. Williams in the *Lectures*, 234, expresses a willingness to substitute 'constitutional' for 'political liberty', if pressed.

⁵⁶ *Spirit of the laws*, Bk. XI, Chapter 6.

⁵⁷ Edward Christian first states his position in the notes to his edition of Blackstone's *Commentaries*. It is reprinted in his *A concise account of the origin of the two houses of parliament* (London, 1810), 91.

⁵⁸ *Letters*, 49.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶¹ See, e.g., J. Rawls, *A Theory of justice* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), 201.

⁶² J. Priestley, *An essay on the first principles of government: and on the nature of political, civil and religious liberty* (London, 1768), 12: 'I should chuse for greater clearness, to divide liberty into two kinds, *political* and *civil*; and the importance of having clear ideas on the subject will be my apology for the innovation'.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 12-13. Here philosophical doubts about whether these powers have been properly analysed and whether, however analysed, they constitute two kinds of liberty have to be ignored.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 50-52.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 22, 54. An illuminating point of comparison between Priestley and Williams is their respective views about the role of the state in education. For Priestley a positive role for the state as educator would violate civil liberty. In his *Treatise on education* Williams remarks: 'Education has but very seldom been an object of government; and every man has generally been permitted to bring up his child as he could. The few steps it took were so ill-directed and injurious, that it is now something of a principle of political liberty with an Englishman, that government is to have nothing to do in the education of his children. But let a man suppose a legislature really intending the public good, and advised in its measures by a Milton, and there would be no doubt concerning the usefulness of laws and provisions in the business of education' (36-7). Here Williams is evidently using 'political liberty' as an interchangeable expression with 'civil liberty'.

⁶⁸ For Price's most careful discussion see his *Additional observations on the nature and value of civil liberty and the war with America* (London, 1776), reprinted in B. Peach, *Richard Price and the ethical foundations of the american revolution* (Durham, N. C., 1979), 141-2.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 136-37.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 140. Note that Price here reflects a common practice of writers of the period to class all natural rights, and not just rights to the liberty of action, as the subject matter of civil liberty.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁷² For Price's relation to Locke and much else besides, see D. O. Thomas, *The Honest Mind* (Oxford, 1977), esp. 187-213.

⁷³ *Observations*, 42-44.

⁷⁴ *Lessons*, 26.

⁷⁵ *Lectures*, 114.

⁷⁶ *Letters*, 53-55.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 59-60, 81.

⁷⁸ *Lessons*, 43. In the *Letters* Williams remarks about the movement for associating counties: 'If any circumstances were wanting to prove that all the measures of these different parties were not properly taken, it would be found in the disagreement and discord which prevailed among them' (p.39). Remarks such as this one illustrate the danger of taking the biological analogy and the political ideal it expresses as seriously as Williams does.

⁷⁹ William Godwin, *Enquiry concerning political justice* (London, 1793), Bk. IV, Chapter III.

⁸⁰ *Letters*, 83-4.

⁸¹ *Letter to the body of protestant dissenters* (London, 1777), 23.

⁸² *The nature and extent of intellectual liberty* (London, 1779), 31-32.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

⁸⁴ See Alexander Meiklejohn, *Political freedom* (New York, 1915).

⁸⁵ *Observations*, 34.

⁸⁶ See the manuscript of the *Observations*, Cardiff Public Library Ms. 2.192, p. 17.

⁸⁷ *Letters*, 75.

⁸⁸ *Observations*, 32-33, 35.

⁸⁹ *Philosopher*, 1st conversation, 29.

⁹⁰ For Williams's views on the Constitutional Council, see *Observations*, 33 ff.

⁹¹ Cardiff Public Library, Ms. 2.192, 21.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 23.

⁹³ *Letters*, 36.

⁹⁴ *Regulations*, 4th edn., 15.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 29ff.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁹⁹ *Letters*, 66.

¹⁰⁰ *Plan*, 64 and 39.

¹⁰¹ *Lessons*, 49.

¹⁰² *Letters*, 21-22.

¹⁰³ *Letters*, 3rd ed., 83-84. This passage appears in Williams's Address to the People, known to have been included in the 2nd edn. from Brissot's partial translation in his *Journal du Lycée de Londres*.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

¹⁰⁵ *Letters*, 79; *Observation*, 15.

¹⁰⁶ *Letters*, 80.

¹⁰⁷ Cardiff Public Library, Ms. 2.192, 9-10.

¹⁰⁸ *Observations*, 16-17. Williams argues that it would be *unjust* to deny voting rights to unmarried women or to widows, but he supposes that husband and wife constitute a moral unit.

¹⁰⁹ James Burgh, *Political disquisitions* Vol. III (London, 1775), esp. 428 ff. When Burgh makes mention of liberty it is of liberty *civil* and *religious* (458, 460).

¹¹⁰ *An historical essay on the english constitution* (London, 1771), 13 ff.

**DR PRIESTLEY'S RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY AND
MR JEFFERSON'S FAILURE OF REPUBLICAN NERVE**

Roderick S. French

It is impossible not to be sensible that we are acting for all mankind; that circumstances denied to others, but indulged to us, have imposed on us the duty of proving what is the degree of freedom and self-government in which a society may venture to leave it's (sic) individual members.

Thomas Jefferson to Joseph Priestley, 19 June 1802.

Joseph Priestley: personal friend of Benjamin Franklin, internationally famous for his own experimental work on electricity and with gases, outspoken partisan of the American and French Revolutions, advocate of free inquiry on all topics, educational innovator in the teaching of laboratory science and modern history, tireless polemicist for progressive ideas and the advancement of the grand Baconian project for Western civilization.¹ All of these attributes qualified Priestley for a leading position among the enlightened intellectuals in the late eighteenth century. The one anomaly in Priestley's repertoire of principles was his persistent attachment to a Jesus-centered 'rational' Christianity which he believed to be vindicated by incontrovertible historical evidence. Moreover, Priestley was not content to hold this faith as a matter of private piety; he argued that the restoration of Christianity to its primitive (Unitarian) form was fundamental to the achievement of the entire programme of the Enlightenment. 'To Priestley's way of thinking, the greatest accomplishment of an enlightened age could only be the synthesis of modern science and philosophy with the ageless, divinely-inspired truths of Christianity.'²

Priestley's religious views mystified and disappointed his scientific admirers in France, and his agitation for the rights of Dissenters led to estrangement from many erstwhile colleagues in the Royal Society. Only in America was Priestley's idiosyncratic amalgam of religious and political philosophy to find endorsement by leading figures of the Enlightenment. In one of his first letters written from the White House, Thomas Jefferson saluted the ageing chemist: 'Yours is one of the few lives precious to mankind, and for the continuance of which every thinking man is solicitous.' John Adams had known Priestley in England, and on the latter's emigration had suggested Boston as a preferred place of settlement. In the late 1790s Adams would become deeply distressed by Priestley's open sympathies with the French, but in retirement he would recall Priestley as 'this great, excellent and extraordinary Man, whom I sincerely loved esteemed and respected'. Of most importance, the world view on which Jefferson and Adams finally arrived at some degree of consensus was based to a considerable extent on Priestley's philosophical-historical interpretation of Christianity. The two elder statesmen had moved, at least by

their own lights, within sight of one another on the spectrum of Unitarianism.³

In the history of ideas, one of the critical transitions of the late eighteenth century was from the natural theology characteristic of deism to outright philosophical naturalism. That transition was made in Great Britain chiefly at the hands of the Utilitarians. It was delayed in the United States by the fact that Unitarianism absorbed most of the liberal rationalism of the Enlightenment, thus holding progressive thinkers at least nominally in the Christian tradition while great numbers of less well-educated Americans were caught up in the revivals of conservative Protestantism.⁴ One consequence of this double development was the inhibition of radical republican political theory with its assumption of a natural capacity in all citizens to develop and practice that measure of social morality necessary to civil order.

Uncertainty regarding the civic competency of the people contributed to that defensiveness in American political culture which Robert Kelley has described as pervasive in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Americans were keenly conscious that they lived in an unfriendly world and that their experiment in republicanism was uncertain ... Were the common people in fact capable of virtuous self-government, as republicanism insisted? Could they practice the self-denial that orderly government requires and give primacy to the public welfare instead of their own selfish appetites?⁵

As Jefferson said to Priestley in the letter quoted in the headnote, it was the historical task of the United States to establish 'the degree of freedom and self-government in which a society may venture to leave its individual members'.

Every major figure in the Enlightenment in Europe and in America wrestled more or less conscientiously with the practical implications of the democratic and secular logic of the movement. Franklin early in life lost his confidence in the capacity of ordinary people to live the autonomous life of virtue which he exemplified; they required the secondary motivations and sanctions of religion. By the 1780s, he was genuinely afraid of 'unchaining the Tyger'. He sought to discourage an anonymous correspondent from publishing a freethinking tract with this cautionary observation: 'If Men are so wicked as we now see them *with religion*, what would they be if *without it*.'⁶

Jefferson struggled with this dilemma perhaps more than with any other intellectual perplexity. My thesis is that Priestley's historiography and Christology influenced significantly the shape of Jefferson's final position.

Jefferson's general esteem for Priestley is well documented. What remains to be done is an investigation of the relevance of Priestley's theological writing

to Jefferson's work in moral and political philosophy. The critical issue of philosophical anthropology for republicanism, as Jefferson perceived it, was whether mankind generally is capable of the requisite civic virtue without the supplemental aid of religious beliefs and sanctions. Jefferson's ambivalence on this issue was profound. On the one hand, he shared the philosophes' abhorrence of the bigotry and authoritarianism of ecclesiastical institutions. On the other, he feared that in human nature the drive of self interest was stronger than the disposition toward social responsibility.

It was at this point that Priestley's rationalist revisions of church history and simplifications of church doctrine facilitated Jefferson's own highly eclectic use of certain Christian teachings. The first section of this paper reconstructs the revisionist works of Priestley which have most bearing on this inquiry. The second section explored the ways in which Priestley's reinterpretation of Christianity was seen by Jefferson to legitimate his own philosophy of man-in-society.

I

Joseph Priestley arrived at his personal version of Christianity rather early in life and never found reason to modify it. He formed a lasting attachment to rationalism and tolerance in reaction to the piety of dogmatism and bigotry which he had experienced as a child. His life fortunes, his work in the laboratory and his study of history all confirmed his strong conviction as to the validity of his views. He was never tempted by scepticism, and his creed included a list of traditional doctrines which positioned him at a considerable distance from deism. The sincerity of Priestley's faith was undisputed, only his creed was controversial, 'Not orthodox, he was nevertheless pious and believing.'⁷

Priestley soon found himself in the defensive posture forced on all self-appointed modernizers of Christianity in any generation - halfway between the reigning orthodoxy and the most advanced views. As he wrote to Edward Burn: 'My case is singularly hard. The greater part of my philosophical acquaintance ridicule my attachment to Christianity, and yet the generality of Christians will not allow me to belong to them at all.'⁸

His need to justify his *sui generis* theology to all parties, his ambitious exertions as an experimental scientist, and his facile style of composition combined to gain him the reputation of 'the most assiduous "bookmaker" of his generation' by the time he was in his late thirties.⁹ Reiteration was born of the desire to demonstrate to all who could read that his 'polymorphic synthesis of natural science and revealed religion' made Christianity compatible with the 'best thought'.¹⁰

Unlike many apologists for the faith, Priestley did not adopt indirection as one of his strategies. 'The unity of God is a doctrine on which the greatest

stress is laid in the whole system of revelation.' That was the opening line of *An history of the corruptions of christianity* and in his view one of the two 'most essential articles' of 'pure christianity'. The other essential article of faith of course was the Unitarian insistence on 'the proper humanity of Christ'.¹¹ Although confident that natural theology must arrive at the same conclusions, he assured Gibbon and other unbelievers that 'the system of revelation' was documented by the best historical evidence. Moses and other Old Testament historians 'were as much present at the time of the transactions they relate' as were any other ancient historians. More than that, 'every tittle of it was committed to writing at the time' of the events described.¹² He was equally confident that the prophetic books of the Bible contained bona fide predictions, and that Jesus had been empowered to work miracles for pedagogical purposes. Indeed, 'the only proper evidence of revelation is a miracle'.¹³

The primary and continuing philosophical influence on Priestley was that of David Hartley, particularly the latter's *Observations on man* (1749). Hartley's combination of Christian faith and associationist psychology reinforced Priestley's own strong disposition toward determinism and materialism. The theological expression of this vision of the universe governed by strict causality took the form of a high doctrine of Providence. Once arrived at, this vision induced a stunning equanimity in the face of all the hazards and misfortunes of human existence. It was a scientist's theodicy.

Such is my belief in the doctrine of an overruling providence, that I have no doubt, but that every thing in the whole system of nature, how noxious soever it may be in some respects, has real, though unknown uses; and also that every thing, even the grossest abuses in the civil or ecclesiastical constitutions of particular states, is subservient to the wise and gracious designs of him, who, notwithstanding these appearances, still rules in the kingdoms of men.¹⁴

Priestley's philosophical materialism derived in part from a rather sophisticated physics in which matter was understood as a dynamic arrangement of forces, but its main use for him was in support of his distinctive concept of the resurrection (which he insisted was consistent with the primitive Christian doctrine). Priestley elaborated his metaphysics at length in *Disquisitions relating to matter and spirit* (1777), surely one of the great curiosities of human speculation. He denounced the idea of an immortal 'spiritual soul' as an importation from 'oriental philosophy'. The truth is, according to Priestley's reading of the New Testament, that man is by nature entirely mortal with the prospect of nothing but death and decomposition. It is only by the gratuitous action of God that the whole person is resurrected and reconstituted for an after life.

Priestley opened a new chapter in Christian apologetics. He anticipated the nineteenth century by choosing to base his primary arguments not on

interpretations of nature but on interpretations of history. 'Historical evidence, on which the belief and authority of revelation must necessarily rest, has been greatly undervalued by the advocates of the sufficiency of the light of nature.' Whereas 'Nature' has many voices, in revelation God 'speaks in a language, that...can never be misunderstood'.¹⁵ Thus confident of his 'facts', Priestley blamed the rise of infidelity on the adherents of the orthodox churches because of their retention of corrupt doctrines and practices which were offensive to any rational person. Discharging his polemical guns in the other direction, he invited infidels to return to a 'rational Christianity' purged of its obnoxious alien elements.

Priestley never suggested that he was improving upon the historical revelation, only recovering it. As he put it, the objective of his scholarship was 'not a progressive religion, but a progressive reformation of a corrupted religion'.¹⁶ At the conclusion of his two-volume demythologization of the faith, he summarized, especially for the consideration of Gibbon, the true 'system of christianity a priori'. The simplicity of the language is pure Priestley; the content retains a remarkable number of traditional theological propositions.

The great outline of it is, that the universal parent of mankind commissioned Jesus Christ, to invite men to the practice of virtue, by the assurance of his mercy to the penitent, and of his purpose to raise to immortal life and happiness all the virtuous and the good, but to inflict an adequate punishment on the wicked. In proof of this he wrought many miracles, and after a public execution he rose again from the dead. He also directed that proselytes to his religion should be admitted by baptism, and that his disciples should eat bread and drink wine in commemoration of his death.¹⁷

According to Priestley, Jesus 'made no other pretensions' than to be the Messiah described in anticipation by the Hebrew prophets. But this was not a modest 'commission' to one who accepted the historicity of the Old Testament narratives. The biblical story is a unique documentation of the singular redemptive activity of the Creator, and the key figure in that drama was the historical Jesus.¹⁸ As such, his moral character and teachings exhibited 'an infinite superiority' to those of all heathen philosophers and religious leaders. 'Socrates and Plato' specifically were 'cold and dry when compared' with Jesus and Moses.¹⁹ And nothing in human experience would match the prospect of 'a happy resurrection' as an incentive for virtuous living.

Jesus played two roles in this succinct argument. He was the Messiah who was mankind's reassurance that there was a pattern of purpose behind the bedlam of history. He also was proof for the promise of resurrection, a proof of greater strength precisely because he was human, not divine in nature.

On occasion Priestley conceded that a well-educated sceptic might be a reasonably decent person, but 'an atheist has neither the *motive* nor the *means*, of being what he might have been if he had not been an atheist'.²⁰ As he insisted to Volney, the rare case of the virtuous sceptic was to be explained as an example of the residual influence of religious teachings. If a man were a true secularist, the 'necessary consequence' would be 'the debasement of his nature'. He understandably was perplexed by Socrates's elevated moral sentiments 'considering the little light that [he] had, viz. that of nature only, uninstructed by any revelation'. In particular, Socrates was ignorant of that 'great sanction of virtue...the doctrine of a future state'.²¹ In the same vein, it was a matter of genuine sadness to Priestley that Franklin had not lived long enough to fulfil a promise that he would re-examine Christian doctrine and history in works recommended by Priestley.²² As he claimed in his long book of 'objections to the Doctrines of Natural Religion...especially those contained in the writings of Mr. Hume', the Christian world view must make the believer 'another kind of being than the atheist'. The Christian's 'feelings and his conduct cannot but be greatly superior'.²³

Priestley's polemic for the indispensability of the Christian religion to righteous living led him to raise the spectre of sexual licence. In the second instalment of his *Letters to a philosophical unbeliever*, in which he is contending against Paine's assertion of the sufficiency of natural theology as a basis for morality, he tells his French readers that unbelievers in revelation do not restrain their sexual activity. They have 'made little account' of the virtue of restraint in 'the commerce of the sexes'.²⁴ But his ultimate warning touched the nerve of the most favoured project of the Enlightenment. 'The man who enters fully...into the spirit of infidelity, will have little respect even for the liberal pursuits of science'.²⁵ In what was perhaps his most psychologically telling remark, he confessed to Volney that he could not imagine rational behaviour which would not be exclusively selfish were it not for the restraint of theological convictions.²⁶

Priestley was not content to leave the matter as an issue of private conduct. In 1794 he welcomed the French National Assembly's affirmation of the existence of God and a future life because he assumed that that action represented their recognition of 'the importance of this faith, to the good conduct and happiness of man *as members of society*' (italics added).²⁷ The power of moral judgement might be present in all men, but the power to live virtuously was too weak to be trusted. Republican virtue required the reinforcement of religion, and of the Christian religion in particular.

Margaret Canovan has presented Priestley as 'a pioneer liberal, who stated the classic case for political and cultural liberalism as clearly as Adam Smith stated that for liberalism in economics'.²⁸ In so far as that is accurate, Priestley's eagerness to define the limits of mankind's natural capacity for self-regulating civic virtue is even more impressive. It also was fateful because his conservative views reinforced the reluctance of our most democratically

inclined American philosophe to exploit the 'Machiavellian Moment' as an opportunity to assert a fully autonomous, naturalistic ethic.

II

The task of translating enlightenment into social reality severely tested the coherence of the views of all progressive philosophers in the eighteenth century. The logic of the Enlightenment confronted the reality of the populace. As Harry Payne has observed, it was precisely their 'empiricist frame of mind' which forced the philosophes to confront the *actual* condition of the mind and morals of the generality of citizens.²⁹ Neither the evasive idealizations of romanticism nor the deferred consolations of supernaturalism were available to them.

Although one can trace a thin line of development from Bayle to Holbach in which the argument for the theoretical possibility of a society of atheists turns into a claim for the superiority of a society which has been purged of all religion, the consensus of opinion, *mutatis mutandis*, was for some version of the idea that ordinary folks were not yet ready to practice that moral autonomy of which the elite were capable. Until that readiness could be brought about through social and educational reforms, religion must be retained as a means of social control.

One might have expected a more optimistic secular concept of liberty to prevail in the United States. A relatively homogeneous population was distributed over a wide area rich in natural resources. There was not the legacy of centuries of serfdom. There was an ideological confidence in the invigorating superiority of the environment of the New World, and an ascriptive natural equality had been asserted to justify the Revolution. In particular, one would look to Jefferson, whose faith in popular democracy wavered least, to have formulated less qualified theoretical justifications for his beloved 'experiment' in republicanism.

The issue was not whether mankind was thought to be 'naturally good' or 'naturally bad'. The more complex question was whether the new nation's intellectual leaders were prepared to derive the norms of human behaviour from reflections on secular experience, to affirm the authority of those norms without recourse to transcendental sanctions, to erect a government of laws based on those principles, and to develop a system of public education designed to inculcate and foster attachment to the shared values of society. The extension of the principles and methods of empiricism into public affairs confronted its adherents with a formidable undertaking.³⁰ Small wonder that Franklin and others lost their will to try. Jefferson at least made a start on putting some of the elements in place as both public servant and public intellectual.

He was concerned for what today would be called the 'formation' of a populace capable of democratic self-government. One motivation for his radical proposals for state and federal land-use policies was to guarantee that those who worked the land would be self-reliant citizens, unlike the downtrodden creatures whom he later observed in the French countryside. His early opposition to the development of indigenous manufacturing was based in part on the wish to prevent the growth of a dependent class of industrial workers.

In intellectual terms, this same concern helps to account for Jefferson's attraction to the Scottish school of common-sense philosophy. He adopted their notion of an innate moral sense, a virtual 'organ of perception' that makes more or less 'automatic decisions' regarding the rightness or wrongness of particular acts.³¹ That power of judgment alone, however, was not sufficient. He also wanted very much to believe that 'nature hath implanted in our breasts a love of others, a sense of duty to them, a moral instinct, in short' which would sustain the ubiquitous moral demands of a republican society. Working himself up to an affirmative frame of mind in the famous letter to Thomas Law, he said. 'The Creator would indeed have been a bungling artist, had he intended man for a social animal, without planting in him social dispositions.'³² Leaving to one side any implications of divine bungling, it must be said that Jefferson could never fully convince himself that our 'social dispositions' were a match for the counter-pull of self-love which he regarded as the enemy of civic virtue. Perhaps the psychological root of this misgiving lay in his lifelong struggle with himself regarding civic obligation, knowing how narrowly the public servant won out over the gentleman farmer.

This was the Achilles heel of Jefferson's moral and political philosophy. His irrepressible nervousness concerning the weakness of natural human philanthropy coupled with his perception of the weakness of the incentives to altruistic behaviour in liberal individualism left him vulnerable to Priestley's apologetics. Jefferson's readiness to learn from Priestley was heightened by secondary considerations. Priestley's reputation as a friend of liberty and an inventive scientist gave a greater credibility to his historical investigations and theological speculations than they might otherwise have enjoyed in Jefferson's mind.

The first evidence of Jefferson's awareness of Priestley's scientific works is contained in a letter to James Madison dated 25 May 1784. He informed Madison that he had asked his Philadelphia book dealer to order 'whatever has been written on air or fire' by Priestley.³³ Allusions to Priestley's pamphlets and to his role in European scientific debates can be found in Jefferson's correspondence from that date forward. By the end of the 1780s, Jefferson had become interested in owning and studying Priestley's ecclesiastical writings. In 1789 Richard Price fulfilled Jefferson's request from Paris for copies of some of the key theological works.³⁴

Jefferson was not in Philadelphia in 1794 when Priestley took up residence in Pennsylvania. However, his election as Vice President brought him back to the seat of government early in 1797. They saw one another regularly during the next four years. Jefferson attended several of Priestley's sermons.³⁵ This direct association came to an end when the federal capital was transferred to Washington, but they maintained a substantive correspondence until Priestley's death in 1804.

When Jefferson turned to the works of Priestley for assistance in his reflective inquiries into social morality and political philosophy, a considerable degree of selective inattention was demanded. He had to blink at the great quantities of dogma, and also overlook Priestley's indifference to most social reforms. Except for his intrepid advocacy of the cardinal principle of toleration, Priestley gave surprisingly little attention to socio-political philosophy. His one tract on the Poor Laws showed no imaginative sympathy with the plight of the indigent. He sincerely believed 'that there is not only most virtue, and most happiness, but even the most true politeness in the middle classes of life'.³⁶ He thanked God for stationing him among them, but took no particular interest in widening the access of others to the virtuous opportunities of the bourgeoisie. The explanation may lie in his doctrine of providence. The human condition would inevitably get better, but the world as it was at any given point was justified; it was as God wanted it to be. This rationalization extended to the very limits of human bad fortune, as can be seen in this passage from his sermon on the slave trade:

At the same time that we [Christians] justly think that every man is a great exalted being ... we consider all distinctions among men as temporary, calculated for the ultimate benefit of all; and consequently that it is for the interest of the lower orders, as well as of the highest, that such a subordination should subsist. But with this persuasion all christian masters will respect and love their servants and dependents...considering them as *brothers* and *equals*, in one and that the most important sense, while they treat them as *inferiors* in another.³⁷

There could scarcely be a more blatant demonstration of the way in which faith in a trans-historical destiny for mankind undermined the democratic secularism of the Enlightenment. Nonetheless, for whatever reasons, this element of Priestley's world view did not diminish appreciation for his other notions in the minds of his admiring American friends.

In the summer of 1813 Jefferson and Adams exchanged a series of letters in the course of which they assessed their respective indebtedness to Priestley. Jefferson claimed to 'have read his *Corruptions of Christianity* and *Early opinions of Jesus*, over and over again; and I rest on them . . . as the basis of my own faith'. He believed those 'writings have never been answered, nor can

be answered, by historical proofs' of the force of those adduced as evidence by Priestley.³⁸ The two titles mentioned were, of course, Priestley's main revisionist studies wherein he neatly isolated a non-mystical Jesus from the accretions of traditional theology and exonerated him from all responsibility for the mystifications and atrocities perpetrated by the ecclesiastical institutions which bear his name. The primitive Jesus emerged as a clearheaded teacher of a superlative version of rational morality.³⁹

It comes as no surprise that the next work by Priestley to strike Jefferson with particular force was the little comparative study of Socrates and Jesus. Priestley made certain that Jefferson received a copy shortly after it was published in the spring of 1803. Jefferson's response was immediate and took two forms. He urged Priestley, then in his final illness at Northumberland, to enlarge the study by extending the comparison to other philosophers, and then without delay composed his own 'Syllabus of an estimate of the merit of the doctrines of Jesus, compared with those of others.' In this latter document, Jefferson put down sharply his old mentors, the philosophers of classical antiquity, as 'short and defective' in their teachings regarding 'our duties to others'. By contrast with both Judaism and ancient philosophy, 'the peculiar superiority of the system of Jesus' lay in its inculcation of 'universal philanthropy'. Moreover, Jefferson continued without indication of his own position, Jesus 'taught, emphatically, the doctrines of a future state . . . as an important incentive, supplementary to the other motives of moral conduct'.⁴⁰ This from America's most avid student of Cabanis and de Tracy! All his hopes from a more empirical psychology were overridden by his fear of the deficiency of the motivation to civic virtue in the ordinary human heart.

Jefferson, with his usual indifference to consistency in systematic speculation, did not perceive that the philosophical anthropology which he was imbibing from the Ideologues must soon force to break with the views of his old friend Priestley among those who carried on the work of the Age of Reason. The centrality of the term 'materialism' in both schemes may have further concealed the disjunction from him. It is symbolically instructive in this connection that one of the last of the thousands of letters addressed to Monticello came from a very young French philosopher. Auguste Comte was aware of Jefferson's enthusiasm for de Tracy's efforts to base political and economic theory on 'the physical nature of man'. He enclosed the first instalment of the next chapter in man's scientific study of himself.⁴¹ Jefferson may be forgiven for not responding; he had lived beyond the boundary of his philosophical generation.

Gordon Wood, with understandable exasperation, recently characterized Jefferson as a 'confused secular humanist'.⁴² The problem — our problem — is that he was not. Eighteenth-century deists lived at a privileged moment in the process of the secularization of Western culture. They could use a double language without duplicity. To appeal at once to 'the laws of nature and of

nature's God' is an equivocation only in retrospect. To those of us who live and think after 'the death of God' in the nineteenth century, that rhetoric is double talk. To Jefferson's generation the existence of a cosmic order in which there is a telic unity of nature and history was a shared assumption; to day it can be no more than a faith claim.

As an accurate characterization of Jefferson's eclectic synthesis of views, Merrill Peterson is closer to the mark in calling him 'a kind of Christian humanist'.⁴³ John Dewey made no qualifications: 'Jefferson was a sincere theist.'⁴⁴ Adrienne Koch worked over this ground more thoroughly than anyone else, and her conclusion still stands that whereas the 'general drift of Jefferson's thinking is unquestionably toward the autonomy of moral values' he never took the step that would have carried him beyond the position of 'an extremely liberated deist, with a primarily utilitarian emphasis for his social morality'.⁴⁵ Resistance to the logic of naturalism thus can be seen in the most liberal of the Founding Fathers. Jefferson's wavering on the key point of republican morality left an ambivalence at the heart of American civic theory: Is or is not a democratic society dependent upon public faith in a specific religious tradition?

The radical wing of the American Enlightenment was always a fragile minority movement lacking distinguished leadership capable of sustained philosophical work.⁴⁶ The collapse of Jefferson's effort to ground republicanism in a post-Christian interpretation of human nature and human history is one factor which helps to explain why philosophical naturalism did not achieve a mature articulation in America for nearly a century. And by the time of the rise of Pragmatism, the Protestant churches had succeeded in establishing an identification between the American way of life and the Christian way — an identification which Jefferson would have repudiated because he would have grasped its anti-republican ramifications for political theory and political practice.⁴⁷

The playing out of these implications in contemporary American society gives an added significance to the study of the Priestley-Jefferson relationship. Whereas Priestley's idiosyncratic philosophy otherwise might appear to deserve no more than a footnote in the history of religious thought, closer examination reveals its influence on Jefferson's political philosophy at a critical point. By virtue of that influence, Priestley's writings contributed to the diffuse assumption in American culture that full civic virtue can be attained only in a society constituted of citizens animated by traditional religious beliefs.

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¹ There is no better testament to the durability of the Baconian inspiration in British experimentalism than the Preface to the first (1767) edition of Priestley's *The history and present state of electricity*. It can be read in *Priestley's writings on philosophy, science and politics*, ed. John A. Passmore (New York, 1965), 261-65. See also Caroline Robbins, 'Honest heretic: Joseph Priestley in America, 1794-1804', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 106 (1962), 60-75; and F.W. Gibbs, *Joseph Priestley* (New York, 1967).

² James J. Hoecker, 'Joseph Priestley and the reification of religion', *The Price-Priestley Newsletter*, No. 2 (1978), 45.

³ The first quotation is from the letter of Jefferson to Priestley, 21 March 1801, in *The portable Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York, 1975), 483-85. The second is from Adams's letter to Jefferson, 18 July 1813, in *The Adams-Jefferson letters*, ed. Lester J. Cappon (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1959), II, 361-62. On the strength of Priestley's association with Adams, see Chapter 14 in Zoltan Haraszti, *John Adams and the prophets of progress* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952). Merrill D. Peterson cites the role of Priestley's philosophy of religion in the convergence of religious views of the two former Presidents in his *Adams and Jefferson: a revolutionary dialogue* (Athens, Ga., 1976), 121-25.

⁴ Herbert W. Schneider, *A history of American Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1963), part II.

⁵ Robert Kelley, *The cultural pattern in American politics: the first century* (New York, 1979), 274-75.

⁶ Franklin conceded that his correspondent 'may find it easy to live a virtuous life, without the Assistance afforded by Religion'. But he asked him 'to think how great a Proportion of Mankind consists of weak and ignorant Men and Women', 3 July 1786(?), *The writings of Benjamin Franklin* ed. Albert H. Smyth (New York, 1907), IX, 520-22.

⁷ Robbins, 'Honest heretic', 72.

⁸ *Letter to the rev. Edward Burn* (1790), quoted in Passmore, 16. Edward Gibbon once remarked that Priestley must shoot 'a double battery' against those who believe too little and those who believe too much. Cited in Volney's *Answer to Doctor Priestley* (Philadelphia, 1797), 10.

⁹ Gibbs, *Joseph Priestley*, 36.

¹⁰ Erwin N. Hiebert, 'The integration of revealed religion and scientific materialism in the thought of Joseph Priestley', in *Joseph Priestley: scientist, theologian, and metaphysician*, eds. Lester Kieft and Bennett R. Willevord, Jr. (Lewisburg, Penn., 1980), 27, 34.

¹¹ Joseph Priestley, *An history of the corruptions of christianity*, I (London, 1782), I; and II (Birmingham, 1782), 465.

¹² *Ibid.*, II, 496-97. Priestley later made the same claim for the New Testament in *A continuation of the letters to the philosophers and politicians of France on the subject of religion; and of the letters to a philosophical unbeliever, in answer to Mr. Paine's age of reason* (Northumberland, 1794), 61-69.

¹³ Joseph Priestley, *Letters to a philosophical unbeliever* (Bath, 1780) part III, letter 2.

¹⁴ Joseph Priestley, *An essay on the first principles of government*, 2nd edn. (London, 1771), preface.

¹⁵ Joseph Priestley, *A continuation of the letters*, letters 6 and 7.

¹⁶ Quoted from *An history of the corruptions*, V, 503, in Margaret Canovan, 'The irony of history: Priestley's rational theology', *The Price-Priestley Newsletter*, No. 4 (1980), 18.

¹⁷ Priestley, *An history of the corruptions*, II, 440.

¹⁸ The vehemence of Priestley's denunciation of Volney's *Ruins* was provoked no doubt by the fact that the book represented, in however elementary a fashion, the comparative anthropological study of ancient Near Eastern religions. The notions of common cultic origins or shared symbol systems and rituals were anathema to Priestley. Above all he was outraged by Volney's suggestion that Jesus probably was a mythological, not a historic person. Priestley, *Letters to Mr. Volney* (Philadelphia, 1797), 4, 20ff.

¹⁹ Priestley, *A continuation of the letters*, 95.

²⁰ Joseph Priestley, *Letters to a philosophical unbeliever*, part I, x. This is the book in which Priestley calls Holbach's *Système de la nature* 'the most plausible and seducing of any thing that I have yet met with in support of atheism'. Letter XI, 157.

²¹ Joseph Priestley, *The doctrines of heathen philosophy compared with those of the revelation* (Northumberland, 1804), 58, 70.

²² Joseph Priestley, *Letters addressed to the philosophers and politicians of France on the subject*

of religion. To which are prefixed observations relating to the causes of the general prevalence of infidelity (Philadelphia, 1794), 9.

²³ Priestley, *Letters to a philosophical unbeliever*, xi.

²⁴ Priestley, *A continuation of the letters*, 28-36.

²⁵ Priestley, *Letters to Mr. Volney*, 10. Part of the inspiration which Priestley drew from his belief in the afterlife was the chance it would give him 'to resume those [scientific] inquiries with which I am so much delighted now'. Quoted in Gibbs, 168.

²⁶ Priestley, *Letters to Mr. Volney*, 9.

²⁷ Priestley, *A continuation of the letters*, iii.

²⁸ Margaret Canovan, 'Two concepts of liberty – eighteenth-century style', *The Price-Priestley Newsletter*, no. 2 (1978), 27.

²⁹ Harry C. Payne, *The philosophes and the people* (New Haven, 1976), esp. ch. 5, 'The uses of religion'. For a less sympathetic interpretation, see Ronald I. Boss, 'The development of social religion: a contradiction of French free thought', *Journal of the history of ideas*, 34 (1973), 577-89. Donald H. Meyer employs the concept of 'the hidden logic' of the assumptions of the Enlightenment. Donald H. Meyer, *The democratic enlightenment* (New York, 1976), xv.

³⁰ For a succinct discussion of the persistent difficulty encountered by Empiricism in its self-appointed task of elaborating a reasoned, deductive 'science of morality', see Morton White, *Science and sentiment in America* (New York, 1972), chs. 1, 3. It is instructive to recall Locke's retreat from the high claim in the *Essay* (Bk. IV, ch. III) that morality is 'amongst the sciences capable of demonstration'. When challenged by Molyneux to make good on that promise, Locke begged off and said the New Testament 'contains so perfect a body of Ethics that reason may be excused from that inquiry'. Jefferson's equivocation had good precedent in his beloved Mr. Locke.

³¹ The terms in quotation marks are from Elizabeth Flower and Murray G. Murphey, *A history of philosophy in America* (New York, 1977), I, 335-36. The failure to follow Jefferson's distinction between the capacity to make moral judgments and the disposition to do the right thing leads Flower and Murphey to minimize Jefferson's problems with ethical naturalism. They may have drawn too strong a conclusion from his indifference to piety. 'He did not find it necessary, as Franklin did, to insist upon man's direct dependence upon God as a basis for morality.' (I, 304).

³² Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Law, 13 June 1814, in *Portable Jefferson*, 540-44. The language of this letter was a favourite formula of Jefferson's whereby he summarized his views on this matter throughout his mature life. See the early letter to Peter Carr on 10 August 1787 (*Portable Jefferson*, 423-28) and one to John Adams on 14 October 1816 (*Letters*, ed. Cappon, II, 492).

³³ *The papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton, 1953), VII, 288. An interesting letter to Jefferson in Paris from Thomas Randolph, Jr. who was studying at Edinburgh at the time (14 April 1787), includes the following reference. 'I have taken the liberty to procure the seat of an honorary member for you in a society instituted here for the encouragement of the study of Natural history among the students at this university. I should not have thought the honor worth your acceptance, was not the list already (sic) adorned with the names of Black, Priestley and Pennant', *The papers of Thomas Jefferson*, XI, 293.

³⁴ Letter from Richard Price dated 3 August 1789 in *The papers of Thomas Jefferson*, XV, 329-31.

³⁵ Edgar F. Smith, *Priestley in America, 1794-1804*, (Philadelphia, 1920), 95.

³⁶ Joseph Priestley, 'Memoirs written by himself' in *Autobiography of Joseph Priestley*, intro. Jack Lindsay (Teaneck, N.J., 1970), 114-15.

³⁷ Quoted from a 1788 sermon in Hoecker, *The Price-Priestley Newsletter*, No. 2 (1978), 62.

³⁸ Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 22 August 1813 in *Letters*, ed. Cappon, II, 367-69. Benjamin Rush had introduced Priestley and Jefferson to one another. Jefferson's personal copies of several works by Priestley are preserved in the Rare Book Collection of the Library of Congress. Priestley was invited to visit Monticello but never managed to get there. Jefferson also earnestly requested Priestley's advice regarding educational reforms in Virginia, including his thoughts on the proposed University. Priestley for his part dedicated the final volume of his six-volume *General history of the christian church* (1802-03) to President Jefferson.

³⁹ The determination of late-eighteenth century philosophers to hold to Jesus as the warrant for their scientific humanism is the more amazing the more one reflects on the contrast between their ideal of human character and the biblical profile of the Messiah. What could they have found in the New Testament biography to vindicate their cultivation of aesthetic appreciation for the

artifacts of human culture, their dedication to the close experimental study of nature, or their cosmopolitan curiosity regarding the mores of diverse human societies? The discrepancies go to the heart of the programme of the Enlightenment, and yet even so advanced a radical as Tom Paine would say in Part I of *The age of reason* that Jesus was 'a virtuous and an amiable man' whose morality 'has not been exceeded by any'.

⁴⁰ The 'Syllabus' was first circulated in a letter to Benjamin Rush, 21 April 1803. *Portable Jefferson*, 490-94.

⁴¹ Gilbert Chinard, 'Jefferson among the philosophers', *Ethics*, LIII (1943), No. 4, 266. Chinard's enthusiasm led him to salute Jefferson as 'the herald of positivism: and the prophet of a new humanism'. However, his essay remains useful as a documentation of the depth of Jefferson's interest in the new naturalistic anthropology of the Ideologues.

⁴² Gordon S. Wood, 'The disappointments of Jefferson', *NYRB*, XXVIII (Aug. 13, 1981), 13, 4-8.

⁴³ Peterson, *Revolutionary dialogue*, 121.

⁴⁴ *The living thoughts of Thomas Jefferson*, presented by John Dewey (New York, 1940), 23.

⁴⁵ Adrienne Koch, *The philosophy of Thomas Jefferson* (1943, rpt. Chicago, 1964), 28-29, 37.

⁴⁶ For an account of the leading figure in the left wing of the American Enlightenment, see Roderick French, 'Elihu Palmer, radical deist, radical republican', in *Studies in eighteenth-century culture*, 8, ed. Roseann Runte (Madison, 1979), 87-108.

⁴⁷ Dewey of course was the one pragmatist who consciously assumed responsibility for finishing the philosophical work left undone by Jefferson. Dewey's veneration for 'our first great democrat' led him to perceive a consistency ('few men in public life whose course has been so straight') which might surprise more recent commentators. The great point of their affinity was 'faith in scientific advance as a means of popular enlightenment and of social progress', *Living thoughts*, 3, 2, 6. For a partisan discussion of the thesis that Protestant Christianity was the established religion of America in law and in culture, see Terry Eastland, 'In defense of religious America', *Commentary*, 71 (June, 1981), No. 6, 39-45.

JOSEPH PRIESTLEY AND UTILITARIANISM IN THE AGE OF REASON

James J. Hoecker

I

Western liberalism in the eighteenth century constituted more than an effusive impulse toward liberation and humanitarianism. The democratic and industrial revolutions that followed closely on the heels of the Enlightenment moved the middle classes to the centre of the political and economic life of Europe. At their epicentre was a new spirit of scientific inquiry that led the liberal ideologues of the age to undertake in society a separation between facts and values, the religious and the profane, and the material and the metaphysical. The social system-building for which the Nineteenth Century, particularly such theoreticians as Bentham, had a propensity was predicated on a positivist view that human nature was a function of the natural world.

This essay explores one element in the transition from the liberal social philosophy of natural law associated with Locke to the unadorned social science of the Philosophical Radicals. Joseph Priestley was no Benthamite; nor can Bentham be described as his disciple. The two thinkers nevertheless share a theoretical mutuality that is underscored fortuitously by Bentham's subsequent recollection of having read Priestley in his youth.

II

All realms of human activity were thought by the 'philosophes' to be proper objects of scientific understanding and, consequently, as subject to scientifically-determined principles. Under Hume and Hutcheson, for example, the Newtonian methodology insinuated itself even into that most sensitive field of human inquiry, morals. One major scientific principle that evolved in the eighteenth century was that of the natural identity of human self-interests, the positive law of social utility. Before Bentham envisioned the legislative execution of the felicific calculus, the utilitarian concept had already appeared, in one guise or another, in the works of Adam Smith, Godwin, and even Shaftesbury. The prescription for social amelioration — that the proper goal of society and governments is to seek the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number' — occurs in the works of Hutcheson and Beccaria. Among the most interesting utilitarian theoreticians was Joseph Priestley, whose ideas provide special insights into the modern liberal tradition.

Priestley was recognized by his contemporaries and has been best known to posterity as a heterodox religionist, a fervent believer in Biblical prophecy,

and as the scientist that struggled vainly for three decades to prove the phlogiston theory in the face of mounting support for Lavoisier's new chemistry. Although frequently regarded as less consequential, Priestley contributed substantially to the literature of early liberalism. Priestley's political ideas, like his religious convictions, had an idiosyncratic quality to them. He nevertheless actively circulated and popularized the classically Lockean presuppositions about the relationship between the individual and the state.¹ His success as a liberal theorist, or at least his influence, is plausibly related to his other interests and who he was in English society.

It is readily apparent that Priestley's scientific and experimentalist outlook and his Dissenting and middle class orientations permeated all aspects of his thinking. Like many thinkers of his age, Priestley believed that all beliefs and forms of knowledge should be exposed to rational scrutiny. He was convinced that, from this sweeping inquiry, would emerge a cohesive system of truths, tangible material progress, and a natural improvement in human behaviour and institutions.

Priestley was a thoroughgoing materialist, a philosophical opponent of free will well-versed in Hobbes, a proponent of the associationalist psychology of another materialist, David Hartley, a scholar of Locke and Newton, and a Unitarian who insisted that even religion be subject to the canons of rational inquiry. Drawing on these doctrines, Priestley developed views of the nature of humankind and society which characterized the liberal ideology as it eventually passed into the nineteenth century. Typically dressed in the language of natural law and divine guidance, the objects of Priestley's social philosophy - as for liberalism generally - were nevertheless secular.

Too much significance is assigned to the fact that James Mill adopted associational psychology through Priestley's interpretations and republication of Hartley's work and that a young Jeremy Bentham first discovered the 'greatest happiness' principle in a 1768 essay by Priestley.² Priestley belongs to the uniquely interesting English Jacobins and Honest Whigs of eighteenth century. He nevertheless conversed in the language of that 'party of bourgeois doctrinaires', the Philosophical Radicals, and therefore deserves a place in a broader tradition of liberal political thought.

As an enthusiastic supporter of the two major political cataclysms of the eighteenth century, a martyr to the principles of free speech and association, and a defender of individual rights within the political community, Priestley was part of the struggle against the deteriorating vestiges of feudal authority in Western society. The ideas in Priestley's eclectic writings were gleaned from the various reformist causes of his day - Wilkesite agitation, association movements, anti-slavery campaigns, efforts to repeal the religious tests. Catholic emancipation, parliamentary reform and so on. Not surprisingly, therefore, many of his writings in political philosophy, notably the *Essay on*

the first principles of government, articulate the desires of bourgeois liberal elements in English and American society for more secure and indefeasible rights of person and property and broader avenues to power through representative institutions.

Priestley was seeking, in less radical terms than would Godwin or Paine, a redefinition of the relationship between the individual and the State. His works restated the case for individual autonomy and self-governance in a variety of ways. For example, he wrote, 'In many things besides the article of religion, men have busied themselves in *legislating* too much, and when it would have been better if individuals had been left to think and act for themselves.'³ Liberal declarations like this reflect, on one hand, the early modern rejection of old forms of authority, whether political, religious, or social. They conceal, on the other hand, the deference to the community which liberalism requires of individuals. As discussed below, the logic of the scientific method applied to the social order, that is, the tendency to view all things as subject to immutable laws, prescribes a degree of social conformity and thereby contributed to a fundamental ambivalence in modern liberal theory. It is this second visage of liberalism found in Priestley's works that leads most directly to the Nineteenth Century liberal thinkers.

III

Prior to the American Revolution, Priestley explained that 'the great instrument in the hand of divine providence, of this progress of the species towards perfection, is *society*, and consequently *government*.'⁴ Priestley's buoyant vision of inevitable social progress under providential design was conjoined by the view that such progress and organization could be engineered only by central, albeit representative, authority. The origins of this predilection are quite identifiable.

Priestley's politics flow in large part from the quest for religious freedom and careers open to talent which were the 'epitome of dissenting political theory'.⁵ Dissenters were deeply committed to individual rights and independent thought. The 'Commonwealthmen' tradition, with which Priestley has been associated, added an admiration for the balanced constitutional forms, hierarchical social arrangements, toleration, and the personal freedoms evinced during the struggles of the seventeenth century.⁶ The Lockean legacy with its natural law rhetoric elucidated this mix of ideas and helped generate an ideology shared by various groups. Of course, Locke's theories were 'a political text capable of sustaining any gloss'.⁷ This may account for the fact that liberalism remained a somewhat pragmatic and uncohesive philosophy during the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, certain Lockean notions remained fundamental and immutable.

First, the Lockean views man and society in empirical and mechanical terms. Ernst Cassirer observed how this trait overwhelmed its philosophical

competitors:

Empiricism looks upon nature, as upon the human soul, as a sequence of cause and effect, and upon society and the state as a sequence of means and ends. It would investigate both sequences in order to control them, to be able to intervene and direct them towards given ends.⁸

The primacy of doing over knowing, of the concrete over the abstract, of action over contemplation, forms the vital principle permeating all its details and determining all the special doctrines of the Baconian philosophy.⁹

Locke, whose *Essay concerning human understanding* rejects contemplation for work and business and recognizes that human knowledge is derived from nature alone, blended the Baconian methodology into the liberal political tradition. Both Hobbes and Locke had a mechanistic world view in which the individual, while more real than society itself, was nothing more than a quivering mass of stimulus and response. However, Locke had clothed this naked proposition in a palatable political mythology. Locke did not retain Hobbes's materialism, but his mechanical conception of the political community was coded Hobbesianism. The naturalism and hedonistic psychology in Locke's theories undermined the teleology of the old order. The emphases on property rights, on the relationship of knowledge to experience, and on government non-interference and representative institutions demonstrate that 'Lockeanism is preeminently a bourgeois ideology'.¹⁰ To put it another way, Locke tended to ratify a middle class political philosophy which took the possessive and individualistic qualities of the marketplace as its model.¹¹

In the final analysis, classical liberalism as it developed in the eighteenth century perceived man as a rational creature distinctly a product of his environs. It held the political culture to be atomistic, an amalgam of private interests needing co-ordination and governed by natural rulers. It perceived 'liberty' as a birthright used mainly to circumscribe the authority of the State.¹² To this mixture was added an adulation for science and technology and a faith in the perfectibility of each malleable person and the progress of civilization as a whole. The good Dr. Priestley spoke to this time and again:

We ourselves are part of the great system of nature; as the laws of nature comprehend and continually affect us; everything that we do is putting things into situations, in which the laws of nature determine the result; the more perfect knowledge we have of those laws, the better to foretel [sic] those results and therefore to chuse [sic] what we wish to produce,¹³

This passage, and hundreds like it written by Priestley's contemporaries, describes the incursion of the scientific spirit into social and political theory. 'All civil societies, and the whole science of civil government on which they are founded are yet in their infancy', stated Priestley. 'Like other arts and sciences

this is generally improving; but it improves more slowly, because opportunities for making experiments are fewer'.¹⁴ His faith in progress as a law of nature was unalloyed. Priestley perceived a need to continually cast aside institutions, even those once thought enlightened. To do otherwise would be 'hugging our chains'.¹⁵ 'Were the best formed state in the world to be fixed in its present condition', wrote Priestley, 'I make no doubt, but that, in a course of time, it would be the worst.'¹⁶

Like most Whig apologists, Priestley revered the Gothic constitution as the 'best actual scheme of civil policy' but he refused to say it was perfect, especially in light of the exclusion from the political community of Dissenters, Catholics, Jews, and conscientious deviants of all sorts.¹⁷ A rigid constitution was a burden on posterity, according to Priestley,¹⁸ and the historically legitimated authority which Burke sort to defend was merely a principle of '*passive obedience and non-resistance*'.¹⁹ In other words, Priestley would reject all a priori rationalizations because '*fact and experience* seem to be our only safe guides.²⁰ Anthony Lincoln summed up Priestley's liberal critique like this:

The state for Priestley is completely a power conception; it is a simple will working within a definite sphere. It is to be judged wholly by the extent to which it serves its purpose in promoting the public good. It can plead no special circumstances, no special morality or dispensation. Priestley will admit of no 'State-mind': no reason of State; no sacred shrine; no Arcana of mystery.²¹

Priestley never wholly accepted Montesquieu's and Blackstone's description of mixed government with its separate but coordinated mechanisms. Increasingly in the 1770's and 1780's he became less a political trinitarian - i.e., a believer in a mix of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy - and more distrustful of the English constitution that to him became a facade for corruption, decay, privilege, and tyranny.²²

Priestley's observations of moral and political decline were not balanced by plans for political reconstruction, however. In *An essay on the first principles*, Priestley wrote:

It is comparatively of small consequence *who*, or *how many* be our governors, or *how long* their office continues, provided their power be the same while they are in office, and the administration be uniform and certain.²³

It was the extent of State authority that most concerned liberals of Priestley's ilk. The State was properly to be excluded from domestic and personal affairs, matters of health and conscience, and, of course, commerce.²⁴ Priestley emphasised these invitations by drawing his celebrated distinction between civil and political liberty. On the one hand, people were

free to control their social existences including religion and education; on the other hand, people had the power to consent to and influence political arrangements.²⁵ The exercise of civil liberty was the more fundamental of the two liberties and Priestley believed it had been 'greatly impaired by an abuse of the maxim, that the joint understanding of all the members of a state, properly collected, must be preferable to that of individuals ...'²⁶ A true Lockean, Priestley had little faith in the wisdom of collectivities because individuals were philosophically and politically prior to the State, which itself had no identity other than its constituent nature.

Why, then, did the likes of Priestley look to government as the arbiter of social obligations and an instrument of progress? Men in nature, theorized Priestley, lived unconnected to one another, 'exposed, without redress, to insults and wrongs of every kind'. Thus, to secure 'enterprises and undertakings calculated for the common good,' people abandon 'some part of their natural liberty, and submit their conduct to the direction of the community ...'²⁷ This typically Lockean analysis, written in 1768, posits civil government as a social necessity. As Priestley perceived in his famous *An essay on first principles*, the surrender of the individual to the direction of the community was a means not only to redress the injustices of the state but to improve knowledge, science, and the circumstances of persons of property. The social upheavals of the late eighteenth century probably contributed to making these functions even more precious to liberal theorists. Modernity is thereby recognised as the epoch in which individuals cease to be their own legislators. Priestley too is associated with this abdication of absolute individual autonomy, which occurred irrespective of the liberal mistrust of authority whether monarchical or majoritarian, in the following ways. In the final analysis, the liberal seeks to guard against explicit and personal forms of authority - i.e., kingship or aristocracy - rather than defend against the weight of the political community. In fact, liberalism historically rejects subjective, capricious, and personal forms of power in favour of objective, indifferent, and institutional forms which would theoretically impact more equally across society.²⁸ Although it jealously reserved to the individual all matters of a religious or educational nature, early liberalism increasingly came to identify political rights with the will of the political community. The resulting imposition of limitations on the power of individuals, accomplished through the State is therefore a great irony.²⁹ Amidst the field of social forces, to use a Lockean analogy to the laws of physical nature, the determination of the greatest social good developed inexorably into a matter of individual conformity to the prevailing political will. 'Locke sees politics, like Hobbes, as an aspect of mechanics. Might must determine at least what is legally right. One cannot legislate against the natural motions of social bodies'.³⁰

For Priestley, the primary social concern was the general happiness of the whole community, in other words the utility of political actions. In his famous *Essay* in 1768, he wrote that 'the happiness of the whole community is the ultimate end of government' and that 'all claims of individuals inconsistent

with the public good are absolutely null and void'.³¹ Bentham no doubt found this appealing and, as a mature philosopher, expunged from it the natural law rhetoric of moral obligation and social contract to arrive at a fully secular utilitarian analysis. In the meantime, Priestley, who was once reproached and disfranchised for his religious heterodoxy³² and later persecuted for supporting the French Revolution, concluded that progress lay with identification of the interests of individuals with those of the whole community.

To make the *public good* the standard of right or wrong, in whatever relates to society and government, besides being the most natural and rational of all rules, has the farther recommendation of being the easiest of application. Either what *God has ordained*, or what *antiquity* authorises may be very difficult to ascertain.³³

In language reminiscent of Adam Smith's paean to the 'invisible hand', Priestley bestowed a metaphysical status upon the utilitarian idea.

To a mind not warped by theological and metaphysical subtleties, the divine being appears to be actuated by no other views than the noblest we can conceive, the happiness of his creatures. Virtue and right conduct consist in those affections and actions which terminate in the public good; justice and veracity, for instance, having nothing intrinsically excellent in them, separate from their relation to the happiness of mankind; and the whole system of right to power, property, and everything else in society, must be regulated by the same consideration: the decisive question, when any of these subjects are examined, being, What is it that the good of the community requires?³⁴

The natural law theories of the eighteenth century were being eroded under pressure from the drive for empirical knowledge. This can be seen in Priestley's rather uncritical support for government which served the 'general good' and left the individual with civil liberty and natural rights. The dichotomy between political and civil liberty seems to disappear with Priestley's conclusion that inalienable rights themselves were 'founded on a regard to the general good'.³⁵ If moral life and social institutions could be legitimated according to their utility, in theory so might a person's human rights. This notion contravenes the concept of natural law and the idea of inalienability.³⁶ The contradictions went unrecognized by Priestley.

The political outlook shared by Priestley served the best interests of the middle class. The conventional wisdom was that the authority of the State rested properly with men of estate because they alone could provide knowledgeable leadership based on independent judgement not inspired by need. 'The very idea of property', wrote Priestley, 'or right of any kind, is founded upon a regard to the general good of society'.³⁷ As for the unpropertied classes, with no stake in society they had no claim to a political

voice.³⁸ Locke's theory of rights was, after all, based more on the social differences among men than on their equality in relation to political authority. This bourgeois predilection narrowed the range of political guarantees offered by liberalism.

The classical liberal State assumes the regulation of those areas of social and economic activities considered incapable of improving themselves. The concept of what is required to engineer a generally happy society has, of course, changed markedly since Priestley's time. Jeremy Bentham, who was less enamoured by the Enlightenment's prospects of inevitable progress than was Priestley, subsequently concluded that the achievement of the harmony of interests in society could only derive from legislative coercion. Indeed, the nineteenth century utilitarian doctrine, with which Priestley would have been conversant, developed some philistine characteristics in its quest for social efficiency,

What ought a person to like or desire? The answer of Utilitarianism, both as represented by Hartley one of its earliest, and J.S. Mill one of its latest, exponents, is the same: he should like what other people like, and do what other people do. Humanity found out what is best for itself. Follow its experience.³⁹

The violence of the 1790's drove Priestley from England, fatally damaged the facade of enlightenment, and ended the optimistic philosophers' alliance. Perhaps, as Caroline Robbins has said, the philosophy of the old Whig radicals lost its identity in the radicalism of the new age. The liberal ideology which built upon and consecrated the whiggish tradition nevertheless carried its social and political goals forward, with a belief in the improbability of human society as second nature as Priestley's. The cataclysms of the twentieth century have subsequently shorn liberal thought of this optimism but not of its conviction in the utility of personal liberty. That liberty, however, is rooted in the harmony of political interests, embodied in governing institutions, and emboldened by faith in technology. From this vantage, the liberal systems developed by the likes of Priestley and even Adam Smith, which relied so heavily on the assurance of a benevolent and providential design, seem impossibly tender-minded.

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¹ In an excellent essay, Margaret Conovan has delineated how Priestley's liberalism represents the eighteenth century departure from the ideas of liberty embodied in the tradition of classical republicanism. 'Two concepts of liberty — eighteenth-century style', *The Price-Priestley Newsletter*, No. 2 (1978), 27-43.

² Mary P. Mack, *Jeremy Bentham: an odyssey of ideas, 1748-1792* (London, 1962), 103. The concept antedates Priestley's major political works and can be found in Beccaria's *An essay on crimes and punishments*, 3rd edn. (London, 1770), 2.

³ Joseph Priestley, *Letters to the right honourable Edmund Burke, occasioned by his reflections on the revolution in France* (Dublin, 1791), 45.

⁴ Joseph Priestley, *An essay on the first principles of government, and the nature of political, civil and religious liberty*, 2nd edn. (London, 1771), 2-3

⁵ Anthony Lincoln, *Some political and social ideas of english dissent, 1763-1800* (Cambridge, 1938), 180.

⁶ Caroline Robbins, *The eighteenth-century commonwealthman: studies in the transmission, development and circumstance of english liberal thought from the restoration of Charles II until the war with the thirteen colonies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961).

⁷ Lincoln, 148.

⁸ Ernst Cassirer, *The platonic renaissance in England*, trans. James P. Pettegrove (London, 1953), 191.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁰ Liam T. Bluhm, *Theories of the political system: classics of political thought and modern political analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965), 301-305.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 323. Penetrating analysis of Locke's thought are found in: Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and vision: continuity and innovation in western political thought* (Boston, 1963); Robert Paul Wolff, *The poverty of liberalism* (Boston, 1968); Leo Strauss, *Natural right and history* (Chicago, 1953).

¹² Liberalism is always to be distinguished from the radical democratic tradition of the French Revolution which emphasized equality rather than liberty, used radical individualism to oppose feudal obstructions, and perceived man as non-rational and non-moral except as he participates in the state which merged with society itself, as Rousseau envisioned it. George Sabine, 'The two democratic traditions', *Philosophical Review*, LXI(1952), 451-474.

¹³ Joseph Priestley, *Experiments and observations relating to various branches of natural philosophy*, 3 vols. (London, 1781-1791), III, vi. See Walter L. Dorn, 'The heavenly city and the historical writing on the enlightenment', in *Carl Becker's heavenly city revisited*, ed. Raymond O. Rockwood (Ithaca, N.Y., 1958).

¹⁴ Joseph Priestley, *Experiments and observations on different kinds of air*, 3 vols. (London, 1774-77), I, xvi-xvii.

¹⁵ Priestley, *An essay on the first principles*, 292

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 293-94.

¹⁷ Joseph Priestley, *A view of the principles and conduct of the protestant dissenters, with respect to the civil and ecclesiastical constitution of England* 2nd edn. (London, 1769). Priestley, *Letters to the right honourable Edmund Burke*, 41-68.

¹⁸ Joseph Priestley, *Lectures on history and general policy; to which is prefixed an essay on a course of liberal education for civil and active life* (Dublin, 1788), 232-33.

¹⁹ Priestley, *Letters to the right honourable Edmund Burke*, vii.

²⁰ Priestley, *An essay on the first principles*, 110. 'Priestley and Bentham, not less than Rousseau and his followers, altogether ignore the historical method in politics. They are absolutely indifferent to that conception of the continuity of the social organism which supplies the vital element of Burke's teaching.' Sir Leslie Stephen, *History of english thought in the eighteenth century*, 2 vols., (New York, 1962), II, 215.

²¹ Lincoln, 166-67.

²² Priestley's English guarantism, that is, 'political liberty conceived as the freedom of the individual from the State and in the face of the State', places him firmly in the Whig tradition. Priestley's deference to balanced constitutional forms was nevertheless qualified by several factors, more so as he grew older. First, even as a young man, he believed that the art of civil government, though in its infancy, would evolve, improve, and help ameliorate the human condition, but more slowly than might science. Priestley, *An essay on the first principles*, 252;

also, *Experiments and observations on different kinds of air* (London, 1774-1777), I, xvi-xvii. For Priestley adulation for past institutions was "hugging our chains". *An essay on the first principles*, 292. Secondly, events of the 1780's appeared to reinforce his view that a rigid constitution was a burden on prosperity. His work reflected an impatience with the lack of definition in the constitutional system; power did not reside where it seemed and Priestley concluded that the constitution was as much a source of confusion as a tool of social improvement. Joseph Priestley, *Lectures on history and general policy* (Dublin, 1788), 232-33, 248. Finally, Priestley's chiasm increased his scepticism about the permanency, if not the soundness, of human institutions. His fascination with the corruption and decay of institutions, the second coming of Christ, and the imminence of cataclysms foretold in the Bible signalled his departure from the majoritarian consensus and became intense during the French Revolution. Clarke Garrett, 'Joseph Priestley, the millenium and the french revolution', *Journal of the history of ideas*, XXXIV, No. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1973). From exile in Pennsylvania, he finally wrote that 'whether there be peace or war, there must be a revolution in that country'. Joseph Priestley to George Thacher, 10 May 1798, Northumberland (Dickinson College, Pa. Library).

²³ Priestley, *An essay on the first principles*, 48-49; Lincoln, 162-63.

²⁴ Joseph Priestly, *The present state of liberty in Great Britain and her colonies. By an Englishman* (London, 1769), 11-12. Priestley, *An essay on the first principles*, 52-55.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 9, 11-76

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁸ Wolin, *Politics and vision*, 346-47.

²⁹ C.B. Macpherson, 'The social bearing of Locke's political philosophy', *Western Political Quarterly*, VII, No. 1 (March, 1954), 2.

³⁰ Bluhm, *Theory*, 316.

³¹ Priestley, *An essay on the first principles*, 57.

³² As a youth, Priestley was rejected as a communicant in his aunt's church because of his deviations from the family's Calvinism. His religious tenets also exacerbated relations with his brother Timothy throughout their lives. More importantly, Priestley's *Disquisitions relating to matter and Spirit* (1777) caused him to appear, even to his patron Lord Shelburne, as an enemy to religion.

³³ Priestley, *Letters to the right honourable Edmund Burke*, 20.

³⁴ Priestley, *An essay on the first principles*, 14.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁶ Peter Gay, 'Carl Becker's heavenly city', in *Carl Becker's heavenly city revisited*, ed. Rockwood, 42; George Sabine, *A history of political theory*, 3rd edn. (London, 1963), 566-67.

³⁷ Priestley, *An essay on the first principles*, 16-17.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁹ G.S. Bower, *David Hartley and James Mill* (New York, 1881), 186.

SAMUEL CLARKE ON THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Alan P.F. Sell

Samuel Clarke died a little over two hundred and fifty years ago, in 1729. Some of his contemporaries experienced little difficulty in placing Clarke, the man. Thus, the Latitudinarian Bishop Hoadly (1676-1761) declared that he would like to be remembered as 'the friend of Dr. Clarke';¹ while according to the 1739 edition of Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques sur les Anglais*,² Bishop Gibson prevented Clarke's preferment to Canterbury by advising Queen Anne that although Clarke was her most learned and honest subject, he was not a Christian. This latter judgment was more than a little coloured by the alleged Arianism of Clarke's *Scripture doctrine of the Trinity* (1712).³

The question of the correct placing of Clarke the advocate of God's existence is somewhat more complex, but it has been equally productive of differences of opinion. The question resolves itself into the options: Were Clarke's theistic arguments *a priori*, *a posteriori*, or a mixture? Support for each of these alternatives can be found among Clark's critics, and their judgments are based largely upon his first series of Boyle Lectures — sixteen sermons preached in St. Paul's Cathedral in 1704, and published in 1706 (together with his second series of Boyle Lectures of 1705) under the title *A discourse concerning the being and attributes of God, the obligations of natural religion, and the truth and certainty of the christian revelation. In answer to Mr. Hobbes, Spinoza, the author of the oracles of reason, and the deniers of natural and revealed religion*.⁴

Comment upon Clarke's methodology has by no means been confined to philosophers and theologians. The poet Alexander Pope scorned what he called Clarke's 'high *priori* road'⁵ — though the suggestion that Pope was influenced against Clarke by his friendship with the latter's assailant Bolingbroke, and by his aversion to Clarke's Whiggish proclivities⁶ should caution us against taking Pope's view simply on trust. Though writing from a very different stand point, the atheist Holbach was no less blunt; 'En effet', he averred, 'le D. Clarke a prétendu prouver l'existence de Dieu *a priori*'.⁷ The Scottish philosopher Dugald Stewart accepted Clarke at his own estimation as an *a priori* thinker,⁸ while to Sir Leslie Stephen, Clarke was 'the greatest English representative of the *a priori* method of constructing a system of theology'.⁹ Dr. A.C. McGiffert concurs, and finds Clarke standing for innate ideas and *a priori* reasoning over against Locke.¹⁰ For his part George P. Fisher noted that whereas Clarke established the necessary existence of an eternal being on *a priori* lines, he resorted to an *a posteriori* proof of the intelligence of that being.¹¹

From the other side, Sir William Hamilton found that since 'Clarke's cosmological demonstration, called *a priori*' began from 'the observed contingency of the world', it was 'properly an argument *a posteriori*'.¹² With this Henry Rogers agreed, as did J.H. Stirling, who (*pace* McGiffert) found Clarke utilizing a cosmological argument *similar* to that of Locke.¹³ Dr. Caldecott has Clarke seeming to argue *a posteriori* whilst intending to proceed *a priori*;¹⁴ and in our own time Fr. Copleston has delineated what he makes no bones about calling Clarke's *a posteriori* argument for the existence of God.¹⁵

The varied deliverances of the critics afford more than sufficient justification for a two hundred and fiftieth anniversary reappraisal of the question, 'Of what type are Clarke's arguments for the existence of God?' Before returning to his work itself, however, we must sketch the intellectual background of his activities.

A rationalist through and through, Clarke was no slavish Cartesian. On the contrary, he opposed Descartes and his followers at point after point. Thus, he denies what he takes the Cartesians as holding, namely, that the idea of matter is equivalent to that of immensity, and hence that matter exists necessarily (528-29).¹⁶ Such naturalism comes far too close to Hobbes for his liking and, moreover, its accompanying claim to mathematical exactitude has been exploded by 'the greatest mathematicians in the present age'.¹⁷ Again, he finds the Cartesian view that the world was formed by the laws of motion alone 'impossible and ridiculous' (546). Above all, he denies that the Cartesians have shown self-existence to be an attribute of God: they have simply made self-existence part of the definition of the word 'God'. (529, cf. 584). In Clarke's view 'Our first certainty of the existence of God, does not arise from this that in the idea our minds frame of him, (or rather in the definition that we make of the word 'God' as signifying a being of all possible perfections) we include self-existence; but from hence, that 'tis demonstrable both negatively, that neither can all things possibly have arisen out of nothing, nor can they have depended one on another in an endless succession; and also positively, that there is Something in the universe, actually existing without us, the supposition of whose not existing plainly implies a contradiction' (529). Here Clarke adverts to cosmological considerations in support of his fundamentally *a priori* stance; and this, as we shall see, is characteristic of his approach to the question of God's existence.

Cartesian dualism is a futher bone of contention between Clarke and the followers of Descartes. Clarke contends that although we do not know the essence either of God or of matter, we may conclude from an examination of the known attributes of God and the known properties of matter, that since these are mutually incompatible their essences are entirely different.¹⁸ We may well suppose that it was Clarke's insistence upon this point which inclined him against the rationalism of the Cambridge Platonists, whose incipient

mysticism made no appeal to his temperament at all. It certainly underlay his outburst against what he took to be the pantheizing immanentism of Spinoza, 'the most celebrated patron of atheism in our time; who taught that there is no difference of substances, but that the whole and every part of the material world is a necessarily-existing being and that there is no other God, but the universe' (532).¹⁹

In a manner consistent with his own rationalist inclinations Locke made reason the arbiter of revelation.²⁰ But although, as Stirling saw, Clarke utilized a form of the cosmological argument similar to that of Locke, and for all Clarke's willingness to defend Locke from unwarranted attack,²¹ Clarke was no sensationalist. Furthermore, there is a difference in atmosphere between Clarke's rationalism and that of most of his predecessors. This difference was detected by Martineau, who contrasted Clarke with Cudworth *vis a vis* their respective ethical standpoints thus: 'In Cudworth the disposition to intellectualize morals was not inconsistent with a large survival of Puritan enthusiasm and devout fervour. The rights of Reason were asserted by him, not as a check upon faith too unflinching and feeling too intense, but in resistance to the pretensions of Sense and the dogmatism of instituted Law. ... In the person of Dr Samuel Clarke [the theory] assumes some of the harder features of what is called Rationalism'.²² Professor Passmore, who quotes these words of Martineau, elsewhere rightly claims that to Clarke 'Reason is a moral and intellectual faculty, that in us which apprehends necessity, an impersonal arbiter remote from the hurly-burly of passion and feeling'.²³ There is the beginning of an *a priori* position here, and it is all in keeping with Clarke's professed aim of confining himself 'to one only method or continued thread of arguing; which I have endeavoured should be as near to mathematical, as the nature of such discourse would allow' (517).²⁴

No account of Clarke's intellectual environment would be complete without a reference to the deists, from whose position(s) Clarke was anxious to differentiate his own. He found four classes of deists. First, there were those who, while believing in the existence of the supreme creator, did not regard him as having any concern with the created world. Secondly, there were those who believed in the being and the providence of God, but who did not see him as involved in the moral affairs of men. These latter depended on arbitrary human conventions. The third category of deists held that God exists, that his providence is over all, and that he is concerned with morality. But they denied immortality. The last group professed all the right beliefs about God and the world, but claimed to derive these from natural religion alone; they had dispensed with revelation.²⁵ Against all such Clarke protested.

We are now in a position to investigate Clarke's argument for the existence of God.

I

In answer to a Gentleman who had lodged objections against his *Discourse*, Clarke wrote, 'There are but two ways by which the being, and all or any of the attributes of God, can possibly be proved. The one *a priori*; the other, *a posteriori*. The proof *a posteriori* is level to all men's capabilities ... The proof *a priori* is (I fully believe) strictly demonstrative; but (like numberless mathematical demonstrations), capable of being understood only by a few attentive minds; because 'tis of use only against learned and metaphysical difficulties. And therefore it must never be expected that this should be made obvious to the generality of men, any more than astronomy or mathematics can be'.²⁶

Its limited appeal notwithstanding, Clarke pursues the *a priori* path. At the beginning of his *Discourse* he declares that he will not appeal to scripture or to authority, and that he will abide by 'the rules of strict and demonstrative argumentation' (524). His business is not with atheists who are stupid or corrupt, but with those who, though beguiled by false philosophy, are yet capable of being reasoned with (522). He will 'endeavour by one clear and plain series of propositions necessarily connected and following one from another, to demonstrate the certainty of the being of God, and to deduce in order the necessary attributes of his nature, so far as by our finite reason we are enabled to discover and apprehend them' (524).

Clarke places twelve propositions before us, of which the first three are the most important for our present purpose, for they contain Clarke's demonstration of the existence of God. The remaining nine encompass Clarke's 'deductions' of God's attributes. The first proposition is that 'It is absolutely and undeniably certain that something has existed from all eternity ... For since something now is, 'tis evident that something always was: otherwise the things that are, must have been produced out of nothing, absolutely and without cause: which is a plain contradiction in terms' (524). The reference to *something* which now is undoubtedly gives an *a posteriori* ring to this proposition and suggests a causal cosmological argument; but the observation is made within a strongly necessitarian framework. This, as we shall see, is the pattern of the entire argument. The second proposition builds upon the first: 'There has existed from eternity some one unchangeable and independent being. For since something must needs have been from eternity, as has been already proved, and is granted on all hands: Either there has always existed some one unchangeable and independent being, from which all other beings that are or ever were in the universe have received their original; or else there has been an infinite succession of changeable and dependent beings produced one from another in an endless progression, without any original cause at all.' (525-56). We should first note that Clarke here, in an unacknowledged and unjustified way, slips from 'thing' in the first proposition to 'being' in the second, thereby greatly assisting his cause.

Again, his declaration against an 'Infinite succession of changeable and dependent beings produced one from another in an endless progression' sounds like mere rhetoric, but actually conceals a further Clarkeian *a priori* assumption. The possibility of such an infinite succession does not suit him, of course, but he cannot be said conclusively to have disposed of the possibility. Still less has he forestalled the criticism which was later to be levelled against him by Holbach, namely, that all the divine activities alleged by Clarke (as well as all the attributes of God which he deduces) may more properly be predicated of nature.²⁷ Clearly, for all the cosmological, *a posteriori* language, Clarke is building upon the *idea* of one eternal, unchangeable and independent being. He will not allow other possibilities to stand in its way, and we can only imagine what he would have said to Bertrand Russell, who saw no need to seek a cause for the universe; 'I should say that the universe is just there, and that's all.'²⁸

The third proposition is fundamental to Clarke's case: 'That unchangeable and independent being, which has existed from eternity, without any external cause of its existence, must be self-existent, that is, necessarily-existing... We always find in our minds, I say, some ideas, as of infinity and eternity; which to remove, that is, to suppose that there is no being, no substance in the universe, to which these attributes or modes of existence are necessarily inherent, is a contradiction in the very terms. For modes and attributes exist only by the existence of the substance to which they belong. Now he that can suppose eternity and immensity (and consequently the substance by whose existence these modes or attributes exist) removed out of the universe may, if he please, as easily remove the relation of equality between twice two and four' (527). In the last sentence just quoted we have Clarke's favourite mathematical illustration. So frequently does he reiterate it that it is quite clear that (save the anachronism) he wished to treat the proposition 'God exists' as analytic. Kant was yet clearly to show that mathematical and existential propositions are not of the same kind, and that — Hume also realized — an argument which tries to contain both the certitude of mathematics and an existential claim breaks its own back.²⁹

In further exposition of his third proposition Clarke makes plain his way of being *a priori*, and also differentiates his position from that of Descartes, whose 'clear and distinct ideas' did not, he thought, give us any ground for concluding to an existing reality outside ourselves:

Our first certainty of the existence of God does not arise from this, that in the idea our minds frame of him, (or rather in the definition that we make of the word, God, as signifying a being of all possible perfections) we include self-existence: But from hence, that 'tis demonstrable both negatively, that neither can all things possibly have arisen out of nothing, nor can they have depended on one another in an endless succession; and also positively, that there is something in the universe, actually existing

without us, the supposition of whose not-existing plainly implies a contradiction. The argument which has by some been drawn from our including self-existence in the idea of God, or our comprehending it in the definition or notion we frame of him, has this obscurity and defect in it: that it seems to extend only to the nominal idea or mere definition of a self-existent being, and does not with a sufficiently evident connexion refer and apply that general nominal idea, definition or notion which we frame in our own mind, to any real particular being actually existing without us. For it is not satisfactory, that I have in my mind an idea of the proposition; There exists a being endued with all possible perfections; or, There is a self-existent being. But I must also have some idea of the thing. I must have an idea of something actually existing without me. And I must see wherein consists the absolute impossibility of removing that idea, and consequently of supposing the non-existence of the thing, before I can be satisfied from the idea, that the thing actually exists. The bare having an idea of the proposition, There is a self-existent being, proves indeed the thing not to be impossible; ... [But] We are certain ... of the being of a supreme independent cause; because 'tis strictly demonstrable, that there is something in the universe, actually existing without us, the supposition of whose not-existing plainly implies a contradiction. (529-530).

The last sentence here constitutes the kernel of Clarke's case, and represents the point at which Kant was to drive in the knife. Whatever the difficulties, Clarke's methodological procedure is clear. He is seeking to confirm and illustrate his *a priori* stance with *a posteriori* references, and this with a view to avoiding Cartesian psychologism on the one hand, and to ministering to his own sense of fitness of things — that is, that our ideas and our experience should and do cohere — on the other. We pause only to observe that in the course of doing this he conflates the ideas of necessity and self-existence in a way which many might not be prepared to allow.

Clarke next argues that the necessary being cannot be the world, or motion, or matter, for all these are subject to change while it is not. His following propositions state that although the existence of this being is demonstrable, and although we may be certain of its existence and also know what it is not, we cannot comprehend its essence (IV). Even so, the being's (now, by a change of pronoun called 'his') attributes are, like his existence, strictly demonstrable. Thus, he must be eternal (V), infinite, omnipresent (VI), one (VII), intelligent (VIII), free (IX), all powerful (X), wise (XI), and morally perfect in every respect (XII).

II

Although the gist of Clarke's argument for the existence of God is contained in his first three propositions, there are two subsequent points to which we would draw attention. First, we find that some critics, including Dugald Stewart, Henry Rogers and John Caird, have suggested that Clarke

was propounding a new and untenable argument for God's existence. In a nutshell the claim, and complaint, is that Clarke proves God from our conceptions of space and duration. Stewart is in no doubt on the point:

The existence of God, therefore, according to Clarke, is a truth that follows with demonstrative evidence from those conceptions of space and time which are inseparable from the human mind... 'These (says Dr. Reid) are the speculations of men of superior genius; but whether they be as solid as they are sublime, or whether they be the wanderings of imagination in a region beyond the limits of human understanding, I am at a loss to determine.' [Intel. Powers, p.315] After this candid acknowledgement from Dr. Reid, I need not be ashamed to confess my own doubts and difficulties on the same question.³⁰

Henry Rogers concurs: 'It is hard to conceive how the ideas of space and duration can form the *medium* of proof that God exists;'³¹ and John Caird was uncharacteristically curt:

"Space and time," says Clarke, "are necessary existences because the *sine qua non* of all other existences. But space and time are evidently not substances, but only properties or modes. Of these necessary properties there must therefore be a necessary substratum or substance, i.e., there must be a God." Well might Butler answer that "to say that the self-existent substance is the substratum of space is scarcely intelligible, or at least not self-evident." In truth, the whole argument is a piece of meaningless jargon, a nest of unsifted metaphysical assumptions, from which it seems incredible that any sane being should derive the slightest satisfaction.³²

The locus of the debate is Clarke's sixth proposition, in which he seeks to deduce the infinity and omnipresence of God from his being *qua* necessary and self-existent. We are not concerned to argue that Clarke makes out his case for thus relating self-existence and infinity. Our point is that by the time he reaches his sixth proposition Clarke believes himself *already* to have established the existence of God; what he is now doing is 'deducing' his attributes — in this case, infinity. Here is Clarke at his most 'modern'. Nine years before his friend Newton made the point he is claiming that we know space and time not as substances themselves, but as attributes of a substance.³³ This substance is logically prior to them, and we presuppose its existence when we speak about them. Hence we may precisely *not* argue from space and time to substance. Our conclusion is that while there is much to be said for Butler's complaint as quoted by Caird, Stewart and Rogers were mistaken as to Clarke's intention, and Caird himself was needlessly tendentious. Clarke's actual words in clarification of his original point are:

Space is a property or mode of the self-existent substance, but not of any other substance. All other substances are in space, and are penetrated by it;

but the self-existent substance is not in space, nor penetrated by it, but is itself (if I may so speak) the substratum of space, the ground of the existence of space and duration itself. Which (space and duration) being evidently necessary, and yet themselves not substances, but properties or modes, show evidently that the substance, without which these modes could not subsist, is itself much more (if that were possible) necessary.³⁴

Secondly, we would note Clarke's engagingly candid admission that the *a priori* way, though not inherently faulty, does break down at one point in practice. In connection with his eighth proposition he writes:

Now that the self-existent being is not such a blind and unintelligent necessity, but in the most proper sense an understanding and really active being, does not indeed so obviously and directly appear to us by considerations *a priori*; because (through the imperfection of our faculties) we know not wherein intelligence consists, nor can see the immediate and necessary connexion of it with self-existence, as we can that of eternity, infinity, unity, etc. But *a posteriori*, almost everything in the world demonstrates to us this great truth; and affords undeniable arguments, to prove that the world, and all things therein, are the effects of an intelligent and knowing cause (543).

It is precisely the imperfections of our faculties which make revelation necessary. Although, Clarke concludes (echoing Paul in *Romans* i), those who deny God's existence are without excuse - so many are the evidences of his presence in the world and in the human mind - God,

by declaring to us himself his own nature and attributes, he has effectually prevented all mistakes, which the weakness of our reason, the negligence of our application, the corruption of our natures, or the false philosophy of wicked and profane men, might have led us into; and so has infallibly furnished us with sufficient knowledge, to enable us to perform our duty in this life, and to obtain our happiness in that which is to come. But this exceeds the bounds of my present subject, and deserves to be handled in a particular discourse (577).

So to the second series of Clarke's Boyle Lectures.

III

Samuel Clarke had no objection at all to adverting to *a posteriori*, cosmological, considerations in making out his fundamentally *a priori* case for the existence of God. We have found no justification for the view that he set out to be *a priori*, became muddled, and ended *a posteriori*. Indeed, in one of his last words on the subject he defied any 'sober-minded man' to 'show

how the unity of God (the first principle of natural religion) can at all be proved by reason *a posteriori* only'.³⁵ Positively, he affirmed that,

To argue ... *a priori* concerning the existence and attributes of the first cause, is no absurdity. For though no thing, no being, can indeed be prior to the first cause; yet arguments may, and must, be drawn from the nature and consequences of that necessity by which the first cause exists. Mathematical necessary truths are usually demonstrated *a priori*, and yet nothing is prior to truths eternally necessary.³⁶

Clarke's 'one thread' is ultimately one, but Clarke did not see the dangers therein implied. On the basis of the mathematical model which he applied to all areas of human life, and in keeping with his powerful sense of the fitness of things, he was convinced that ontological and cosmological considerations were mutually interdependent, the former taking logical precedence over the latter. It needed a Hume to awaken a Kant from his dogmatic slumber before the difficulties of this position could be adequately exposed, to the undermining of the older rationalism.³⁷

Clarke, we may say, took Enlightenment rationalism as far as it could go in the service of Christianity. Indeed, he 'deduced' so much theology from rationalistic presuppositions that, despite his own view that 'There was a necessity of some particular revelation, to discover what expiation God would accept for sin',³⁸ some wondered why revelation was necessary at all. In *this* sense, and to this extent, Clarke may be said to have eased the passage of deism, whilst ostensibly and actually belabouring deistic writers. Further, and ironically, it is but a short step from reading 'nature' for 'God', which is what some deists came to do, to Clarke's adverse reading of Spinoza.

For all Clarke's 'modernity' and his impatience with medieval scholasticism, with its 'empty sounds' such as *purus acta* and *mera forma* (538-39), he was, methodologically, a scholastic. He stands at the limit of Protestant scholasticism in that he could hardly have conceded more to natural reason without making revelation redundant. It is the abiding merit of Kant to have demonstrated the bankruptcy of the old natural — revealed distinction. In the course of so doing, Kant, with his doctrine that we cannot know the noumena, but only the phenomena, raised other awkward questions, and paved the way to agnosticism on the one hand, and to transcendental idealism on the other. Both Clarke's inadequacies and Kant's 'remedy' with its aftermath, challenge those who would adumbrate a Christian philosophy to find a starting point which is adequate to the claims of the gospel. This challenge is one which must be taken up in each succeeding age.

- ¹ Benjamin Hoadly's life of Clarke in the preface to the latter's *Works*, 4 vols. (London, 1738), I, xvi.
- ² Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques* (1734), ed. G. Lanson, (Paris, 1964), letter vii, pp. 79-80n. Sadly, the editor (unlike *DNB*) finds the anecdote 'très suspecte'; p. 85.
- ³ For which see his *Works*, IV.
- ⁴ Our bracketed page references to Clarke's *Discourse* pertain to Vol. II of the 1738 edn. We have modernized the spelling, and pruned the capitals and italics.
- ⁵ Alexander Pope, *The duniciad*, iv, 471.
- ⁶ *DNB*, IV, 445a.
- ⁷ See his *Système de la nature* (1771), II, 109n.
- ⁸ Dugald Stewart, *Works*, I (1854), 290; VI (1855), 45-46; VII (1856), 8-11.
- ⁹ Leslie Stephen, *History of english thought in the eighteenth century* (New York, 1962), I, 100. Though he does grant that in Clarke ontological and cosmological characteristics merge (101).
- ¹⁰ A.C. McGiffert, *Protestant thought before Kant* (London, 1911), 207. Cf. *DNB*, IV, 443b.
- ¹¹ G.P. Fisher, *The grounds of theistic and christian belief*, (London, 1904), 26-27.
- ¹² Sir William Hamilton, *The works of Thomas Reid*, (Edinburgh, 1846), 762.
- ¹³ H. Rogers, *The life and character of John Howe, M.A.*, 2nd edn. 1862, 368-372; J.H. Stirling, *Philosophy and theology* (Edinburgh, 1890), 124.
- ¹⁴ Alfred Caldecott, *The philosopher of religion in England and America* (London, 1901), 141.
- ¹⁵ F.C. Copleston, *A history of philosophy*, (New York, 1964), I, 168.
- ¹⁶ Cf. Clarke's preface to part II of the Boyle Lectures, *A discourse concerning the unchangeable obligations of natural religion, and the truth and certainty of the christian revelation*, (1705), *Works*, II, 582-83.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 582.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ A less hostile reading of Spinoza came to be current during the nineteenth century in a climate more favourably disposed (in some quarters at least) to post-Hegelian immanentism. John Caird's more sympathetic, though not uncritical, reading of Spinoza (see his, *Spinoza*, Edinburgh, 1888) may perhaps partially inform his hostile judgment of Clarke: 'An air of metaphysical subtlety and a pretence of demonstrative reasoning cannot disguise the essentially fictitious character of Clarke's whole production.' See J. Caird, *University addresses*, (Glasgow, 1898), 197. For the Cambridge (and other) Platonists see A.P.F. Sell, 'Platonists (ancient and modern) and the gospel', *The Irish Theological Quarterly*, XLIV (1977), 153-174.
- ²⁰ See J. Locke, *Works* (1801), III, 128. Cf. J.D. Mabbott, *John Locke* (Oxford, 1973), 131-34; R.I. Aaron, 'The limits of Locke's rationalism', reprinted in his *John Locke* 3rd edn. (Oxford, 1971), App. IV; A.P.F. Sell, 'Locke and Descartes through victorian eyes', *Philosophical Studies*, forthcoming.
- ²¹ Clarke, *Works*, II, 582.
- ²² J. Martineau, *Types of ethical theory* (Oxford, 1885), II, 425, quoted by J. Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth an interpretation* (Cambridge, 1951), 100. Professor Passmore denies Martineau's assumption that Clarke was the 'next stage' to Cudworth on the ground of Clarke's anti-Cartesianism.
- ²³ Passmore, 52.
- ²⁴ According to Henry Rogers (op. cit., 372n.) Philip Doddridge opined that if everything were abstracted from Clarke's *Demonstration* which had appeared in Howe's *The living temple*, part one (1675), there would be little feeling left. Our own feeling is that while there are clear similarities between the two books, the 'mathematico-necessitarian' strain is stronger in Clarke's. Howe was more Cudworthian than Clarke, though his great friend among the Cambridge Platonists was Henry More. See A.P.F. Sell, 'John Howe's eclectic theism', *Journal of the United Reform Church History Society*, II, (Oct. 1980), 187-193.
- ²⁵ See Clarke, *Works*, II, 600-607. Among our contemporaries F.C. Copleston (173) recognizes Clarke's hostility to the deists, while Dr. J. Richmond, in a quite unqualified way, brands Clarke's *Discourse* 'deistic'. See his *Faith and philosophy* (London, 1966), 136. The deist Matthew Tindall attacked Clarke's *Discourse* in his *Christianity as old as the creation* (1730), while Clarke himself belaboured the deist John Toland. See *Works*, II, 531. For our reflections upon deism see A.P.F. Sell, 'Arminianism, deists and reason', *Faith and freedom*, XXIII (1979), 19-31.

- ²⁶ 'Answer to a sixth letter' addressed to another Gentleman who had proposed objections to the *Discourse*, *Works*, II, 751. The first five letters were from a 'Gentleman in Gloucestershire'. i.e. Joseph Butler. The *Discourse* prompted others to take up sides including John Jackson, John Clarke and Henry Stebbing, who defended Clarke, and Edmund Law, Gretton Phillips and Thomas Knowles, who opposed him. It is important to underline the fact that Clarke in no way minimizes the importance of the *a posteriori* argument, though in his 'Answer to the Seventh Letter' (*Works*, II, 756) he does warn that atheists can turn that argument against the theist ('theist' is our word: Clarke never uses it).
- ²⁷ Holbach, 145-47.
- ²⁸ A B.B.C. debate on the existence of God between B. Russell and F.C. Copleston (1948), reprinted in *The existence of God*, ed. J. Hick (New York, 1964), 175.
- ²⁹ See I. Kant, Bk. II of the 'transcendental Dialectic', ch. III, in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), (London, 1964), 334ff. Cf. D. Hume, *Dialogues concerning natural religion* ed. H.D. Aiken (New York, 1969), 58.
- ³⁰ Dugald Stewart, *Works*, I, 291; cf. VI, 46, and VII, 8-11.
- ³¹ H. Rogers, 370. We allude to the influence of Stewart upon Rogers at n. 20 above. For Rogers, see A.F.P. Sell, 'Henry Rogers and the eclipse of faith', *The Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, II (May, 1980), 128-143.
- ³² J. Caird, 197-98.
- ³³ The *Scholium generale* of Newton's *Principia* appeared in 1714. Clarke does, however, admit in his Answer to Butler's fourth letter (*Works*, II, 748): 'That the self-existent substance is the substratum of space, or space a property of the self-existent substance, are not perhaps very proper expressions; nor is it easy to find such.' Cf. Clarke, *Works*, IV, 678-79n. That Richard Price was influenced by Clarke's inference from the infinite quality of space to the infinite substance (= God) is clear from his 'A dissertation on the being and attributes of God' in *A review of the principal questions in morals* ed. D.D. Raphael (Oxford, 1974), 286. See also Henri Laboucheix, *Richard Price as moral philosopher and political theorist*, trans. Sylvia and David Raphael (Oxford, 1982), 53-56, 79.
- ³⁴ 'The answer to the third letter', *Works*, II, 745.
- ³⁵ 'The answer to the seventh letter', *Works*, II, 757.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.* This was the point at issue between Clarke and Daniel Waterland. See the latter's 'A dissertation upon the argument a priori for proving the existence of a first cause', *Works* (1823), IV. J.P. Ferguson, *An eighteenth century heretic, Dr. Samuel Clarke*, (Kineton, 1976) refers to Waterland and to other eighteenth-century critics of Clarke, 26-27.
- ³⁷ For the view that there is a covert *a priori* position in the cosmological argument, but that Kant did not properly make out his case, see J.J.C. Smart, 'The existence of God' in *New essays in philosophical theology*, eds. A.G.N. Flew and A. MacIntyre (London, 1955), 37ff.
- ³⁸ Clarke, *Works*, II, 667.

THE ECONOMIC THOUGHT OF JOSEPH PRIESTLEY*

Chuhei Sugiyama

It might seem unlikely that Joseph Priestley should have had anything whatever to do with economics. It is indeed true that he never wrote a book or an article exclusively devoted to the subject, but, *An essay on a course of liberal education for civil and active life*,¹ which he wrote while he was teaching at Warrington Academy, and 'A syllabus of a course of lectures on the study of history' which is appended to it, both deserve notice because there are passages in them that can be regarded as an expression of his opinions on economics and because there are some elements in those opinions that are reminiscent of mercantilist ideas.

Over twenty years after the publication of the *Essay* Priestley reprinted a version of it together with the newly written *Lectures on history, and general policy* in one volume, letting the title of the latter represent the whole.² The reason he gave for doing so was that he had been requested by his former students at Warrington to publish his lectures.³ It is clear that what had once been no more than a syllabus in an appendix had been developed into an independent set of *Lectures*. In the latter Priestley says that owing to the length of time that had elapsed since he gave the lectures he could not always distinguish his own compositions from the extracts he had made from the works of others, though he believed that most of the observations were originally his; this is confusing because he also writes that since the syllabus was first printed he had 'enlarged the course with many valuable articles collected from works subsequently published, especially from *Dr. Smith on the Wealth of nations* and *Steuart's Principles of Political Economy*'. He hoped that 'by the illustration of some general principles in such works as these' he could 'excite in youth a desire to become better acquainted with them'.⁴ We are presented here with some problems.

First, to what extent, if at all, did Priestley change his opinions between the publication of the 'Syllabus' and the *Lectures*? From the fact that the items that were only enumerated in the 'Syllabus' were later expanded we are not entitled to infer that they were then reproduced in their original form. Because there is an item concerning the balance of trade in the 'Syllabus', and because this topic is dealt with in a negative way in the *Lectures*, it does not at all follow that it was also dealt with negatively in the original lectures. This could have been so, but, equally well, it could have been dealt with more positively. Since there is no relevant publication that appeared between the 'Syllabus' and the *Lectures*, it is not clear whether the latter is a faithful enlargement of the former, or whether the time that had elapsed had brought about a substantial change in Priestley's economic thought.

Secondly, in what ways and to what degree was Priestley influenced by the works of Adam Smith and Sir James Steuart? In the *Lectures* they are mentioned without any particular comments. Indeed it is now evident that Priestley did read both of them, but it is not so evident that he saw them as antagonists. Needless to say, although there is no passage in the *Wealth of nations* to contradict Steuart, criticism of him is implied throughout the book. Furthermore, in one of his letters, referring to the book he was then writing, Smith discloses his plan: 'Without once mentioning it [i.e. Sir James Steuart's book], I flatter myself, that every false principle in it, will meet with a clear and distinct confutation of mine'.⁵ This is an important question because it raises the further question as to the degree to which Priestley was influenced by mercantilist thought.

We are not given a key to these problems. The only possible approach then is to compare the *Essay* and its appended 'Syllabus' with their counterparts in the *Lectures*. According to the former higher education is designed for the 'learned professions' where no provision is made for 'the intelligent and useful citizens' who are to fill the 'principal stations of active life'.⁶ A new course should be prepared so that this fatal defect may be removed. The subjects to be taught in it will be universal and English history, a study of the constitution and the laws of England, with some knowledge of French, applied mathematics, and if possible, algebra and geometry.⁷ This course will differ from those taught in the universities, where the stress has been laid upon canon law, logic and metaphysics.⁸ Lectures will be delivered in English, not in Latin.⁹ Commerce [that is, economics] will also be taught because it is indispensable to the young men who are to enter into 'an active life'.

On the latter point Priestley anticipates an objection that 'a turn for speculation unfits men for business'¹⁰, and answers that a merchant would no more 'do less business, or to worse purpose, for having acquired a fondness for such writers as Sir Josiah Child, Gee, Postlethwait [sic], Tucker, &c, and for being qualified to read them with understanding and judgement' than 'a commander would be the worse soldier for studying books written on the art of war'. These writers, except Child, may be considered Priestley's contemporaries, and the reputation of Sir Josiah was still alive at this time. References to these authors therefore suggest that Priestley was, at least to some extent, acquainted with the economic thought of his day and that his ideas on economic matters reflected the mercantilism which all these writers shared. What evidence is there for this conclusion in the 'Syllabus'?

Without specifying all the items in it, it will suffice to pick out those which concern economic subjects. The Roman numerals in parenthesis stand for the lecture numbers:

1 (VI) Of coins and medals. Their origin and use in history. The principal information we receive from them ... Ancient and modern coins compared.

2 (XV) Of the methods of estimating the riches and power of ancient and remote nations. Sources of mistake on this subject. Change in the standard of coin. Upon what the price of commodities depends ... Of the proportion between silver, gold, and brass in ancient times. Of the changes in Roman coins. Of the proportion of money to commodities in different periods of Grecian and Roman history. Of the interest of money in Greece and at Rome.

3 (XVI) Of the English coins. Saxon and Norman coins compared. When gold and copper began to be coined by our kings. A table of all the changes in the value of English coins. Proportion between gold and silver in different periods of our history. Proportion between coin and commodities in different periods of our history. A table of all the changes of French coin from the time of Charlemagne [sic]. A general idea of the proportion it has, at different times, borne to commodities in France. Of the different rates of interest in Europe in different periods. The number and riches of a people to be considered in computing the proportional quantities of money they raise.

4 (XXXVII) The most important periods in the history of commerce pointed out. Everything worthy of attention in history which contributes to make a nation happy, populous, or secure. Government an essential article. Nature and objects of civil government, simple, or complex...

5 (XLIV) The expences of government. How moderate taxes operate. Exorbitant taxes. Taxes upon possessions or consumptions. Their different advantages and disadvantages. By whom a tax upon consumption should be paid. Taxes upon exports. Farmers of taxes. National debts.

6 (XLVIII) ... Necessity of an attention to agriculture. How best encouraged. Bounties. Public granaries. Mutual influences of agriculture and commerce. Circumstances attending the imperfection of agriculture. Imperfect state of it in England a few centuries ago.

7 (XLIX) In what manner arts and manufactures increase the power of a state. Importance of encouraging labour. Vast advantage of manufactures, particularly to England. The society for the encouragement of arts, manufactures and commerce. The connection between science and arts. On what circumstances a taste for science depends. The consequences of interruptions in science. The usual decline of the arts after they have been brought pretty near perfection. Why science is not so apt to decline.

8 (L) The advantage of commerce to a state. Its effects upon the minds of men. Active and passive commerce. What is the most advantageous kind of commerce. Of fisheries. The importance of unwrought materials. The gain of the merchants and of the country compared. Ballance [sic] of trade. Influence of commerce on the value of land. And vice versa. Interfering of the legislature in commerce. The Navigation-Act. Restrictions of commerce. Companies. Alienation of land. Loss of commerce by persecution.

9 (LI) Use of colonies to a commercial state. Difference between ancient and modern colonies. Importance of our American colonies. The entire subserviency of a colony to the mother country. The situation of Ireland. Unreasonable jealousy of it ... Uniformity of weights and measures. Maxims with respect to money. Of the nature of exchange. In what cases a great quantity of money is useful or hurtful to a state, and how the increase of it operates to produce an improved state of a society.

10 (LII) Of the interest of money: How its rise or fall is influenced by the state of commerce. Of paper-money. Paper-credit. State of the North American colonies in this respect. The fluctuating nature of commerce exemplified as a motive to attend to and improve our commerce. Benefits which have arisen from unsuccessful attempts to extend commerce.

11 (LIII) The consequences of a flourishing state of society deduced. What kinds of luxury are hurtful. How far the country in which luxury prevails is hereby rendered incapable of self-defence or the contrary...

12 (LV) ... Of the populousness of nations. The influence of good laws and government. Easy naturalization. What use of land will enable the people to subsist in the greatest numbers upon it. Circumstances by which to judge of the populousness of ancient nations. How trade and commerce make a nation populous. Equal division of lands. When machines to facilitate labour are useful, and when hurtful.

13 (LVI) Grazing formerly destructive to populousness in England. Inclosures when hurtful, and when useful. Necessity of industry. Of frugality. A taste for expensive living how hurtful to Rome in the Augustan age, and to us at present. Reasons of populousness of China ... The populousness of ancient and modern nations compared. Methods of easily computing the numbers of people in a country.

Now, as far as it is possible to tell from a mere enumeration, there are many items here which lead one to believe that in Priestley's mind topics in economics are to be dealt with historically. There is nothing amiss in this, because the 'Syllabus' is after all for 'lectures on the study of history'. Items I (VI) to 4 (XXXVII) are mostly of this kind. There are, however, some which suggest that there is scope for more general or more abstract theories. Items 5 (XLIV) and 6 (XLVIII) are of this kind and those from 7 (XLIX) to 12 (LX) seem to be so theoretical in character that they make one wonder what place they could possibly have in lectures on history. In 13 (LVI) the historical approach once more prevails, and economic topics are dealt with as though they could be determined simply by the collection of historical data.

Among these items, there are many elements that are strongly reminiscent of mercantilism. In 8 (L), for example, those ranging from 'the advantage of commerce to a state' via 'fishery' up to 'ballance of trade' belong in this

category. Fishing in the sea, so often compared by mercantilist writers to mining on land (which produces treasures free of charge, i.e. without paying gold and silver to foreigners, and thereby enriching other countries), was believed to deserve the greatest possible encouragement. Items such as 'the importation of unwrought materials' and 'ballance of trade' are obviously relevant to mercantilism, especially when accompanied by items such as 'in what manner arts and manufactures increase the power of a state', 'importance of encouraging labour', and 'vast advantages of manufactures, particularly in England' in 7 (XLIX). Similar considerations apply to 'use of colonies to a commercial state' in 9(LI), while 'importance of our American colonies' seems to be at variance with Priestley's own attitudes towards American problems some ten years later. The items 'the populousness of ancient and modern nations compared' and 'methods of easily computing the numbers of people in a country' in 13 (LVI) show that Priestley shared the widespread interest in demographic problems which had some ten years earlier manifested itself in the Hume-Wallace controversy. They are paralleled by 'how trade and commerce make a nation populous' in 12 (LV) or 'everything worthy of attention in history which contributes to make a nation happy, populous, or secure' in 4 (XXXVII). The former clearly sees trade and commerce as contributing to the increase in population, and the latter even more directly implies that an increase in population is a blessing, both notions being essential to mercantilist thought. 'Easy naturalization' in 12 (LV) reminds us of the title of a chapter in Sir Josiah Child's *A new discourse of trade*¹¹ and of Josiah Tucker's *Reflections on the expediency of a law for the naturalization of foreign merchants*,¹² among others, again pointing to mercantilist themes on population. There are however items which it is difficult to say whether they do or do not point to mercantilist beliefs, such as 'in what cases a great quantity of money is useful or hurtful to a state' in 9 (LI) or 'interfering of the legislature in commerce' in 8 (L). About another part of the book such doubts loom larger: 'The introductory address to the course of lectures on the history of England' which is included in the *Essay*, although it emphasizes the importance of security, commerce and power, yet warns us 'not to forget... that we are citizens of the world'. A similar contrast of views is found between the preface to 'A syllabus of a course of lectures on the constitution and laws of England' and 'Remarks on a proposed code of education', both of which are also included in the volume. In the former Priestley claims that 'the great object of all civil policy' is 'to make us happy, and consequently populous at home, then ... to make us formidable abroad'¹³ and by so doing suggests mercantilist views on population and state, whereas in the latter he denies the state a right to intervene in education. He denounces state intervention 'as prejudicial to the proper design of education, and also to the great ends of civil societies' which are 'to produce the greatest sum of happiness in the community'.¹⁴

For Priestley freedom in education is a bastion against all kinds of despotism. He defends this freedom for the same reasons as he defends

freedom of conscience against the claims of an established church:

It is evident to common understanding, that the true spirit and maxims of a mixed government [of regal, aristocratical, and democratic power] can no otherwise be continued, than by every man's educating his children in his own way; and that if any part provided for the education of the whole, that part would soon gain the ascendancy in the whole; and, if it were capable of it, would become the whole.¹⁵

Freedom of education, then is one with the other kinds of civil liberty such as freedom of speech, freedom of the press and the like. According to Priestley, the laws that restrict the freedom of the press are more than adequate. Were they to be extended further, there would be no room left to 'a Newton in the natural world, or a Locke, a Hutcheson, a Clarke or a Hartley in the moral.'¹⁶

It is universally understood, that reason and authority are two things, and that they have generally been opposed to one another...If the opinions and principles in question, be evidently subversive of religion and all civil society, they must be evidently false, and easy to refute; so that there can be no danger of their spreading; and the patrons of them may safely be suffered to maintain them in the most open manner they chuse.¹⁷

In short, complete freedom of speech is useful as well as necessary 'for the interest of truth'.

How can this liberalism and utilitarianism be reconciled with the apparent mercantilism in the above? Of course it may not be impossible for a liberal in social and political matters to be a mercantilist in economic ones. But whether this is the case with Priestley when he wrote *An essay* cannot now be decided for we do not have the means to make a judgement. What shall we say of the *Lectures*?

The lecture numbers of the *Lectures* are not always parallel to those of the 'Syllabus'. The former end at LXVIII, whereas the latter end at LXIII, and it is only up to XXXVI that both sets of numbers match and that the items are nearly the same. As mentioned above some items were added when the *Lectures* were written, and there are some which are exactly the same as each other even though their numbers differ.

In the first of the above-named elements, those that might be classified as economic although they are more properly regarded as historical, several items need not be considered here as their content cannot be determined by considering the corresponding titles in the *Lectures*. For example, there are those which may easily be presumed to be theoretical, e.g. 'upon what the price of commodities depends' in 2 (XL), even though they turn out not to be so. In fact the corresponding part of the *Lectures* under the same title is merely

a discussion of the changes in the monetary standard introduced as a preliminary to the descriptions of the changes that took place in the value of money in Greek and Roman times and as such deals with no theoretical problems. Thus we may safely confine our interest here to what we have called the second element, especially to those parts which remind us of mercantilism and which refer to Smith and Steuart.

Let us examine the part of the *Lectures* which corresponds to those items in 8 (L) in the 'Syllabus' which point to mercantilism. Meaning foreign trade by 'commerce', the *Lectures* say, 'We may conclude universally, that commerce never fails to make a people wealthy, populous, and powerful'.¹⁸ This smacks of mercantilism. The sentence implies that all foreign trades are beneficial. But in fact Priestley says, 'that commerce can only be gainful to a nation which promotes industry, so as to enable the people to live in affluence without exhausting their revenues. The most gainful commerce to a state, therefore, is, of all others, that in which we export our own manufactures made from home materials'. For the same reason fisheries are recommended. 'In this view, also fisheries are peculiarly valuable; as, by means of them, it requires nothing but labour to enable us to open a very gainful market. Fisheries also promote navigation, so as to employ a great number of seamen'.¹⁹ Priestley continues:

Next to the exportation of home manufactures, and fisheries, the importation of unwrought materials for manufactures is valuable to a nation. It is better than the importation of money. Because the manufacture of those foreign materials employs many of our hands at home, and the goods that are made from them are sure to bring in, at the least, much more than the price of the raw materials.²⁰

This is, needless to say, nothing other than a fundamental theme of mercantilism. The only omission is that the importation of manufactured goods is not discouraged. This omission may be due to Priestley's attitude towards the balance of trade or protectionism which is discussed immediately afterwards. As to the balance of trade, it was included as one of the items in the *Lectures* as well as in the 'Syllabus'. But in the corresponding part of the text of the former, the phrase is not used. Let us see, then what is said about it without explicitly mentioning it:

Though exportation makes a nation rich, we are not to judge the quantity of riches which a nation gains by trade from exportation only, but the importation must also be considered. If these exactly balance one another, nothing can be said to be gained or lost, just as a person is not the richer for selling a quantity of goods, if he buy to the same amount. Nay, though the exportation be lessened, if the importation be lessened more than in proportion, it proves an increase of gainful trade, notwithstanding the decrease of exportation. This, however, is estimating the value of commerce by the mere increase of money. But a nation may flourish by internal commerce only, and what is *external* commerce between two nations not

united in government, would be *internal*, if they should come under the same government. In every fair bargain the buyer and seller are equally gainers, whether money be accumulated by either of the parties, or not.²¹

The implication is quite opaque. The first half appears to be under the influence of the mercantilist way of thinking, whereas the second half would seem to go in the opposite direction. On the other hand, what the *Lectures* say on protectionism is so clear that it leaves little room for any doubt. Referring to the restrictions on foreign trade, Priestley concludes that 'by aiming at great immediate advantage, they have cut off the very springs of all future advantage'. Thus he cites the relevant part of the *Wealth of nations* and criticizes Colbert who, 'in order to render provisions cheap to the inhabitants of towns, and thereby to encourage manufactures and commerce, ... prohibited the exportation of corn'.²²

His attitude towards bounties is very much the same. An item about it in the *Lectures* corresponds to that in the 'Syllabus'. There it is said that when the nation had no motive to raise more corn than it needed for consumption, a bad harvest was followed by a famine, but this ceased to be true when bounties were granted for the exportation of corn; after bounties were granted the price of corn continued to fall despite the increase in the quantity of money in the country. Suddenly Priestley changes direction: he admits that 'they [i.e. bounties] may be useful for a time' but that 'if any commodity cannot be raised, or exported, without a bounty, it should be considered whether more is not given in the bounty than is gained by raising, or exporting, the commodity'.²³ This unexpected turnabout suggests that a change of opinion occurred between the 'Syllabus' and the *Lectures*, and that this change was probably caused by reading the *Wealth of nations*, his denunciation of bounties cannot but remind us of Smith. As is well known, Smith thought that bounties forced some part of a country 'not only into a channel that is less advantageous, but into one that is actually disadvantageous', and so into a 'trade which cannot be carried on but by means of a bounty'.²⁴ Smith made this an essential part of his attack upon mercantilism. While he is clear that the fall in the price of corn is *not* due to an increase in production brought about by the bounty, Priestley is much more hesitant.

Bounties do not reappear as an item in the *Lectures*, but they are referred to once again at another place in the book:

If the whole property of the nation was in the hand of one person, he would never export anything that could not find a gainful market. Though the merchant, therefore, who exports goods with a bounty may gain by such a trade, the nation evidently cannot. In order to favour any particular manufacture, or produce, a bounty must either be given for the raising, or exporting it, or the importation of the same must be prohibited. But in both cases it is evident that the interest of the consumer is sacrificed to that of the raiser of the produce, or the manufacturer. But these are few, and the consumers many.²⁵

Here again, the *Wealth of nations* is not mentioned, but the assumption that bounties sacrifice the interests of consumers to those of manufacturers may be said to be derived from Smith who claims that both in the restraint on the importation of foreign commodities and in the bounty on the exportation of national goods, the interest of the consumer is sacrificed to that of the producer, and that 'consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production and the interest of producer ought to be attended to, only so far as it may be necessary for promoting that of the consumer'.²⁶

On the other hand, under the same lecture number there is a passage which reads as follows: 'The manner in which arts and manufactures operate to increase the power of a state, is by making a provision of a *fund of labour* for the use of the state.' And 'since the labour which is bestowed on arts and manufactures only contributes to the greater convenience and ornament of life, it may be spared in the case of exigence, and converted, in a variety of ways, to the service of the state'. The importance of labour taken into account, 'it would be better to have mines, which require much labour to extract the metal from the ore, than to find the precious metal formed by nature to our hands'.²⁷ The idea of 'a fund of labour' and the analogy with mines is doubtless inherited from his mercantilist predecessors. A similar consideration might also be relevant to the stress laid on commerce under the item 'mutual influences of agriculture and commerce'. Following Postlethwayt, Priestley maintains that what is harmful to trade also destroys agriculture, and that 'the interests of both land and trade are best promoted by cultivating such things as commerce points out to be most beneficial'.²⁸ As we have already seen, the name of Postlethwayt was familiar to him at the time of the 'Syllabus'. Therefore it may be that what he writes in the *Lectures* under this item is by and large the same as what he had in mind in the 'Syllabus'. At any rate the treatment seen here in the *Lectures* on trade and commerce surely belongs to the pre-Smithian stage.

As to his views on colonies, because the war of American independence intervenes between the 'Syllabus' and the *Lectures*, and because it is a known fact that Priestley argued in defence of the colonies before the outbreak of the war, it would appear not to be profitable to try to discover the text of the *Lectures* under the corresponding item in the 'Syllabus'. It is true that there is a passage on the loss of the colonies caused by the War.²⁹ But to the passages immediately preceding it he appends a footnote in which he states that they were written long before the War and that since the war 'the state of things in these respects is much changed'. If so, this description would allow us to determine what his standpoint was when the 'Syllabus' was written. Making use of the calculations made by Sir Josiah Child,³⁰ he writes, 'It is easy to conceive how vastly profitable these our plantations are to us in every view, whether by setting on work such immense numbers of our manufacturers and artificers of all kinds, or by finding employment for our sailors, ship-builders, and all the trades depending thereon'.³¹ This together with the sentence that 'a great means of the amazing increase of shipping and commerce in our foreign

colonies'³² does more than reveal an inheritance of a traditionally mercantilist conception. It must be added, however, that it is undeniable that there is an element in his views on colonies that anticipate his later views, because following Postlethwayt he says that preventing the importation of goods from Ireland in order to protect those of the home country is a 'short sighted policy' and that 'an extreme jealousy of its colonies' is injurious to the mother country.³³

It has thus become clear that the mercantilist elements which are presumed to have characterized Priestley's economic thinking in the 'Syllabus' survive in the *Lectures*, that they coexist in the latter with the new elements of classical political economy, and that while there are instances in which those new elements appear to have been latent in the 'Syllabus' there are others in the *Lectures* in which the influence of the *Wealth of nations* is evident enough. In the *Lectures* some new items are added between those corresponding to the last one of 6 (XLVIII) and to the first of 7 (XLIX) of the 'Syllabus' and it is on the text of these additions that Smith casts his shadow directly. The additions are 'the progress of improvements in society', 'division of labour', 'great uses of the most common arts', 'securities necessary to manufactures, etc', 'apprenticeship', and 'servitude'. Priestley says that 'the only original source of wealth, and every other advantage is labour' and continues, 'By this labour men are enabled to get from the earth, or the sea, their provisions, materials for their cloathing [sic] and habitations, and their comfortable subsistence in all other respects. By this they make themselves tools and engines, which shorten labour and divide it, so as to enable a few to make sufficient provision for a great number'.³⁴ The first of these quotations and the first half of the second may be regarded as being parallel to the well-known formula in the *Wealth of nations* that wealth consists in 'all the necessaries and conveniences of life' that are the produce of labour, and the second half of the second quotation as parallel to the passage on the division of labour which follows immediately.

In the *Lectures* Priestley divides men into four classes: labourers, holders of land and money, traders and servants. Labourers consist of farmers and manufacturers. It is only they who add to the wealth of a nation and so it is only their work that is really productive. Servants include magistrates, teachers (religious or secular), physicians, and actors. Apart from what is said about the proprietors of land and money, what is stated here is virtually the same as that maintained by Adam Smith in the use he makes of the distinction between productive and unproductive labour,³⁵ except that Priestley uses the word servant in a wider sense and it is not clear whether he thinks that traders belong to the productive labourers or not. Priestley does not relate this argument to the theory of capital accumulation as Smith did, but he says properly enough that 'as the product of labour... will in time of peace accumulate, the class of unproductive labourers, or servants of all kinds, will increase; because the labour of a few will be able to support them'.³⁶

Where individuals are left to themselves, he says, they generally tend to be provident and 'will daily better their circumstances' but governments are not so disposed:

Of all the classes of men above-mentioned, the governors are, in general, and of necessity must be, the most ignorant of their own business, because it is exceedingly complex, and requires more knowledge and ability than they are possessed of. The waste of public wealth by them is by far the most considerable. By the foolish wars in which they involve nations, and the endless taxes they impose upon them, governors are continually pulling down what individuals are building up.³⁷

Although Adam Smith does not go so far as Priestley does when the latter writes that 'governors are...the most ignorant of their own business because it is exceedingly complex', it is clear that they both share a common view as to how governments may be expected to behave, Priestley explicitly cites the passage in the *Wealth of nations* relating to the theory of capital accumulation in which Smith maintains that it is impertinent and presumptuous for the government to intervene in the economy of private people and that the governors themselves are the greatest spendthrifts.³⁸

In the *Lectures* Priestley only assigns a few lines to the division of labour. In the 'Syllabus' he referred to the benefit that accrues 'when a man's faculties are wholly employed upon one single object'.³⁹ But the reference was only made as an introductory comment to the discussion on the education of those who are engaged in trades where the division of labour is not applicable. For this reason a proper discussion of the division of labour only occurs in that part of the *Lectures* in which Smith's discussion of the manufacture of pins is briefly outlined.⁴⁰

The text of the item 'encouragement of arts, etc. by government' is simply the part mentioned above where bounties are advocated in the interest of consumers. Priestley's contention that any manufacture that is unable to stand without government protection is not worth supporting is virtually the same as Smith's.⁴¹

Smith's influence is also evidence in the text of the items, 'apprenticeship' and 'servitude'. Although Smith is not referred to by name, the lines including the sentence 'the law relating to apprenticeship in this country is an impediment to the improvement of the arts'⁴² is doubtless a brief reproduction of Smith's contention, except that the claim that apprenticeship, like the guilds, is a violation of the 'most sacred and inviolable' natural liberty is missing. Priestley considers that slavery is most inhumane and that it can be a cause of war. He cites Smith's statement almost verbatim that from the experience of all ages and nations, the 'work done by freemen comes cheaper in the end than that performed by slaves', and that this is particularly true of American cities where 'the wages of common labour are so very high'.⁴³

What, then, are we to say about the influence of Sir James? As for references and quotations, Stuart's name occurs much more frequently than Smith's. In fact it appears nearly twice as often. And yet in most cases his *Principles of political economy* is used merely as the source of information about money, credit, taxes, etc. on the Continent generally and in France particularly. But there are some instances in which Priestley's reliance on Stuart goes further than that. For example, on the question of taxes he objects to Stuart's statement that 'the best possible tax' is one levied on the sale of every commodity.⁴⁴ His reason for objecting to this is that it would be 'a check on the transferring of property, which, in a commercial state, ought to be made as easy as possible' and that 'if the wealth and strength of a nation depend chiefly upon its manufactures, it is impolitic to subject them to any tax'⁴⁵. No doubt this quotation smacks of mercantilism. If so, Priestley may be said to be criticizing the mercantilist Stuart with a mercantilist argument.

Another instance in which Priestley's references to Stuart's *Principles* are not merely concerned with historical information is to be found in his treatment of the theory of prices. It is part of the argument which Stuart develops when he criticizes David Hume on the relation of the quantity of circulating money to prices.⁴⁶ Stuart deals with the 'standard prices' of provisions or 'articles of the first necessity' as he called them. Repeating him almost exactly Priestley says:

As the price of things cannot rise where there is no desire to purchase, so let that desire be ever so great, the price cannot exceed what those who want can afford to pay. The price of the necessaries of life, therefore, as Mr. Stuart says, must depend upon the faculties of the buyer, that is, of the lowest class of the people. In the greatest famine, even bread can never rise above that price.⁴⁷

Priestley seems to pay no attention to the differences between Smith's theory concerning the prices of commodities and Stuart's. It seems as though he had no interest in comparing their ideas. It even seems as though it was a matter of indifference whether he referred to Smith or to Stuart. Might this have been a natural consequence of the fact that elements of the new and elements of the old co-existed in his thought? There are, however, instances in which Smith and Stuart are contrasted. One such concerns the theory of public loans. 'National debts', which was only one of the items in 5 (XLIV) of the 'Syllabus', is so enlarged in the *Lectures* as to make it almost an independent lecture. There, following Stuart, Priestley traces the 'origin and progress' of national debts, but as soon as he leaves their history he says:

Some have represented the national debt as having the same operation with the addition of so much capital stock to the nation, encouraging the industry of it, etc. But whatever money is issued in the form of paper by the government, it is first deposited in the form of cash by the individual. The man who pays the tax gives up so much of his property, so that it is

generally expended by the government in army and navy expences, revenue of officers, gratuities, etc. which yield no return... The money, no doubt, is employed, and thereby industry encouraged; but it is only that kind of industry which raises the price of consumable goods. If any man, or nation, should give all their property in this manner, they would certainly be impoverished, though those to whom money was transferred would be gainers.⁴⁸

Although there is no Smithian distinction here between capital that maintains productive labour and revenue that supports unproductive labour, virtually the same conception is implied. In nearly the same tone as Smith's⁴⁹ Priestley remarks that a public loan is not an additional capital. And this is exactly opposite to Stuart who maintains that a public loan creates new demands by giving vent to stagnant money and thereby plays a constructive part in the development of commercial society.⁵⁰ Thus, while following Stuart in explaining the history of public loans, he disagrees with him as to their economic significance. It may safely be said that it is here that the influence of the *Wealth of nations* on the *Lectures* is most clearly seen.⁵¹

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¹ London, 1765.

² Birmingham, 1788.

³ Op. cit., v.

⁴ Ibid., vii.

⁵ Adam Smith to William Pulteney, 3 Sept. 1772, *The correspondence of Adam Smith*, ed. E.C. Mossner and I.S. Ross (Oxford, 1977), 164.

⁶ *Essay*, 1, 11.

⁷ Ibid., 11-19.

⁸ Ibid., 26.

⁹ Ibid., 24.

¹⁰ Ibid., 19.

¹¹ Op. cit., (London, 1693), 122-127.

¹² Op. cit., (London, 1751-2), 19, 57-58.

¹³ *Essay*, 100.

¹⁴ Ibid., 142, 152.

¹⁵ Ibid., 207.

¹⁶ Ibid., 175-76.

¹⁷ Ibid., 189-90.

¹⁸ *Lectures*, 389.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 390.

²¹ Ibid., 390-91.

²² Ibid., 393.

²³ Ibid., 366.

²⁴ Adam Smith, *The wealth of nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (London, 1904), II, 7-17.

²⁵ *Lectures*, 374-75.

²⁶ Smith, II, 159.

²⁷ *Lectures*, 378-79.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 367.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 403.

³⁰ *Op. cit.*, 208.

³¹ *Lectures*, 401-02.

³² *Ibid.*, 400.

³³ *Ibid.*, 402.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 369.

³⁵ Smith, I, 313-4.

³⁶ *Lectures*, 370.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 371-72.

³⁸ Smith, I, 329.

³⁹ *Essay*, 19-20.

⁴⁰ *Lectures*, 372.

⁴¹ Smith, I, 120-144.

⁴² *Lectures*, 376.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 377-8; cf. Smith, I, 82-83 and 364.

⁴⁴ Sir James Steuart, *The principles of political economy*, (1767), II, 593.

⁴⁵ *Lectures*, 503.

⁴⁶ Steuart, I, 396-97.

⁴⁷ *Lectures*, 404.

⁴⁸ *Lectures*, 511-12.

⁴⁹ Smith, II, 409-11.

⁵⁰ Steuart, II, 451-52.

⁵¹ Another opportunity open to Priestley for contrasting the views of Smith and Steuart presented itself in the topic of luxury. But about the economic implications of luxury Priestley only says that 'wants of this kind, i.e. the mere taste for ornament, more than all our other wants, promote industry, and are most effectual means of circulating wealth'. His interest in the topic lies mainly in the moral and physical effects of luxury (*Lectures*, 418) and in the taxes on luxurious commodities (*ibid.*, 507).

KARL MARX AND RICHARD PRICE

Howard Williams

Marx enjoyed taking to task his forerunners in political economy and political theory for what he held to be their deficiencies in understanding and interpretation. He did so with wit, sarcasm and the occasional almost libellous comment. Perhaps the most waspish of his attacks is on Price's famous contemporary and opponent Edmund Burke. He refers to Burke as 'this sycophant who, in the pay of the English oligarchy, played the romantic *laudator temporis acti* against the French Revolution, just as, in the pay of the North American Colonies, at the beginning of the American troubles, he had played the liberal against the English oligarchy, was an out and out vulgar bourgeois.' Marx goes on to quote Burke's own view that 'the laws of commerce are the laws of nature and therefore the laws of God',¹ and adds that 'no wonder that true to the laws of God and nature, he (Burke) always sold himself to the highest bidder'.² Marx is none too charitable also about that other bastion of English political thought, Jeremy Bentham. In another biting footnote to *Capital* he remarks caustically, 'Bentham is a purely English phenomenon. Not even excepting our (German) philosopher, Christian Wolff, in no time and in no country has the most homespun commonplace ever strutted about in so self-satisfied a way. The principle of utility was no discovery of Bentham. He simply reproduced in his dull way what Helvétius and other Frenchmen had said with esprit in the 18th century.' Marx concludes his invective with the words 'Had I the courage of my friend, Heinrich Heine, I should call Mr Jeremy Bentham a genius in the way of bourgeois stupidity.'³

It is interesting to compare these devastating attacks on two of the most respected figures in the history of English social and political thought with the fate that Richard Price suffers at Marx's hands. Price receives two significant mentions in Marx's major work *Capital*. The first mention is highly favourable where he refers to Price's valuable work in unmasking some of the pretensions of the official spokesmen of the *status quo* in English society, and the second mention (a good deal less favourable) is where Marx speaks of the fantasies Price had encouraged by his obsession with the operation of compound interest. Despite this unfavourable allusion to Price's views on compound interest Marx gives the overall impression that, whatever the present relative status of Price, Burke and Bentham, in his assessment Price is intellectually at least their equal, and stands morally head and shoulders above the two.

Marx regards Price as a defender of the working class. Marx first expresses this view in Volume I of *Capital* when discussing the struggle over the length of the working day between employers and workers.⁴ Price along with Malachy Postlethwayt⁵, Nathaniel Forster⁶ and Jacob Vanderlint⁷ is listed as one of the critics of attempts to lengthen the working day and to deprive the English labourer of his 'natural liberty'. According to Marx, Price was one of the

leading contributors to the debate in English political economy between those who sought to defend the interests of the labourer and those who sought to defend the interests of capital on this matter. The most prominent opponent of Price's view Marx cites is Arthur Young author of *Political arithmetic*⁸ and a *Tour of Ireland*.⁹

Marx deals at length with Price's views on the condition of the British agricultural labourer, including the effects of enclosure, in his enormous chapter on the 'General Law of Capitalist Accumulation'.¹⁰ Price gets more than honourable mention for the honest reporting of the wages and standard of life of the poorer farming population. Marx notes with interest the way in which the introduction of capitalism into agriculture had led to a decline in the standard of life of the agricultural labourer. Arthur Young is quoted as saying that agricultural payment had fallen markedly from its 'golden age' in the 14th and 15th Century and Marx cites an anonymous pamphlet, *Reasons for the late increase of the poor rates*,¹¹ as demonstrating that real agricultural wages fell by a quarter between 1737 and 1777.¹² Here Marx calls upon Price's work to verify his point. He refers to Price's essay *Observations on reversionary payments* where Price had also computed that real wages had dropped dramatically in England from their high point in the early sixteenth century.¹³ Marx then quotes with relish Price's conclusion that 'modern policy is, indeed, more favourable to the higher classes of people; and the consequences may in time prove that the whole kingdom will consist of only *gentry and beggars*, or of *grandees and slaves*'.¹⁴

It is clear, therefore, that Marx found Price's evidence of the deteriorating conditions of working people in Britain very useful to his case that capitalism brought in its train centralization, concentration of wealth and large-scale poverty. Marx draws on Price once again in a similar vein in his chapter XXVII on the 'Expropriation of the Agricultural population', in the first volume of *Capital*. Here Marx deals in a most vehement and passionate way with the process of land enclosure which from the early eighteenth century onward became sanctified by notorious acts of Parliament. For Marx the movement to land enclosure was no more than a process of large-scale theft, whereby the English yeomanry (independent, small peasant farmers) was utterly destroyed. Marx sums up his views in the following way:

Whilst the place of the independent yeoman was taken by tenants at will, small farmers on yearly leases, a servile rabble dependent on the pleasure of landlords, the systematic robbery of the Communal lands helped especially, next to the theft of State domains, to swell those large farms that were called in the 18th Century capital farms or merchant-farms, and to "set free" the agricultural population as proletarians for manufacturing industry.¹⁵

Marx calls on Price in his support here, I believe, because of the careful and precise way in which Price outlines the consequences of enclosure. Price, in

Marx's view, sees clearly the relations of dependence forged and how the minority class can dominate the majority class.

The evidence in the *Observations* appears to corroborate Marx's interpretation of Price as an opponent of enclosures and a champion of the 'lower ranks of men'. Although Price is prepared to grant that the effects of enclosures and larger holdings system are more profitable to the 'great farmer' they are, none the less, detrimental to the public as a whole.¹⁶ Price regrets the passing of a simpler, less sophisticated age and form of life. Enclosures stimulate rural depopulation, poverty among labourers (which is aggravated by rising prices) and this, in turn, has its effect on the public through the increased poor rates which have to be paid. Agricultural wages decline under the pressure of the newly 'released' labourer on the market. Deprived of the means of eking out their own subsistence the dispossessed labourers are obliged to take what work they can obtain. They fall prey to the allures of urban life once they turn, out of necessity, to manufacture.

Price's view on the move from an agricultural economy to a primarily commercial and manufacturing one as a loss is strikingly similar to that of Rousseau:

The first or the simple stages of civilization, are those which favour most the increase and the happiness of mankind: For in these states, agriculture supplies plenty of the means of subsistence; the blessings of a natural and simple life are enjoyed; property is equally divided; the wants of men are few, and soon satisfied; and families are easily provided for. On the contrary. In the refined states of civilization property is engrossed, and the natural equality of men subverted; artificial necessities without number are created; great towns propagate contagion and licentiousness; luxury and vice prevail; and, together with them, disease, poverty, venality, and oppression. And there is a limit at which all liberty, virtue, and happiness must be lost, and complete ruin follow.¹⁷

Price draws on three of the same sources as Marx in giving his account of the process of enclosure.¹⁸ Both Price and Marx draw from the Reverend Stephen Addington's *An inquiry into the reasons for and against inclosing open-fields*,¹⁹ which gives a vivid account of the effects of enclosure in Northamptonshire and Leicestershire and both also refer to Nathaniel Kent, author of *Hints to gentlemen of landed property*²⁰. Francis Bacon's *Essays or counsels, civil and moral*²¹ is also a common source with Price making great use of Bacon's work to establish the wisdom of restraining the process of enclosure. The extent to which Marx looks upon Price as an authority on the process of enclosure can be gauged by the fact that many of Marx's quotations from these authors follow very closely those of Price in the *Observations*.²² From the same sources Marx and Price drew similar conclusions. Therefore it is no surprise that Marx quotes with approval Price's overall assessment of the effects of enclosure: 'Upon the whole', Price says, 'the circumstances of the

lower ranks of men are altered in almost every respect for the worst. From little occupiers of land, they are reduced to the state of day labourers and hirelings; and, at the same time, their subsistence in that state has become more difficult'.²³ Marx sees eye to eye with Price on the consequences of the process of enclosure. He concurs with Price that subsistence farmers are by the process turned into dependent wage-labourers who form a pool of potential employment for both town and country. With Price Marx also sees the dislodged peasantry as forming part of the basis of the new urban proletariat. Finally with Price, Marx also sympathizes with the fate of the yeomanry, but Marx sees in their original liberty so illegally lost the seeds of revolt and a potential new society. Thus, Marx thoroughly commends Price in these sections of *Capital* as an opponent of privilege, property and Toryism.²⁴

Price and Compound Interest

Marx's assessment of Price as a financial and economic thinker is far lower than his assessment of Price as a sociologist and economic historian. Marx accuses Price of 'capital fetishism' and of deluding the 'heaven-born' Pitt the Younger into starting his ill-fated Sinking Fund. The accusation of fetishizing capital is by far the most interesting of the two, since if the second accusation is true and if Pitt was misled by Price, Pitt can only hold himself and his incompetent advisers to blame. There is every evidence that Price gave his advice in good faith.²⁵

Marx first takes Price to task on the matter of compound interest and interest bearing capital in the *Grundrisse*²⁶. Marx regards Price as having far surpassed even the 'alchemists' with his 'marvellous inventions' concerning the innate power of capital to expand and multiply itself.²⁷ He quotes both Price's *An appeal to the public on the subject of the national debt* and the *Observations on reversionary payments* to show Price's attachment to the notion of self-expanding and self-producing capital. Marx is particularly taken by the statement in the *Observations* that 'a shilling put out to 6% compound interest at our Saviour's birth would... have increased to a greater sum than the whole solar system could hold, supposing it a sphere equal in diameter to the diameter of Saturn's orbit.'²⁸ Price must, he thinks, be given credit for his vivid imagination, if not for his good sense.

Marx believes Price was taken in by the appearance of the capitalist productive process. Price accorded to capital in its financial form a fetishized stature, attributing to money-capital itself the apparent power to expand and reproduce itself. In Marx's view, the root of the capacity of capital to increase itself lies in productive industry and manufacture to which the money is lent. Marx argues that capitalist production gives rise to a surplus through the exploitation of the employees. Workers put their ability to produce at the disposal of the employer for a specified amount of time in return for a cash payment. Marx sees this exchange as perfectly fair on the surface, but argues that it masks an unequal exchange whereby the worker hands over for a fixed sum of value a commodity which has the power of producing a unspecified

amount of value. The capitalist uses his power over the worker to ensure that the worker works part of the day to produce the equivalent of his own payment and then to work for the rest of the day unpaid to give the capitalist his surplus. Money capital on which interest is paid can facilitate this process by giving the employer an initial sum to begin the production process (or, more typically, the money capital is lent to expand or merely continue the production process). Now it appears that the capital commands an interest merely because of its own inherent properties, but in fact it is able to command an interest only because of the surplus the direct producers generate (through which the interest is paid). It is the ability of the capitalist employer to expand the scale of his production, take on extra employees and thereby produce greater surpluses that provides the wealth through which compound interest may be paid. Compound interest mirrors, and is only made possible therefore by, the process of capitalist accumulation. Thus to suppose that the power of money capital to yield compound interest and thus continually to grow lies entirely within money-capital itself, as Price appears to do, is entirely mistaken. The capacity to grow apparently indefinitely, represents, Marx argues, the reflected glory of the capitalist production process.

Marx acknowledges that it is possible to charge compound interest on a loan and increase the principal quite rapidly. But what he does not accept is that this would provide a Fund, such as Pitt's Sinking fund was supposed to, from which other debts might be paid. Once money is taken out of the fund on a continuous basis the compound effect is retarded or even reversed (as anyone who has had to live on his/her savings for any length of time will acknowledge). Even more fantastic than this idea is the idea of paying Government debts with debts or the notion of lending at compound interest and borrowing at simple interest. For this to be in the least bit effective it presupposes, in the first place, that those who wish to lend money do not have access to the same financial markets as the government. They would, in other words, have to be legally prevented from lending out their money at compound interest. In the second place, it presupposes that the lender is prepared to waive interest payments for an indefinite amount of time, otherwise the government would always have less to lend out at compound interest than it was actually borrowing. Since both these presumptions are in practice out of the question, any scheme such as this advanced by Price must be a total failure.

Marx speaks at greater length about the defects of Price's views on compound interest in Volume 3 of *Capital* (edited and published by Engels in 1894). Much of what is said follows word for word what appears in the earlier *Grundrisse* manuscripts except that there are added a number of new footnotes and a long reference to Luther's 'naive onslaught against usury'.²⁹ What takes Marx from Luther to Price (Marx, we might expect, is not in the least interested in the theological connection between the two) is Luther's diatribe against those who 'amass wealth' at their neighbour's expense simply

by lending out money, and add insult to injury by increasing the cost of a loan when the principal is not repaid on time. Luther found payment of simple interest detestable, but payment at compound interest he found loathsome. In Marx's view Price was led into error over compound interest because he 'was simply dazzled by the gargantuan dimensions obtained in a geometrical progression. Since he took no note of the conditions of reproduction and labour, and regarded capital as a self-regulating automaton, as a mere number which increases itself just as Malthus did with respect to population.³⁰

Price and others who fetishize capital in this way ignore the real conditions which give rise to its accumulation and the limitations which are set by that real process of accumulation. A capitalist employer can borrow at an interest of 5% and repay that interest, and still generate a profit for himself, because he will be laying out his capital on the hire of hands on whose work he will get a return far in excess of 5% per annum. An employer will expect a return of at least in excess of 20% before thinking of extending his business. With such a return he can both add to his own business capital and to his personal consumption, at the same time as repaying a loan. This is the real process that Price overlooks when he gets carried away with his mathematical calculations.

Marx hastens finally to point out that there are limitations even to the accumulation of the successful industrial capitalist. Part of the capital employed in machinery and other fixed capital in the enterprise will be subject to wear and tear and therefore will require periodic replacement. Equally, economies of scale may operate up to a certain point within an enterprise, but the expansion of a firm at one location will inevitably reach a ceiling beyond which it cannot increase without the outlay of huge new capital. Accumulation is also limited by market competition and, in Marx's view, by the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. Thus rates of interest are certain to decline from time to time (checking compound growth) as the demand for money capital is reduced by recession. All these real processes check the smooth path of the growth of compound interest and give the lie to the 'fetishism of capital'.

Marx couples this criticism of Price's compound interest fantasies with a final moral admonition against the capital fetishism it implies. Not only, in Marx's view, does interest bearing capital not have the inherent property of self-expansion, but also it is not itself entitled to be viewed as a source of increased wealth. That honour belongs exclusively to 'living labour' that is the labour expended by a worker during the process of production. The fantasies attached to the lending of money capital are due to the 'domination of the products of past labour over living surplus-labour'³¹ which can persist only so long as capital is allowed to exploit labour. Once production is consciously planned and carried out by the community as a whole the fantastic powers of money capital will at once cease. With his laudable support to the underdog in society, if not through his fantastic tales about compound interest, Price may,

in Marx's view, have contributed to the eventual realization of this aim.

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¹ Karl Marx, *Capital* (London, 1970), I, 760, and E. Burke, *Thoughts and details on scarcity* (London, 1800), 31-32.

² Marx, 760.

³ *Ibid.*, I, 609-610.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 274.

⁵ Malachy Postlethwayt, author of *Britain's commercial interest explained and improved*, 2 vols. (London, 1755), and translator of Savary des Bruslon, *Universal dictionary of trade and commerce*, 2nd edn. (London, 1755).

⁶ Nathaniel Forster, author of *An enquiry into the causes of the present high price of provisions* (London, 1767).

⁷ Jacob Vanderlint, *Money answers all things* (London, 1734).

⁸ London, 1774.

⁹ London, 1780.

¹⁰ Ch. XXV in *Capital*, I, 612-716.

¹¹ London, 1777.

¹² *Capital*, I, 673.

¹³ *Observations on revisionary payments*. 6th edn., 2 vols., ed. W. Morgan (London, 1803) (hereafter *O.R.P.*). Marx quotes the following: 'the nominal price of day-labour is at present no more than about four times, or at most five times higher than it was in the year 1514. But the price of corn is seven times, and of flesh-meat and raiment about fifteen times higher. So far, therefore, has the price of labour been from advancing in proportion to the increase in the expences of living, that it does not appear that it bears now half the proportion to those expences that it did bear formerly.' *Ibid.*, II, 159.

¹⁴ *O.R.P.*, II, 158-159.

¹⁵ *Capital*, I, 725.

¹⁶ *O.R.P.*, II, 138.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹⁸ Other sources for the discussion on enclosures in *O.R.P.* are Charles Smith, *Three tracts on the corn trade*, (1766); and William Fleetwood, *Chronicum preciosum* (London, 1707 and 1745). Bishop Fleetwood's book (unlike, it seems, Smith's book) was also known to Marx (see *Capital*, I, 272). Marx was, of course able to take advantage of many later studies of the problem, including Macaulay's *History of England*, 10th edn. (London, 1854); Cobbett's *A history of the protestant reformation* (London, 1824); F.W. Newman's *Lectures on political economy* (London, 1851); George Ensor's *An enquiry concerning the population of nature* (London, 1818); George Roberts's *The social history of the people of the southern counties of England* (London, 1856), and J.E.T. Roger's *History of agriculture and prices in England* (1259-1793), (Oxford, 1866).

¹⁹ Coventry, 1772.

²⁰ London, 1775.

²¹ London, 1597.

²² *Capital*, I, 726, 720.

²³ *Ibid.*, I, 726; *O.R.P.*, II, 159-160.

²⁴ Marx regards Sir F.M. Eden as the most important literary representative of the Tories in the debate over land enclosures. Marx refers to him as 'an opponent of Dr. Price . . . philanthropist and tory, to boot' (*Capital*, I, 727). Eden was the author of *The state of the poor; or an history of the labouring classes from the conquest to the present period* (London, 1797).

²⁵ D.O. Thomas, *The honest mind* (Oxford, 1977), 256.

²⁶ *Die Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Konomie* represents the earliest draft of Marx's *Capital*. Written in the winter of 1857-8 it provides a fascinating insight into the origins and

motives of Marx's interpretation of this manuscript which was published for the first time in 1954. It was translated first in 1973 by Martin Nicolaus.

²⁷ *Grundrisse* (London, 1973), 842.

²⁸ *Ibid.* Marx takes this quotation from the 2nd (1772) edn. of *O.R.P.*, xiii. He also quotes from *An appeal to the nation on the subject of the national debt*, 2nd edn. (London, 1772): 'One penny put out at our saviour's birth to 5 per cent. Compound interest, would, before this time, have increased to a greater sum than would be contained in 150 millions of earths, all solid gold (pages 18-19). But if put out to simple interest, it would, in the same time, have amounted to no more than seven shillings four pence halfpenny.' A similar passage appears in the 6th edn. of *O.R.P.*, I, 314-15.

²⁹ *Capital*, III (London, 1974), 394.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 395-96.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 399.

THE MISSING ARCHIVE OF JOHN EVANS OF ISLINGTON (1767-1827)

John Arthur Oddy

The eirenic John Evans, from 1792 minister of the Worship Street, London, General Baptists, was also an educator and writer. About 1800 he became very friendly with William Richards of King's Lynn (1749-1818), and in 1819 appeared Evans's *Memoirs of the life and writings of the Rev. William Richards* (Chiswick). Richards, a Welshman, was a theological and political polemicist, an historian and an extensive correspondent.¹ Theologically he put a heavy stress on tolerance, but he 'failed to transcend a potentially lethal inheritance' of 'private judgement, sectarianism, Scripture sufficiency, and eighteenth-century "reason" ';² and so acquired an incoherent Christology and the opinion that the Churches were labouring under apostasy. Politically he was an independent, alienated radical, a mordant critic with hardly any positive programme. As a writer he was lucid, vigorous, and elegant. Moreover, he and his friends show us a section of Dissent in action, writing numerous letters to each other, publishing, preaching on State issues.

When Evans wrote the *Memoirs* he had a considerable Richards archive before him. Of letters there were perhaps 700; about 200 were from Evans himself;³ and there were more from William Williams (d. 1799),⁴ Dissenting minister, J.P., militia captain and Deputy Lieutenant of Cardigan and Pembroke, who had been tolerant (at the least) towards an Arminian secession, led by Richards, among the Welsh Baptists c. 1799. Another large quantity was from that extraordinary Baptist radical, and emigrant to the U.S.A., Morgan John Rhees (1760-1804): 'Sunday schools and popular journalism, negro emancipation, civil liberty, religious tolerance — what unpopular cause did he not embrace?'⁵ There were also letters from Hugh and Caleb Evans (the Bristol Academy tutors), John Rippon (the Baptist biographer) and Archibald McLean (the founder of the neo-Sandemanian 'Scotch Baptists').

Evans retained this archive. We know of two occasions when he produced material from it. In 1824 he let the *New Evangelical Magazine* publish five letters to Richards from McLean, written between 1783 and 1791, when Richards was McLean's disciple. When John Towill Rutt was preparing his account of Joseph Priestley, Evans communicated to him a letter from William Allum to Richards, 6 June 1794, recording how Allum, who wrote from New York had 'had the high satisfaction of bringing Dr. Priestley on shore' when the latter reached America.⁶ I concluded in my newspaper article (see below) that Evans meant to leave the documents to his posterity. His Will, however, made as early as 19 June 1800 and in the Principal Probate Registry, simply bequeathed all his estate to his wife Mary, who was also his sole executrix. The Administration granted on 11 August 1827 shows that she

renounced probate and execution in favour of her son John, who was a mathematician and perhaps a Unitarian, and shares his father's entry in the *DNB*.

On page 7 of the *Baptist Times* for 26 November 1970, I fruitlessly drew attention to Evans's missing hoard. Inquiries in obvious places failed to unearth it. I am not convinced of its destruction. The truth, and perhaps the archive, might be discovered by someone who could trace Evans's line.

¹ See 'The Reverend William Richards (1749-1818) and his friends: a study of ideas and relationships' (my unpublished M.Phil. dissertation, University of Nottingham, 1973); my article 'The dissidence of William Richards', *Baptist Quarterly* 27 (1977), 118-127; and *DNB*.

² Oddy, 'The dissidence ...', 125.

³ Evans, *Memoirs*, 245.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 194n.

⁵ Gwyn A. Williams, 'Morgan John Rhees and his Beula', *Welsh History Review*, 3 (1967), 441-72 (443).

⁶ *The theological and miscellaneous works of Joseph Priestley*, ed. Rutt (London, [1817-32]), 234-35.

JOSEPH PRIESTLEY AT HACKNEY: THE COLLIER Ms.: AN ADDITIONAL NOTE

Alan Ruston

The existence of Priestley's letter of resignation to the Hackney congregation, which was set out together with their reply in my article in *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 2, 115-17, is confirmed in Thomas Belsham *Memoirs of the late reverend Theophilus Lindsey* (London, 1812), 367-68:

On the 21st February, 1794, Dr. Priestley sent in his letter of resignation to the congregation at Hackney; to which after some time, when they found all efforts to induce him to remain with them unavailing and hopeless, they returned an answer expressive of their veneration and gratitude for his person and his labours, their poignant regret at the dissolution of the connexion, and their affectionate good wishes for his future welfare.

This roughly contemporaneous reference raises some interesting points:

1. It explains the reason for the gap of over two weeks between the letter of resignation and the congregation's reply.
2. It deepens speculation as to why J.T. Rutt omitted these two important letters from his *The theological and miscellaneous works of Joseph Priestley*. Rutt must have known of them from Belsham's *Memoirs*, and, being a leading member of the Gravel Pit congregation from the 1790s, may even have been consulted over the wording of the reply made in March 1794 to their minister. He remained an active Unitarian until his death, and his name appears as a committee member of the New Gravel Pit during the 1820s when he was assembling the *Works* for publications. Therefore he would have had easy access to the minute books (now lost) where the two letters were written out in full. That Rutt used the chapel records as a prime source for material is shown by the several references he makes to them in *Works*. In the view he made a deliberate decision to leave them out although it is now difficult to understand why he did so as they show both minister and congregation to have been temperate and enlightened in the face of what amounted to persecution.
3. In writing *Memoirs* did Belsham use the original letters or the copies made of them in the minute books? As the minister of the congregation following Priestley, he would have had access to the latter but not necessarily to the former. If any Priestley memoranda were thrown away in this period as unimportant or as of only passing interest, these formal letters would surely not have been included in these categories by anyone with even the flimsiest knowledge of the religious and political scene of the 1790s.

Oxhey, Watford, Hertfordshire.

**SAMUEL HORSLEY AND JOSEPH PRIESTLEY'S *DISQUISITIONS*
RELATING TO MATTER AND SPIRIT**

John Stephens

Some nine years since the Christian Church was no less astonished than offended, by an extravagant attempt to heighten, as it was pretended, the importance of the Christian Revelation, by overturning one of those first principles of natural religion, which had for ages been considered as the basis upon which the whole superstructure of Revelation stands. The notion of an immaterial principle in man, which, without an immediate exertion of the divine power to the express purpose of its destruction, must necessarily survive the dissolution of the body; the notion of an immortal soul, was condemned and exploded as an invention of heathen philosophy.¹

Thus Samuel Horsley in a sermon *On the incarnation* delivered on Christmas Day, 1785. Although the long and bitter controversy between Horsley and Priestley only got under way in earnest with the publication of the *History of the corruptions of christianity* in 1782, a preliminary skirmish devoted to metaphysics rather than the early church had taken place five years before. In 1777 *Disquisitions relating to matter and spirit* appeared and was read by Horsley. He attacked the work in a sermon *On providence and free agency* delivered in 1778 but only some of his disagreements with Priestley were articulated there. The remainder survive in the marginal notes that Horsley wrote in his copy of the *Disquisitions* and it is with these that this paper is principally concerned.²

Disquisitions is an important work in Priestley's development, in that it was the first presentation of the peculiar synthesis of religious and philosophical views that he had been evolving in the early 1770s. First the influence of Michell and Boscovich made him conceive matter in terms of powers. Later his work on the Scottish common sense philosophers made him doubt that matter and mind were distinct substances. Long before, Hartley had made him a necessitarian and his theological views had become severely Unitarian. A philosophy that denied immaterial substance and relied on a deterministic view of causation was ideally suited to synthesizing these views.³

The significance of the survival of Horsley's notes goes beyond merely documenting the first encounter of the two antagonists. More important is the way in which it reveals the prejudices of a late eighteenth century theologian who was more than casually interested in the scientific thought of his time. Horsley was an accomplished mathematician, elected to the Royal Society in 1767 he became one of its secretaries in 1773; between 1779 and 1785 he edited an edition of Newton's works. The obvious parallel is with Richard Price, similarly mathematically inclined, and conversant with the works of Newton.

Indeed, not the least interesting fact to emerge from Horsley's annotations is that the arguments he sketches out are often identical with those that Price was communicating to Priestley at the same time.⁴

II

Priestley had long been struck by evidence which seemed to him to suggest that matter was not impenetrable. His first statement to this effect appears in the *History of discoveries relating to vision* published in 1772. He there states that,

the easiest method of solving all the difficulties attending the subject of the *subtlety of light*, and of answering Mr Euler's objections to its materiality is to adopt the hypothesis of Mr Boscovich, who supposes that matter is not impenetrable as before him had been universally taken for granted; but that it consists of *physical points* only, endued with powers of attraction and repulsion...⁵

In 1773 he was using the dilation and condensation of matter brought about by heat and cold as an example. In 1777 these and other examples — such as Melville's demonstration that a drop of water rolling on a cabbage leaf never comes into actual contact — were used in *Disquisitions*.⁶ For Priestley the analogy here suggested was that matter *as such* was penetrable and that it was held together by powers of attraction and repulsion. The view is so expressed in *Disquisitions*,

An atom by which I mean an ultimate component part of any gross body, is necessarily supposed to be perfectly solid, wholly impervious to any other atom; and it must also be round, or square, or of some other *determinate* form. But the parts of such a body (as this solid atom must be *divisible*, and therefore have parts) must be infinitely hard, and therefore must have powers of mutual attraction infinitely strong, or it could not hold together, that is, could not exist as a *solid atom*. Take away the *power* therefore, and the solidity of the atom intirely disappears. In short, it is then no longer *matter*; being destitute of the fundamental properties of such a substance.⁷

Priestley here assumes that the ultimate particles of matter, as conceived by Horsley and others are inert and have no properties, a view which Horsley himself thought was first put about by Andrew Baxter.⁸ Horsley denies that these ultimate particles have parts as Priestley seems to suppose,

No attraction is required to bind together the parts of the solid primordial atoms, or rather to preserve every such atom in its size and figure. Every such atom is one thing by the original intention of the Creator. It is not

composed of parts then (turned?) physically divisible into parts. Its finite divisibility is only Logical, It is a monad.⁹

and again,

All this argument is founded on a supposition that the primordial atoms of which sensible bodies are composed, are not themselves simple un compounded beings. Take away this supposition and the Conclusions fall to the ground. If two or more things be held together they must be held together by attraction i.e. by a force. But no force is necessary to preserve the Unity of that which is intrinsically and (totally) one thing.¹⁰

This is not to dispute that forces may inhere in matter,¹¹ merely that, 'Every primordial Atom is one thing, and wants nothing to hold it together'.¹² Horsley makes one further point:

The Author imagines that the parts of Matter, even the smallest particles of it, are held together by attraction. I deny this — But however I would ask him whether Repulsion penetrating the inmost parts of bodies, and acting in the smallest particles (the physical points) with infinite intensity would not produce all the mischief attraction was to prevent. He cannot deny this. And if Attraction is taken away between the Parts of the primordial atom, the Dissipation from Repulsion becomes still a more necessary consequence. The only answer that can be given to this, is that matter being only an assemblage of Powers, there is no *substance* to be dissipated. But this is in effect denying the existence of Matter altogether. And in this I think the hypothesis of Father Boscovic and Mr Mitchell as represented by Dr. P terminates.¹³

In other words if the power of repulsion is supposed infinite, matter will tear itself apart leaving only the 'primordial atoms'. However to argue thus Horsley has to assume that Priestley accepts that matter is ultimately composed of particles, an assumption that, given the tenor of Priestley's argument, is difficult to sustain.¹⁴

Thus Horsley seeks to turn Priestley's arguments on their head. Forces may exist in matter but they are superadded to the primordial particles. Priestley, preoccupied as he is with the cohesion of matter, assumes that if this is brought about by attraction and repulsion he has shown that matter is not solid. Horsley does not deny that forces play a part in bringing about cohesion but insists that this must be distinguished from the solidity of the un compounded primordial particle.¹⁵

III

Priestley's argument on the materiality of the mind is likewise analogical. If matter can have powers these could include thought: further, on the basis of the observed phenomena there is no *need* to postulate an immaterial substance as the underlying reality of the mind. Since this postulation is axiomatic for Horsley his comments on, for him, a barren argument, are approximately terse.

Priestley points out that the mind never operates 'but in conjunction with a certain organized system of matter'. The faculty of thinking ripens or decays with the body. 'There is not a single idea of which the mind is possessed but what may be proved to have come to it from the bodily senses'.¹⁶ Horsley agrees that sensation is an important source of ideas, but adds,

But there are many other Ideas which cd. never come from Sense. Such as those of Magnitude, Proportion, Identity, Diversity, Similarity, Justice, Wisdom &c.¹⁷

The implication here is that these are not in Priestley's words, 'consequent upon' a principle of sense, (as in the case of Locke's ideas of reflection) but that they arise in the mind from its own power. Priestley on the other hand denies that the mind has any active powers,

... whatever ideas are in themselves, they are evidently produced by external objects, and must therefore correspond to them; and since many of the objects or archetypes (sic) of ideas are divisible, it necessarily follows, that the ideas themselves are divisible also.¹⁸

This makes sense if one assumes that there is a simple relation between idea and object. But it raises difficulties for Horsley.

Ideas are in the Soul, not locally but as in their subject. The Divisibility of Ideas, even of sensible things is only a Logical Divisibility. Now to say that things Logically Divisible cannot be contained in a substance that is indivisible is to say that a thinking substance (for in such only can things logically divisible be contained) cannot divide, that is cannot analyse its own ideas, unless it be itself a divisible substance. This needs demonstration.

When the author speaks of the *extension of Ideas*, I should suppose he had no other notion of ideas but as the Impressions, the Images of sensible objects, on a Material Sensory, which are no more the Ideas than the Objects themselves are.¹⁹

As an assertion of orthodox dualism this needs no further comment. Priestley had merely confused ideas and object.²⁰

IV

To accept Priestley's argument that there was only one substance in the world, and that matter, it was necessary to accept various consequences of which the chief was that causation is mechanical and necessary and so things could not be other than they were. This meant there could be no choice in our actions and freewill a nonsense. Priestley accepted all these implications. Neither Horsley nor Price did. Denying Priestley's reduction of mind to matter they could insist that mind was active, the mind of God continually so because that was how the universe was sustained and the moral government of God ensured.

Priestley cites a contradiction in Andrew Baxter's *Matho* in the following terms,

The manifest contradiction between these two accounts of matter, hardly needs to be pointed out. The immaterial principle, it seems, is to be *initiated in the elements of knowledge* by its union to a dead and torpid substance, which is so far from *giving it any life or power, or any degree of them*, that we cannot name a greater absurdity, than such a supposition; a substance which, *when best disposed*, must limit the powers and activity of the soul, and when *disordered and indisposed*, as it is evidently very liable to be, and indeed is hardly ever otherwise, may quite *obstruct and impede* all its operations; and can in no manner *aid or assist* its powers or energy.

On this Horsley comments as follows,

The Contradiction is not so manifest as the Author seems to imagine.

Indeed there is no Contradiction at all. It seems to have been the design of our Creator in making us so imperfect as we are, that our Virtue should in the End have the truest (?) Virtue by being as much as possible our own acquisition, under the Discipline of his Providence, and with the assistances of his Grace. Matter, therefore, if it is one principal cause of that Imperfection, which is the necessary beginning of the greatest possible perfection of finite beings, is fit to initiate Beings, &c. and train them up &c. for that very reason because it limits its power and activity.²¹

These views were given a public airing in the sermon *Providence and free agency* delivered in St Paul's Cathedral on Good Friday 1778. The text is Matthew xvi. 21 where Christ informs his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and die. Horsley glosses this passage as follows:

Now ... [Christ] begins to shew [the disciples] how that he *must* go to Jerusalem, and after much malicious persecution ... he *must* be killed. The form of expression here is very remarkable in the original, and it is well preserved in our English translation. He *must* go, he *must* suffer, he

must be killed, he *must* be raised again on the third day. All these things were fixed and determined — must inevitably be — nothing could prevent them — and yet the greatest part of them were of a kind that might seem to depend entirely on man's free-agency ...²²

However this certainty is not the same as 'a true Necessity inherent in the Nature of the thing'. In this sense Horsley thinks that something is necessary if the idea of existence is part of the idea of the thing itself, as is the case with God. An event by its nature,

excludes this Necessity, which belongs only to things uncaused. The events of the created universe are *certain*, because sufficient causes *do*, not because they *must*, act to their production. God knows this certainty, because he knows the action of all these causes; in as much as he himself begins it, and perfectly comprehends those Mutual connections between the things he hath created which render *this* a Cause, and *that* its effect.²³

But for Horsley at least — this is not predestination in the Calvinist sense. One knows intuitively that one's will is free,

I feel that I exist, and I feel that I am free; and I may with reason turn a deaf ear upon every argument that can be alledged in either case to disprove my feelings.

Of course most predestinarians would not have denied that we have the feeling of being free. However whether we really are free is another matter. Horsley expands as follows: After one has acted unreasonably,

*I feel that I am misled by my own passions, my own appetites, my own mistaken view of things. A feeling always succeeds these unreasonable actions, that had my mind exerted its natural powers, in considering the actions I was about to do, the propriety of it in itself and its consequences, I might and should have acted otherwise. Having these feelings, I feel all that liberty, which renders the Morality of a man's actions properly his own, and makes him justly accountable for his conduct.*²⁴

Although Horsley rejects Calvinism, which, he asserts, makes men 'mere machines' he nevertheless commends necessitarians such as Priestley for showing the 'certain influence of Moral Motives' as the means by which human actions are brought within the continued chain of cause and effect.

So enthusiastic is Horsley for the operation of moral motives that he almost lapses into determinism himself. His main concern is restricted to distinguishing 'moral' from 'physical' necessity,

they [the necessitarians] imagine a Similitude between things which admit of no comparison; between the influence of a moral Motive on Mind, and that of mechanical Force upon Matter . . . Force is only another name for the *efficient* cause; it is that which impresses motion upon body, the passive recipient of a foreign impulse. A Moral Motive is what is more significantly called the *final* cause, and can have no influence but with a being that proposes to itself an end, chooses means, and then *puts itself* in action.

The two causes operate in different ways. Every cause acts on something so 'whatever be the cause that acts, the Principle of Certainty lies in a capacity in the thing on which it acts, of being affected by that action'. In the case of mechanical causes this is inertia but,

Intelligence and Liberty constitute the capacity of being influenced by a final cause, by a Moral Motive; and to this very liberty does this sort of cause owe its whole Efficiency, the whole certainty of its operations; which certainly never can disprove the existence of that liberty on which it is itself founded, and of which it affords the highest evidence.

However,

*A moral motive and a mechanical force are equally certain causes, each of its proper effect.*²⁵

Hence it is open to Priestley to retort,

*Though you do not chuse to call this a physical, but a moral necessity, you allow it to be a real necessity, arising from the operation of the established laws of nature, implying an impossibility of the thing being otherwise than it is, which is all I wish you to grant.*²⁶

Insofar as they both concede that a moral government exists in nature and that God has foreknowledge of contingent actions Priestley and Horsley are agreed.²⁷ Horsley's argument however takes the form that *if* the agent by which an action is brought about is immaterial, and the motive therefore what he calls a 'Moral Motive', it cannot possibly be determined. This is because an event, to be determined, must have a mechanical cause. However he does agree that in a given situation a man will only act in one way and it is not surprising that he was thought at the time to be a necessitarian.²⁸ In fact as a later comment makes clear²⁹ Horsley supposes liberty, in the rationalist fashion, to be the capacity of determining one's actions 'by Motives of Wisdom and Goodness'. Whether this makes him consistent is another matter.

V

Discussion of mind and matter in the eighteenth century revolved around two problems. Was matter passive or not? Could mind be material or not? The first centred on whether such powers as gravitation, repulsion and attraction were inherent in matter or imposed upon it. The second was concerned with whether the soul was material and the way and degree to which its operations might be determined by material mechanisms. Hartley's associationism is the best known example: there were many others. However extreme his development of it, Priestley was standing in a recognizable tradition.³⁰

Horsley's commonplaces came from elsewhere. He did not have Priestley's knowledge of chemistry and his own scientific interests were mathematical and astronomical. He accepted the view – prevalent certainly, but how prevalent is unclear – that mind and matter interacted because God had arranged that they should. Thus mind is – for Horsley – independent of and superior to matter and everything that he asserts against Priestley's views is designed to explicate this belief.³¹ Thus matter is inert and must be acted on, the mind is capable of finding ideas which are not derived from matter, are implicitly true, and in a sense innate, consciousness is essential to mind, and its freedom from material determination is what defines its freewill.

It would go well beyond ordinary special pleading to argue that these comments are not in themselves of great significance. They were written on the spur of the moment: often they are badly expressed or fragmentary in argument. Where they are of most value is in presenting a reply to Priestley that transcends routine expression of revulsion or incredulity.³² What perhaps is of most interest is the way in which Priestley failed to convince so many of his audience. This goes not only for Horsley and Price but also for Thomas Reid³³ and the anonymous author of the sceptical *Essay on the nature and existence of a material world*, in which the views of Price and Priestley are considered at length.³⁴ None of them shared Priestley's preoccupation, either theological or scientific.

The points made by all of these writers are much the same. Even the anonymous sceptic thinks that materialism is the only consistent scheme 'if we adopt the doctrine of solid matter'.³⁵ For all of them Priestley falls down in failing to distinguish between cohesion and solidity, between ideas and objects, in arguing analogically that matter can have properties normally ascribed to mind. It is not then surprising that these replies to Priestley are ultimately assertions of the commonplaces of the day. The fact is that in *Dissertations* he was going well beyond the explication of the particular phenomena with which his scientific work was concerned and was instead making general, metaphysical, assertions.³⁶ Hence although it is true in one sense to say that Price's response, for example, was inadequate³⁷ because he

failed to see that Priestley was trying to describe matter in terms of forces, in another sense that response was correct because Price and those others who wrote against Priestley saw clearly the undesirable metaphysical or theological consequences of his theories. They preferred instead³⁸ to insist on the importance of what people *had* to believe.³⁹

Oxford

¹ Samuel Horsley, *On the incarnation. A sermon* (London, 1786) 3-4.

² Copies of three of Priestley's works with annotations by Horsley are now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. They are (i) *Disquisitions relating to matter and spirit* (London, 1777), 265 i 364; (ii) *A free discussion of the doctrines of materialism and philosophical necessity, in a correspondence between Dr Price and Dr Priestley* (London, 1778), 265 i 365; and (iii) *The history of the corruptions of Christianity* (London, 1782), 265 i 366, 7. See *A catalogue of the . . . library of . . . Samuel Horsley*, (Leigh and Sotheby, 1807), lots 1325, 1327, 1328. They fetched £1.1.0, £1.4.s., £2.10.0 respectively to Lunn, presumably William Henry Lunn (Cf. Ian Maxted, *The London Book Trades, 1775-1800* (Folkestone, 1977), 143. Horsley annotated them when they were still in the publisher's boards. When at a later date they were bound and the pages cut down the annotations were preserved by turning them over. This undoubtedly helped to preserve the notes (admittedly sparse) in the *Free discussion* many of which are in pencil. I have reproduced all the notes in the *Disquisitions*, a selection only from those in the *Free discussion*.

³ Cf. J.G. McEvoy and J.E. McGuire, 'God and nature: Priestley's way of rational dissent', *Historical studies in the physical sciences*, VI (1975), 325-404.

⁴ For the life of Horsley see H.H. Jebb, *A great bishop of one hundred years ago, being a sketch of the life of Samuel Horsley* (London, 1909), and Alexander Gordon, s.n., in *D.N.B.*

⁵ Joseph Priestley, *History of the discoveries concerning light and colours* (London, 1772), 390. This passage is reproduced almost verbatim in *Disquisitions*, 19ff. One textual change, possibly first noted by Dugald Stewart in his *Philosophical essays* (Edinburgh, 1810), 131, occurs at the start of the second paragraph of *Disquisitions*, 21. In 1777 this read 'This scheme of the mutual penetration of matter first occurred to Mr Michell . . .' In 1772 it read 'This scheme of the immateriality of matter, as it may be called, or rather the mutual penetration of matter . . .'. On this basis Stewart (loc. cit.) states that he is 'somewhat at a loss, whether to class [Priestley] with the materialists or with the immaterialists . . .' For Priestley of course there was no distinction.

⁶ Joseph Priestley to Joseph Bretland, 7 Mar. 1773, printed in R.E. Schofield, *A scientific autobiography of Joseph Priestley* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), 117. Cf. also McEvoy and McGuire, 'God and nature', 387-89.

⁷ *Disquisitions*, 5-6.

⁸ Samuel Horsley to Lord Monboddo, 25 Feb. 1780, commenting on Monboddo's *Antient metaphysics* (Edinburgh, 1779), 183: 'I think that Mr Baxter's book [i.e. Andrew Baxter, *An enquiry into the nature of the human soul*, 1733 and later editions] has been very much the cause that the *vis inertiae* of the Newtonians, has been so generally confounded with that notion of the passivity of matter, which I take to be common to the Newtonians with the Platonic and Peripatetic Schools'. National Library of Scotland, Monboddo Papers, printed in William Knight, *Lord Monboddo and some of his contemporaries* (London, 1900), 282. For Horsley resistance must be an active power since 'to overcome passivity is to overcome nothing'. *Ibid.*, 282. Reid makes the same distinction in a letter to Lord Kames, 19 May 1780. See Thomas Reid *Works*, ed. Sir William Hamilton (Edinburgh, 1863), 54-56. Horsley also states 'Baxter, I believe, had right notions upon these subjects, but he expressed them with much confusion and perplexity. The resistance of Body consists of this; that the exertion of some force is always necessary to move it when at rest, or to stop it when in motion. Now this resistance, that requires a force to be overcome, is an active resistance, for which there must be some active cause, and it can never be a consequence of the passivity of matter; because to overcome passivity is to overcome nothing'.

Knight, 281. See also John W. Yolton, *Thinking matter: materialism in eighteenth-century Britain* (Oxford, 1983), 99-100. Horsley was unaware of the discussions of this subject such as Rowning's *Compendious system of natural philosophy* (London, 1737-1743) that played a part in the development of Priestley's thought: he nowhere seems to refer to them and they do not appear in the catalogue of his library. Even Priestley's scientific works are absent. Horsley did possess a copy of Boscovich, however.

⁹ Horsley on *Disquisitions*, 5: the annotation is a response to Priestley's assertion 'it is no less obvious, that no such figured thing can exist, unless the parts of which it consists have a mutual attraction, so as either to keep contiguous to, or preserve a certain distance from each other'. Price makes the same point as Horsley at *Free discussion*, 10.

¹⁰ Horsley on *Disquisitions*, 10.

¹¹ Horsley expounded this at length in his copy of his own *Difficulties on the newtonian theory of light considered and removed* (London, 1771) where he made extensive additions in preparation for a second edition which never appeared. (This is in the library of the Royal Society, London, to whom I am grateful for access, Horsley Papers 19(a).) His note reads: '... the general simplicity of Nature leads one to suppose that the Creator hath formed the primordial atoms all of one Magnitude & one figure, & in all respects alike, & that their common figure, is the most simple, & uniform, the same in all its parts'. Horsley contrasts this with corpuscles, so that the particles of light 'can not be supposed to be themselves the first uncompounded atoms'. He cites the differences between particles of different colours and the fact that different sides of the same particle are found 'to possess the opposite properties of attraction and repulsion'.

¹² Horsley on *Disquisitions*, 6.

¹³ Horsley on *Disquisitions*, 24. This is the second part of a note of which the first part reads, 'In answer to this argument against the Impenetrability of Matter, I would first of all ask what is the difference between a physical point invested with an infinite repulsive power, & a solid impenetrable Atom? Much, this acute writer would reply. Impenetrability is a meer negative. Repulsion is action. Matter therefore in repulsing puts forth an active power, & if we find an instance of active power in it, why may we not suppose it capable of others. Why should we deny it that, any of these powers, for which, because they are truly active powers, it has been judged necessary to find another substratum. It is therefore a question of much importance whether the phenomenon of impenetrability be induced by the exertion of a repulsive force or not. That it is not is easily demonstrated. The Author imagines . . .' The second part of the quotation is paralleled by Price *Free discussion*, 44.

¹⁴ Price puts forward a similar repulsion argument in *Free discussion*, 44-45. Cf. also Philaethes Rusticans, i.e. Richard Shepherd, *Reflections on the doctrine of materialism* (London, 1779), 6-7. For Priestley's reluctance to speculate on the internal structure of matter see J.G. McEvoy, 'Joseph Priestley: aerial philosopher' in *Ambix*, 25 (1978), 26, 33-36. The extent to which Priestley was or was not influenced by Boscovich (see R.E. Schofield, 'Joseph Priestley: natural philosopher', *Ambix*, 14 (1967), 1-15) would appear to be irrelevant to Horsley's understanding of his arguments.

¹⁵ See Priestley's argument in *Free discussion*, 17. For an indication of Horsley's views see note 11 above, also his *True nature of centripetal and centrifugal forces* (London, 1767), 7-8, where he refers to gravity as 'an effect wrought on matter by the immediate agency of the Sovereign Mind. . .'. In his letter to Monbodo of 25 February 1780, Horsley, after outlining the principles of the Newtonian philosophy wrote, 'From them Newton descends to the effects wrought in the material world. I endeavour to ascend to the true causes acting in the world of spirit; where alone original activity, and true causes are to be found', William Knight, *Lord Monbodo and some of his contemporaries*, 160, see also, 168-69.

¹⁶ *Disquisitions*, 16-17, 33. The assertion that the faculty of thinking ripens or decays with the body is repeated at 36 where Horsley has written 'denied' in the margin, Horsley insisted that the soul is a simple being and not extended as many eighteenth century thinkers believed. Priestley outlines his version of the history of all this in *Free discussion*, 260-280, pointing out difficulties in any view of an extended spirit. Horsley responds, 'The most coherent argument for a separate soul is the necessity that the thinking being should be a simple being' (278). The rest of a long comment has been irrecoverably obliterated by Horsley. On the argument in *Disquisitions* cf. McEvoy and McGuire, 'God and nature', 384-86.

¹⁷ Horsley on *Disquisitions*, 33-34, Priestley had written, 'Could we, for instance, have had any idea of colour, as red, blue, &c without the eyes, and optic nerves; of sound without the ears, and auditory nerves . . . &c. &c.? Horsley writes, 'Perhaps not (certainly *deleted*) of sensible things without the Senses' followed by the passage quoted. Cf. 33, where Horsley has written, 'denied' against Priestley's assertion that all the ideas possessed by the mind either come through the senses or are consequent on them.

¹⁸ *Disquisitions*, 37.

¹⁹ Horsley on *Disquisitions*, 58 (both passages).

²⁰ Cf. Priestley, *Free discussions*, 52, 'What correspondence can there be between an idea and its archetype, if the archetype consist of parts, and the idea have (sic) no parts'. The arguments here are reiterated elsewhere in Horsley's annotations. Discussing the state of the soul during sleep Priestley wrote '... if the soul think during sleep, where is the repository of the ideas on which it is employed?' Horsley comments, 79, 'What can be this Man's notion of ideas? That they are things to be lock'd up in a corner cupboard with our Plate & China?' Priestley used the word 'repository' again in 93, where Horsley has written 'For repository read cupboard, & the author's question will appear in its true light'. For a discussion of the physiological theories of cognition and action in this period see Yolton, *Thinking matter*, 153-189.

²¹ *Disquisitions*, 45 and Horsley's comments thereon.

²² Samuel Horsley *Providence and free agency* (London, 1778).

²³ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

²⁶ Priestley's 'Letter to Horsley' in *Free discussion*, 214.

²⁷ Cf. D.O. Thomas, *The honest mind* (Oxford, 1977), 160-169, for a discussion of Price in this context. Price is a good deal less dogmatic than Horsley. He allows beings to determine events in some measure by their own choice [see *Free discussion*, 174; *Four dissertations*, 2nd edn. (London, 1768), 94] and is also uncertain about how one explains God's foreknowledge of a contingent event (*Free discussion*, 175-176).

²⁸ Cf. the review of *Providence and free agency* in *Critical Review*, 46 (1778), 75-77.

²⁹ A later comment by Horsley should also be noted. This is written on a sheet inserted before the index in *Free discussion*.

N.B. By Liberty & self determination Dr Priestley understands a power of acting without regard to Motives. Vide pp. 145 & 149. But this is what the assertors of Liberty do no (sic) mean by the Word. If any have asserted the Liberty of Man in this sense they do not deserve a hearing. To act without regard to Motives is inconsistent with the nature of an intelligent Being. We must deny this Liberty to Man, because he is intelligent. And since it is because he is intelligent, that we deny this Liberty to Man we must still more deny it to a Being that is more intelligent. We must most of all deny it to the Being, that is most Intelligent. To the infinitely Wise & good God who always determines himself by Motives of Wisdom & Goodness. By this consideration of what is essentially good & right & of the fitness of things. But shall we say that this perfect being, because he always determines himself according to what is fit & right is not self determin'd; is not free, is not truly an Agent. If we ascribe Liberty (f.2.) & self determination to the Deity notwithstanding (who is *deleted*) that he always determines himself according to Motives why should we deny Liberty & self determination to Man, because he determines himself by Motives. Every thing in the Deity is the most perfect of its kind. His Liberty is the most uncontrolled. The influence of good motives with him the most invariable. The most perfect liberty therefore is consistent with the most certain influence of moral Motives. And Dr Priestley who combats Liberty as incompatible with the influence of Motives, combats only a false Notion of it, which its Assertors disclaim. The true Notion of Liberty is a Power of pursuing the End one most approves or desires by the means one judges the fittest & best for the attainment of it. That it is a power of following Motives without Compulsion not of acting without regard to them.'

³⁰ On all this see John W. Yolton, *Thinking matter*, passim.

³¹ Thus he says, commenting on Monbodo's work, that Newton's system 'terminates in a principal which can never be explained mechanically', Knight, *Lord Monbodo and his contemporaries*, 159. He adds, 'It is an objection of no great moment to say that Newton himself

was not aware of this. The fact is that that great man having once seized some leading principals, was much more inquisitive as to the consequence that might follow from them, than the higher causes on which they might depend', *Ibid.*, 160.

³² Cf. Richard Gifford, *Outlines of an answer to Dr Priestley's disquisitions relating to matter and spirit* (London, 1781); J. Benson, *Remarks on Dr Priestley's system of materialism and necessity* (Hull, 1788).

³³ See Thomas Reid to Richard Price, 10 Apr. 1775 in *The correspondence of Richard Price*, ed. W. Bernard Peach and D.O. Thomas (Cardiff, 1983), I, 194-95.

³⁴ *An essay on the nature and existence of a material world* (London, 1781). This work is dedicated to Price and Priestley. Priestley refers briefly to the work in the second edition of the *Disquisitions* (London, 1782), xxxiii, where he misinterpreted him as an immaterialist. The authorship is a puzzle. The only authority would seem to be Samuel Parr in a note written in his copy of the work and printed in *Bibliotheca Parriana* (London, 1827), 446. 'During the controversy upon materialism between Priestley, Price and others, Priestley met with this book; he was struck with the talents of the writer; he eagerly enquired after him for several years, and at last he was informed that his name was Russel, and that he had left England for the West Indies'. Of the Russells or Russels listed in the *D.N.B.* the only likely possibility would seem to be William Russell (1741-1793), the miscellaneous writer, who visited Jamaica in 1780 for some time.

³⁵ *An essay*, 145. His extended criticism of Priestley may be found on 80ff. A version of the dissipation argument appears at 92-93, confusion between perception and the thing perceived at 100, divisibility of ideas at 102, and the distinction between mind and matter at 109.

³⁶ *Dissertations*, I on extending Newton's *Rules* to 'the most general and comprehensive principles of human knowledge . . .'

³⁷ R.E. Schofield, *Mechanism and materialism: British natural philosophy in an age of reason* (Princeton, 1970), 264.

³⁸ Cf. R.H. Popkin, 'Skepticism and anti-skepticism in the latter part of the eighteenth century' in *The high road to pyrrhonism* (San Diego, 1980), 71.

³⁹ The following notes in *Disquisitions* are not otherwise quoted above:

(1) *Title page*, quotation (in Greek) from Eusebius, VI, c.37.

(2) 11, quotation (4 lines) from Lucretius, I, 423 (recte 422) ff.;

(3) 10, 'The [illegible] of Mr Baxter's hypothesis does not establish the author's';

(4) 36, Priestley, 'that all power of thinking is suspended during a swoon, I conclude with certainty, because no appearance whatever can possibly lead us to suspect the contrary' – Horsley, 'This is talking very superficially';

(5) 36-37, Priestley, 'If the sentient principle in man be immaterial, it can have no *extension* . . . and consequently every thing within it, or properly belonging to it, must be *simple* and *indivisible*'; – Horsley, 'Simple & in its existence indivisible physically it must be';

(6) 38, Priestley, 'To this argument for the extension and materiality of the human soul, the author of *La vraye philosophie* replies, in a manner very singular, and to me not very intelligible' – Horsley, 'Not at all singular but very common among writers with whom this Learned Author I suspect is little acquainted'.

(7) 56, Priestley, 'the very idea of *place*, or *space* . . .' – Horsley, 'The author speaks of the Idea of Place & Space as one. Whereas they are two very different Ideas';

(8) 99, Priestley, 'We are, according to all appearance, just as much fatigued with *thinking* as with *walking*, and to say that it is a *body* only that is fatigued, in this case and not the *mind itself*, is absolutely *gratis dictum*' – Horsley, 'With *thinking* long upon one subject the mind tires, as the body with exercise. But when tired of one subject it takes up a new one & enquires & and is capable of no other rest than that of changing its mode of acting on its object';

(9) 131-32, Priestley, 'It is plain, therefore, that he [i.e. St John, Priestley is citing Revelation xx. 4] saw them not as unembodied souls but as *living men*, after a real resurrection . . .'; – Horsley, 'On the contrary nothing can be more plain than that he saw them as unembodied souls, & saw *the living & the reigning with Christ* [Revelation xx.6] as a thing happening to these souls. He saw them first as unembodied souls. He saw these souls *rise*, i.e. he saw them united to bodies, & thus reembodyed he saw them reign with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead lived not again, were not re-embodied till the 1000 years were ended?'

(10) 329, Priestley, 'It being acknowledged, that we have no authority in the scriptures for addressing ourselves to Christ'; – Horsley, 'The examples of the Apostles and of the holy martyr Stephen no Authority?'

John McLachlan, *Joseph Priestley, man of science, 1733-1804. An iconography of a great Yorkshireman* (Merlin Books, Braunton, Devon, 1983).

One would wish to be able both to welcome and to praise a new iconography of Joseph Priestley in this his 250th anniversary year, particularly since the last one by H.C. Bolton (which McLachlan somewhat unfairly dismisses as 'incomplete' and 'out of date') was published as far back as 1892. A welcome is perhaps possible but praise alas is not. What are we to make of a preface which includes the partly wrong, oversimplified and ill-phrased passage:

Then in August, 1774. . . [Priestley] discovered oxygen, and shortly after the process of photosynthesis. This was the Copernican turn in chemistry, a basic mutation in the development of modern science.

and goes on to call Priestley a 'friend of . . . Lavoisier', a man he met but once and to whom he wrote only one surviving letter – and that a perfunctory one? The booklet usefully updates much of the information in Bolton – the 'Kensington National Portrait Gallery' has moved to the West End, the author's 'Manchester [new] College' from London to Oxford and the Leeds Portrait has resurfaced – and there is interesting new material on provenance, location and, in a couple of cases, probable authorship. However though John Opie did indeed paint a well-known portrait of the *mother* of the future Mrs. Percy Bysshe Shelley, namely Mary Wollstonecraft, her daughter Mary was only ten when Opie died. Maybe another Mrs. Shelley is intended; Percy's mother perhaps, not the future author of *Frankenstein*? And in a book which deplores the surely unusual misspelling of 'Stuart' as 'Stewart' the author should have taken care not to give Humphr(e)y Davy an extra 'e' nor to deprive Charles Wil(l) son Peale of his extra 'l'.

One advantage the present volume holds over Bolton's is the presence of many black and white illustrations but unfortunately these are rendered with very poor contrast so that highlights loom up out of almost total blackness. What is perhaps the best portrait, that by Rembrandt Peale, is not amongst those illustrated and no mention is made of two other surviving versions besides the one in the New York Historical Society. It was this portrait which purportedly served as the model for the recent U.S. commemorative stamp. Looking at these paintings one is forced to admit that, apart from those by Fuseli and Rembrandt Peale, they are in general rather routine works. Surprisingly they often seem to portray totally different persons and one wishes the real Joseph Priestley would stand up (or out) to be recognized. This polymorphism is in striking contrast to the twenty five or so surviving caricatures which were barely mentioned by Bolton and which are alas totally ignored by McLachlan. James Gillray, James Sayers and Isaac Cruikshank were very considerable artists and in spite of their different styles *their*

Priestleys are obviously one and the same man. Paradoxically it might appear that Priestley and his times have survived better in caricature than they have in more formal portraiture.

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Jack Fruchtman, Jr., *The apocalyptic politics of Richard Price and Joseph Priestley: a study in late eighteenth-century english republican millennialism* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Volume 73, Part 4, 1983; available separately), pp. 125.

Political millennialism in England had its heyday at the time of the Civil War. The language of millennialism continued to be used in the latter part of the seventeenth century and in the eighteenth, but historians differ on whether it is to be taken literally or figuratively. The latter opinion seems to be the prevalent one. Dr Jack Fruchtman, in his interesting monograph, goes the other way. He believes that both Priestley and Price took the idea of an imminent millennium quite literally and were continuing a tradition which they received from David Hartley. He says that 'writers like Price and Priestley domesticated the idea of the millennium', meaning that they had abandoned a 'counting of the days' in accordance with biblical prophecy; but he thinks that they nevertheless did expect the millennium to follow close upon the heels of the American and French Revolutions.

Dr Fruchtman, who is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Towson State University, Baltimore, gave readers of this journal a foretaste of his knowledge of Priestley in an article, 'Joseph Priestley and Early English Zionism', which was published in *Enlightenment and Dissent*, no. 2, 1983. The return of the Jews to the Holy Land, after their conversion to Christianity, was one of the features commonly attributed to the millennium. However, this is only a minor factor in Fruchtman's interpretation of the political ideas of Price and Priestley.

His book is the outcome of a PhD dissertation conducted under the aegis of Professor J.G.A. Pocock of the John Hopkins University and is naturally influenced by Pocock's view of a tradition of 'civic humanism' or 'civic virtue', emphasizing the value of liberty and of republicanism. Fruchtman regards the millennialism of Price and Priestley as distinctive in having a 'republican coloration'. He thinks that they should be termed republicans for two reasons in particular. First, they held that 'the people's authority must be made equal to the king's', and secondly, they believed in a balance of the three constituents of political society in accordance with the principles of 'the English ancient constitution' (a Pocockian phrase).

Fruchtman notes that different views can be and have been taken by well-informed scholars. He refers to D.O. Thomas's article on Price, 'Neither Republican nor Democrat' *The Price-Priestley Newsletter*, 1, 1977, and to Isaac Kramnick's 'lucid, and truly brilliant, attack' on the notion of what Kramnick calls 'republican revisionism'. He does not tell us why he nevertheless prefers his own interpretation. No doubt he felt that he had enough on his plate without trying to rebut in detail alternative views of any note. In tracing the history of political ideas it is undoubtedly difficult to say exactly why the evidence justifies a preference for one interpretation over another; but if no attempt is made, the choice looks arbitrary.

Fruchtman points out that there is a tension, almost a contradiction, between the millennialist and republican strands in the political ideology which he attributes to Price and Priestley. The cosmic aspect of their view implies that the course of history is determined by God's plan; the human aspect implies that political change depends on the decisions of active citizens. That tension would remain even if the human aspect of the view were not characterized as republican. The more important question is whether the millennialism is to be taken literally. If it is not, the notion of a divine plan need not imply a strict determination of history. If however, the millennialism is accepted literally, then there is a genuine contradiction between divine determination and human free action.

It is common enough for a religious doctrine to begin as belief in the literal truth of a supposed historical event and then, in the course of time, to turn into a figurative interpretation. We need only think of the interpretation given by many modern Christian churchmen to the doctrines of the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection. Fruchtman notes that Price and Priestley spoke with different voices when wearing different hats. 'In their more formal historical studies and political treatises, they would characteristically use a less explicitly millennial vocabulary', as contrasted with their mode of speech in sermons and theological tracts. This does not imply hypocrisy or a prudent concealment. The language of religious discourse retains traditional imagery even when it is no longer taken literally. So if the two voices were consistently kept for the different hats, one could conclude that the millennialism was figurative. In the case of Priestley, however, this is clearly not so. Fruchtman shows from Priestley's personal letters that he did for a time adopt a figurative understanding of the millennium but then moved firmly back again to a literal acceptance. Fruchtman also provides clear evidence of literal millennialist belief on the part of that earlier clergyman-scientist, David Hartley. Since Priestley was influenced by Hartley in other respects, it is likely enough that he might have followed Hartley in this one too.

It is not clear to me, however, that the same can be said of Price. Unlike Priestley, Price is far removed from Hartley's materialism, associationism, and determinism. Fruchtman does not, so far as I can see, present any definite

evidence for a literal understanding of millennialism on the part of Price, as contrasted with Priestley. He notes a difference between them in that Priestley emphasized the imminent cataclysm while Price tended more to speak in optimistic terms of the messianic age that would follow.

Despite their friendship, Price and Priestley were less close in their philosophical outlook than Fruchtman suggests. He accepts Priestley's conclusion that their dispute on free will and necessity was verbal rather than substantial. I think that Priestley was certainly mistaken about that. In this connection it is perhaps worth observing that the tension of contradiction between millennialism and 'republicanism', which Fruchtman described earlier, ceases to be acute if one takes account of the respective positions of Price and Priestley on the question of determinism. Since Priestley was a determinist, he was not faced with an explicit contradiction between a divine determination of history and the role of human decision understood deterministically. Price, however, thought of himself as a libertarian; there would be a contradiction in his view if he accepted millennialism literally but not if he interpreted it figuratively.

I should perhaps add that there is a slip in Fruchtman's account of Price's epistemology. He says that Price regarded the understanding as 'the source of all ideas'. This is incorrect. Price regarded the understanding as the source of some (very important) ideas, but allowed that the experience of sense and feeling is the source of most ideas. This lapse, however, does not affect the interest and value of Fruchtman's book, whose main concern is with the political ideas of Price and Priestley. On that topic he has certainly presented us with a novel perspective that deserves careful consideration.

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The correspondence of Richard Price Vol. I, July 1748-March 1778, eds. **D.O. Thomas and W. Bernard Peach** (Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, and Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1983) pp. xxviii, 294. £24.

Happy it is when the interests of academics coalesce rather than collide. Such is the case with Peach and Thomas, the one American and the other British. These Price scholars, both pursuing the idea of publishing his correspondence, came together to pool their researches. The result is this first of a promised three volumes, which will bring together for the first time all known letters to and from this eighteenth-century writer in the varied areas of morals, mathematics and politics.

It is not a fat volume. There are only 122 letters, of which sixty-seven are from Price, with only one before he had reached the age of forty. There is

nothing here to shed any light on the writing of his first important work, *A review of the principal questions and difficulties in morals* (1758).

Most of the correspondence – especially with Joseph Priestley – up to the early 1770s concerns Price's scientific interests, and we find him sharply critical of some of Priestley's work in this field. In addition, we have the first known reference, in 1768, to his actuarial and demographic interests which were to mature two years later in his full-blown schemes for Annuities. However, it must be admitted that it is not merely this somewhat dry subject which produced what one historian has called Price's 'usual heavy style': his literary metal was never noted for its polish.

During the 1770s the bulk of the correspondence turns to the rising imperial storm. Some of Price's most interesting exchanges were with Benjamin Franklin, a man whom he 'greatly loved and valued'. Those letters, of course, have already appeared in the definitive Yale edition of Franklin's papers. Among his more regular American correspondents, Price numbered Ezra Stiles, John Winthrop, and, especially, Charles Chauncy. It is fascinating to find old Chauncy of Boston, thirty years on, still grumbling about the theology of Jonathan Edwards, which Chauncy had so forcefully opposed during the time of the 'Great Awakening'. But other than a disagreement over the fate of the reprobate, it was not theological fish that the two men fried during the '70s. Chauncy seemed to believe that he somehow could use Price as a channel through which to persuade the British Government that it would never be able to win in a war against the colonists. In fact, Chauncy himself proved to be Price's most constant source of information about American affairs in the run-up to Independence.

It is in support for American opposition to Parliamentary claims of authority that Price will be remembered by most, and by far the largest number of letters in this volume reveal this unwavering position. Price advised his American correspondents to 'continue firm and unanimous' in this opposition, and he went so far in his letters to America to encourage military victory over British troops. Extracts from at least one of his letters apparently were printed in Massachusetts by one of his correspondents there. A minor web of intrigue is revealed by the fact that some Members of Parliament and civil servants were providing Price with confidential information regarding British strategy, some of which he 'leaked' to his American correspondents. Unsurprisingly, all his English political correspondents were supporters of Pitt, in opposition to the Government of the day.

Price's defence of the American cause is pursued in his exchange of letters with Pitt and, especially, with Shelburne, who – though his own position was less radical than Price's – helped Price to make the final revision of *Observations on the nature of civil liberty*, published early in 1776. This tract generally is recognized today as having been a better statement of American

Revolutionary thought than anything written on the colonial side of the Atlantic.

Price's letters on the American Rebellion reveal an idealized – not to say fanciful – view of America. He makes some breathtakingly inaccurate claims to Pitt regarding freedom of religion in the colonies. Of course, Price's political writing was carried out with just as much an eye on England as on America. 'Indeed,' he wrote, 'the influence of the crown has already in effect subverted liberty here'. This appeared to him to be most clearly illustrated by the failure of his attempt to have removed the requirement for Dissenting ministers to subscribe any of the Thirty-nine Articles. (His own tolerance apparently had its limits, though, and he observed of an organized group of English Dissenters who opposed his plans, that most of them were but 'methodists and persons in the lowest stations'.)

The greatest irony in Price's full-throated (and occasionally misinformed) support of what was happening in the colonies was precisely related to 'liberty'. He may have had to suffer 'a torrent of opposition and abuse from the ministerial writers' for his outspoken written support of the American cause. It is to be wondered, however, how Price would have fared if he had lived in America and had criticized the American Revolutionaries. No such freedom of publication would have been permitted him there.

Peach and Thomas have done a real service for all who are interested in Price and his circle by bringing together these letters, many of them before unpublished. Though the collection is not extensive, there is just enough correspondence to reflect adequately the development of Price's thought in most of the many areas of public and academic pursuits which engrossed a man whose importance in historical eyes has increased markedly over the past generation. There are extensive notes, which – though occasionally over-detailed – certainly assist the reader in his tour round Price. Though the Index is not perfect, taken as a whole the volume is attractively and well produced. With the two further volumes dedicated to the remaining thirteen years of Price's life, we can hope to have an even fuller picture of one of the leading eighteenth century radical thinkers.

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