



Enlightenment and Dissent

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Editorial

After the destruction of his house and laboratory at Birmingham in July 1791, Joseph Priestley went to London and settled with his wife at Hackney. Mr Mike Gray has established that the house they lived in was in what is now called Clapton Passage, just off Lower Clapton Road. The house was demolished in 1883 and now only a remnant of the garden wall remains. During his stay at Hackney and before he and his wife emigrated to America in 1794, Priestley officiated as minister to the Gravel Pit Chapel in succession to Richard Price who had retired from the ministry in February 1791 and who died in the April of that year. In addition to his pastoral duties Priestley also taught at New College, Hackney where Andrew Kippis and Abraham Rees also taught.

During this difficult and dangerous period in his life, when he experienced a great deal of hostility, and despite the fear that the atrocities that had taken place at Birmingham would be repeated in London, Priestley received a great deal of kindness and warmhearted hospitality at Hackney. This generosity of spirit was recently acknowledged by the Greater London Council, not long before its demise, by the authorization of the placing of one of its distinctive blue plaques in Morning Lane to commemorate Priestley's residence at Hackney. The unveiling of the plaque, an account of which by Alastair Ross was published in *The Unitarian* for February 1986, took place on 7 November 1985. The unveiling was performed by the Mayor of Hackney, Councillor Betty Shanks, at a ceremony conducted in the presence of Dr. Jack Barrett, representing the Royal Society of Chemistry, Mr. Alan Ruston, Vice-President of the Unitarian Historical Society, Mr. David Mander, archivist to Hackney Borough, Mr. David Batchelder, Chairman of Hackney Society, the Rev'd John Robbins and a gathering of several other distinguished persons with an interest in Priestley's life and work.

To those who are mindful of the immense contribution made by Priestley to science, to theology, and to the cause of Rational Dissent, it is very encouraging that those in authority at Hackney should have undertaken to keep his name before the public in this way, and it is to be hoped that other centres with Priestley connections will be stimulated to follow their example.

In the editorial in our previous issue we thanked those who had made a special financial contribution in support of the journal. We now have pleasure in adding the name of Professor Martin P. Golding, former Chairman of the Department of Philosophy at Duke University.

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

IDEOLOGY AND THE ENGLISH JACOBINS: THE CASE OF JOHN THELWALL*

Geoffrey Gallop

It is surprising, perhaps, that with all the contemporary interest in English Jacobinism¹ so little should have been written about John Thelwall, particularly when one thinks of the considerable literature that has now built up on the other radicals of his generation. From his journey into radical politics in 1790, when he campaigned for Horne Tooke in the Westminster elections, to his 'retirement' from active politics in 1797 he devoted all his energies to the radical cause. At important moments in its life he was a leading member of the London Corresponding Society and despite a slight speech impediment he was a speech-maker and public lecturer of quality and courage. The belief in free speech being a central element in his politics he went to great lengths to defend it, even after the passage of the infamous Two Acts in 1795. With Thomas Hardy and Horne Tooke he had been unsuccessfully tried for High Treason in the preceding year. During these years of intense activity he was one of the movement's leading theorists, attempting to define its objectives and work out a coherent and politically viable strategy for their fulfillment. Thelwall has also aroused some interest as a literary figure, being a novelist and poet with personal and intellectual connections with William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.²

There is one important, book-length study of Thelwall's politics, that of Charles Cestre, published in 1906.³ Cestre's study is a reliable and useful introduction on which contemporary scholarship has rested its case. He also makes reference to six manuscript volumes of letters, notes and outlines of intended lectures collected by Thelwall himself and now apparently lost. These references tell us a great deal about Thelwall's perception of the economic changes gathering pace in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. There is also an article which deals with the influence of William Godwin's ideas on Thelwall's general theory of man and society⁴ and an unpublished thesis which focuses on his literary endeavours but also outlines the nature of his political position in general terms.⁵ It is with Thelwall the theorist of English Jacobinism in the 1790s that I am concerned in this paper. I hope to complement Cestre's study by taking a more detailed look at Thelwall's politics. How did he describe the context within which the radicals struggled? What was his programme of political, social and economic reform and what were the beliefs that underpinned it? What was his account of the methods that were to be used to achieve these reforms?

I

Thelwall characterized the eighteenth-century constitution as a 'usurped oligarchy'.⁶ He maintained that the 1688 Revolution had abolished the claims of divine right and proved that sovereignty ultimately lay with the people but had not established the constitution on a proper, corruption-free basis.⁷ Consequently 'influence', operating both within and without Parliament had enabled a clique of 'rotten-borough mongers' to establish themselves as the effective rulers of the nation, even at the expense of the King who was said to be a 'puppet' in their hands.⁸ He identified the great landed proprietors and 'the political intriguers and parasites' who had amassed wealth and position through the basest prostitution as the two classes of rotten-borough monger.⁹ Through its effective control of Parliament this clique was able to feather its nest by way of the Corn Laws, the facilitation of easy enclosure,¹⁰ and the provision of places, pensions and general patronage. A symbiotic relationship grew up between the Ministry and the borough-mongers:

... taxes are levied to buy up the borough-mongers, and then the borough-mongers vote for fresh taxes, to reward the Minister and his dependents.¹¹

At one and the same time, then, he writes as if political power is a reflection of economic power and a self-perpetuating parasitism over and above the nation at large. Thelwall would have been attracted to E. P. Thompson's characterization of the eighteenth-century state as 'Old Corruption', an essentially 'unique formation'.¹²

Thelwall did note that within this ruling elite there were warring factions organized along party lines as 'ins' and 'outs'. The struggle between Whig and Tory since the Restoration was, he claimed, 'nothing more than a struggle which of the combinations of aristocratic families should grasp the government of the country into their own hands'.¹³ Party was a means to this end only and would have no place in a reformed polity. The 'fruits of liberty, truth, and justice', he said, would not grow from 'the rotten, blasted bough of party'.¹⁴ Consequently he warned his fellow radicals to be wary of any 'outs' who became involved in the reform movement. They may try to sidetrack the popular movement into working for narrow, party-based ends. In particular, he was suspicious of Parliamentary Whigs like Fox, Sheridan and Grey and consistently rejected proposals to water down the radical reform programme in the interests of unity with moderates.¹⁵

Like the other radicals Thelwall saw power as a corrupting influence on its possessor. Thus 'instead of enlarging the boundaries of freedom in proportion to the improved intellect of man' contemporary statesmen were led to 'resist that improvement by contracting them within narrower spaces'.¹⁶ Should the

Two Acts be passed by Parliament, he said (on the eve of their passage), only trial by jury would stand between Britain and absolute despotism.¹⁷ He accused Pitt and Dundas of assuming the 'power and pomp of royalty' as they prepared their 'counter-revolution' against the principles and advantages of 1688, as limited as they were.¹⁸

Thelwall's politics was underpinned by the belief that, despite external appearances, the eighteenth-century state was decaying from within. 'It is the nature of corruption', he argued, 'to eat itself up'.¹⁹ Two interconnected processes were said to be at work: first, an intensification of the degree of poverty and inequality and, secondly, the exhaustion of the productive sector of the economy, the sole source of taxation for the government. He thought it inevitable that the country would experience an economic and political crisis at some point in the future.

The condition of the labouring poor ('the peasants in the field' and 'the manufacturers in the workshop'²⁰) and increasingly that of the middling orders was, he said, becoming desperate. The root cause of the problem was to be found in the tax system which was designed to shift the burden of taxation onto the shoulder of those least able to pay.²¹ Crippling levels of taxation were needed to feed the corruption at the centre of political life, to fight the war (itself linked with corruption²²) and to pay the interest on an ever-expanding National Debt. Thelwall estimated that if the expenses of government were nil then *twice* the current level of wages could be paid to the labourers.²³ Increasingly the middling orders were feeling the pinch of taxation as well:

It is in their [the oligarchy's] interest to have but two classes, the very high and the very low, that those they may oppress may be kept at too great a distance — and in too much ignorance to be enabled to seek redress.²⁴

The feudal-based tithes ('unjust and dreadful clogs upon agricultural improvement'²⁵) and the poor rates which were particularly hard on the small property-holders also came in for special criticism.²⁶

Monopoly in the production and trading sectors of the economy had an important role to play in that it allowed the wealthy to pass on tax increases in the form of higher prices and to exploit their market power to keep prices at artificially high levels. He specifically mentioned the corn and fish markets as being subject to monopoly influence.²⁷ The economic and legal power of the monopolists in relation to their employees made it easy for them to keep wages at unacceptably low levels. High levels of unemployment (brought about by trade depression or labour-saving machinery) and the undermining of sources of economic independence for rural workers through rampant enclosure acted to reduce the bargaining power of the workers.²⁸ Thelwall also waxed indignant

at the system which allowed merchants, wholesale dealers, and manufacturers to monopolize supply and fix prices as they pleased 'while mechanics that enter into associations to appreciate their own labour are sentenced like felons to a gaol'.²⁹

Following the line of argument commonly used in radical circles³⁰ Thelwall pointed to the future collapse of this system of monopoly, corruption and oppression. It was believed that the essentially unproductive superstructure of corruption and war was growing at the expense of the productive base of the economy. Declining population levels³¹ and economic decay were the realities, concealed from view by the inflationary effects of paper money. Increasingly it was a system which emphasized consumption (for the few) and neglected production by acting against the dynamic and wealth creating middle class. Quite literally, then, it was a system 'preying upon its own vitals'.³² Without doubt, claimed Thelwall, the limits of taxable capacity and a bankruptcy crisis were close at hand.

The bankruptcy crisis would be characterized politically, wrote Thelwall, by the break up of the alliance between the stockholders and the rotten-borough mongers as the latter would no longer be able to pay for corruption and the interest on the National Debt.³³ He saw great dangers in the situation and spoke of the possibility of a 'war of monied alarmists' as stockholders were driven to panic by the threat of poverty.³⁴ At the same time (or before) the common people, rendered ignorant and desperate by poverty, may be driven to violent and undisciplined upheaval.³⁵ Thelwall was particularly fearful of an explosion from below led and manipulated by unprincipled demagogues and paving the way for some new and more terrible form of tyranny. He warned his radical friends:

Trust not your hopes to a blind fatality. Repose not in the indolent expectation, that the corruption of the system will work its own cure. That corruption will, I believe, inevitably destroy itself: But the destruction of the tyranny is not, of necessity, the emancipation of the slave. Almost all are tyrants when they have the power; and the being, or the nation, that knows not how to maintain its freedom, when one yoke is broken, will find that another is prepared.³⁶

He saw his task as that of defining a strategy for the radical movement that would be constitutional but radical, peaceful but effective. For this he needed a programme and a conception of the methods to be used.

II

In *theory* Thelwall was a Paineite republican. He repeated the argument that

direct democracy was only suitable for small states and that in large states some form of representative democracy was necessary. Popular election to the legislature was both a matter of right and of utility:

... laws to be binding upon all, should consult the benefit of all, and that laws to benefit all, must be made by the consent and appointment of all.³⁷

What the ancients call 'aristocracy' or government by the widest and best would result. If the judgement of the people proved mistaken annual elections would enable them to make a quick correction.³⁸ All moral and intellectual distinctions, said by Thelwall to be 'the foundations of all real honour', were neither 'heritable nor transferable'.³⁹ In a democratic republic the people not only possessed the right to choose representatives but also to cashier them for misconduct. This right also existed in relation to all officers and magistrates who by their arbitrary proceedings or corrupt practices impeded the due execution of the law.⁴⁰

In *practice*, however, Thelwall was not a democratic republican. He would, he said, only adopt such a position if he were drafting a constitution for a newly established state. In England, on the other hand, there already existed a constitution and a tradition of constitutional thought and practice. The radicals should work within that tradition 'not because Englishmen should prefer what is English . . . but because in *England* there is a constitution established, which, if realized by a fair representation of the people, is capable of securing the happiness of the nation: and having a decided abhorrence of tumult and violence, I reprobate the man who would plunge into commotion for speculative opinions'.⁴¹ Paineism, despite its intellectual coherence and attractiveness, needed to be rejected. It was as if the framework within which politics should be understood was pre-determined.

The English Constitution, Thelwall asserted, was a democracy admitting of some aristocracy in the legislature and adopting an hereditary chief magistrate as the executive; in other words a *limited* democracy.⁴² The King was to possess executive power only, the right of making and altering laws to be vested in the Lords and Commons. Consequently he stressed the importance of using the word 'king' rather than 'monarch', the latter implying too much power.⁴³ He acknowledged that in Anglo-Saxon times⁴⁴ the King was chosen from the same family but wisdom being the primary criterion for decision the eldest son was not always chosen. Not until 1688 did the office become hereditary and even then under conditions. This was done to avoid the dissension and commotion associated with the office throughout English history. Thelwall endorsed this decision to make the throne hereditary.⁴⁵ However, as Joseph Priestley argued in an anonymous tract, the commotion surrounding the crown only existed because of the powers it possessed.⁴⁶ Given the severe limitation of powers

which the radicals intended for the office it was possible to re-open the debate about election. Apparently Thelwall regarded it as unnecessary and/or provocative to propose elections for the chief magistrate. It was in keeping with his view that the rotten borough-mongers, not George III were the real usurpers.

For the hereditary executive and aristocratic participation in the legislation to be acceptable it was essential that the Commons be independent and democratically elected. Cheap government, the absence of placemen and pensioners in the Commons, universal manhood suffrage and annual elections would ensure that the Commons could never be managed or controlled by a minister or that parties or factions could dominate its proceedings.⁴⁷ The Commons could then be transformed into a real legislature (and controller of supply), each individual making up his mind as to what best served the general good, the opinion of the majority carrying the day.⁴⁸ There is no indication that Thelwall expected or desired the people's representatives to be subject to the instructions of their constituents.

To back up these political changes it would be necessary to establish a citizen's militia under the control of the people and with officers chosen from the district from which they came. In this way every citizen would be a soldier and every soldier a citizen.⁴⁹ In such a system with a democratic army and democratic Commons 'even the vices of mankind shall have no longer power to hurt us'.⁵⁰

Thelwall stressed that these reforms were minimum conditions for a corruption-free constitution. 'Be not deluded by half-way measures', he told his followers, 'he who recommends a mid-way path, between right and wrong, means to make you the instruments of his own ambitious views'.⁵¹ Thus he was always an opponent of attempts to water down the radical programme in the interests of 'unity' and 'realism'. Moderation, he said, did not mean the sacrifice of principle but the 'determination to weigh and consider every sentiment before you adopt it, to be inflamed by no factitious principles, to be misled by no party attachments, but to do that which is just, and never more; always taking care that we do not let violence and intemperance snatch from our hands the reins of reason'.⁵²

One cannot help but note a real tension in Thelwall's writings between his republican beliefs and his acceptance of the Lords. The Commons he called 'the democracy of the country'. Being the representative arm of the people it was without doubt the most important part of the legislature. Our ancestors, he wrote, only '*imagined*' (not believed or argued) that their democracy would work better with an aristocratic appendage. When it came to describing the Lords he could not resist a lampoon:

It is . . . very well known that, by Lords we mean a certain number of individuals walking, like other men, upon two legs; but, unlike other men, decorated with stars and garters, and such other ornaments, as you might have seen represented in gingerbread, a few days ago, at Bartholomew Fair.⁵³

At no time, however, did he advocate either its abolition or a limitation of its powers in the Parliament. Up to a point he thought it necessary to compromise with what was seen to be a *given* political culture. He was perfectly happy to live with any ambiguities which resulted provided they increased the possibility of success for his strategy of peaceful and radical reform. He wrote: 'The welfare of mankind is my object, not particular modes or shapes of constitutions'.⁵⁴

III

Thelwall's programme of social and economic reform was underpinned by a commitment to equality; not, he explained, equality of property but equality of opportunity for self-advancement:

. . . man has inalienable rights, and that one human being has just a title to improve his faculties for himself and family as another.⁵⁵

It followed, therefore, that all had a right to work and to a fair return for their labour. In civilized countries this meant a right to the necessities of life, some comforts and enjoyments as well as a tolerable degree of leisure.⁵⁶ To achieve this end reforms in the current distribution of property and power were required. It was monopoly power in production and distribution, not private property and the market which Thelwall attacked. 'It is one thing to place a barrier round property', he noted, 'another to put property in the scale against the welfare, and the independence of the people'.⁵⁷

His opposition to doctrines of 'equalization of property' (or 'levelling' as it had come to be known⁵⁸) was stated forcefully. In the first place it would result in '*massacres and assassinations*' and lead not to equalization but to '*a new order of nobility, more insufferable, because more ignorant and ferocious, than those whom their daggers had supplanted*'.⁵⁹

In the second place certain distinctions of property were necessary as an incentive to activity and improvement and therefore in the interests of the community at large.⁶⁰ Equality of rights, not property, was his motto. We need to record, however, that his opposition to 'equalization' was always historically qualified; it being only impossible or undesirable *given the current state of opinion and intellect*.

As B.S. Allen has noted there are definitely shades of Godwinism here. What Thelwall did not do, however, is make any utopian projections as Godwin did in Book VIII of *Political Justice*:

The impression is that his procedure is dictated by his interest in practical measures and a policy of wise caution rather than by disbelief in any of Godwin's radical conclusions.⁶¹

In fact Thelwall does say that a society in which there were 'imperceptible gradations of rank' was, in the present period, a perfectly practicable substitute for the golden age of equality.⁶²

Not only did he encourage the radicals to take their politics beyond a crude form of egalitarianism but he also urged them to question any agrarian fundamentalism, still a major tendency in eighteenth-century opinion.⁶³ It is true that in his *Peripatetic* (1793), written in the form of a travel journal, agrarianism and anti-modernism were central elements. For example commerce was linked directly with war, luxury and inequality.⁶⁴ However, after 1795 it was not modernism *as such* which he criticized but the *particular shape* it was taking. Enclosures were said to be acceptable so long as they were productive of extra output and were conducted on 'fair and honest principles'.⁶⁵ Similarly the spread of manufactories was not necessarily harmful to the individual and inappropriate for the reformed polity as it was possible to ensure that working and living conditions in manufacturing areas were at acceptable levels.⁶⁶ He was particularly critical of those town-based intellectuals (of whom, he admitted, he had been an example) who accepted the picture of rural felicity presented in novels and pastorals of the period. In reality, he said, the domestic system and rural labour generally was productive of little return; material, moral and intellectual.⁶⁷ Indeed wages in manufacturing areas tended to be higher⁶⁸ and manufactories encouraged the progress of learning and liberty by bringing people together:

Man is, by his very nature, social and communicative — proud to display the little knowledge he possesses, and eager, as opportunity presents, to encrease his store. Whatever presses men together, therefore, though it may generate some vices, is favourable to the diffusion of knowledge, and ultimately promotive of human liberty. Hence every large workshop and manufactory is a sort of political society, which no act of parliament can silence, and no magistrate disperse.⁶⁹

International trade and commerce, if uncorrupted by monopoly and speculation, helped do away with national prejudices and hereditary notions of status as well as allowing all parts of the globe to benefit from the knowledge of the rest.⁷⁰

Nor was Thelwall worried by the 'luxury' which economic progress would bring. 'I think it a very good thing', he wrote, 'that a country should be adorned with splendid edifices, magnificent paintings, books to inform the mind, and divergences and indulgences to relax and soften it'.⁷¹ Note, however, that Thelwall is talking partly about communal and partly about personal enrichment as a *means* to a good life. He was no defender of what we would call 'consumerism'. In fact he specifically attacked 'speculation commerce' in which commodities are produced or accumulated in the hope of exciting artificial wants and increasing consumption.⁷² It was to be a measured form of progress:

There can be no liberty where there is not a simplicity of manners, a fortitude of character and a pure and generous system of morality.⁷³

To summarize then: Thelwall saw no merit in an unqualified egalitarianism and agrarianism. Wage labour, enclosures, foreign trade, factories and some degree of accumulation all should have a place in the reformed society. The only questions were: To what degree? Under what conditions? These he tried to answer by way of a programme of social and economic reform.

Tax reform and cheap government were seen by Thelwall to be at the centre of any reform package. The abolition of tithes and the end of the old system of poor relief would do much to take part of the tax burden off the backs of the productive classes.⁷⁴ Of the system of poor relief he wrote: 'Would it not be more *just* and more *wise* to put the great mass of the people upon such a footing as to enable them to maintain themselves and their families by their own labour'.⁷⁵ He wanted to encourage the labouring poor to be independent and industrious not dependent and immobile. Only with cheap and honest government, however, would real tax reform be possible. He proposed the abolition of pensions, the abrogation of sinecures and the reduction of salaries of all officers of the state to reasonable levels.⁷⁶ This would, he said, do much to relieve the suffering of wage labourers and cheapen the costs of capital. This would make it easier for small farmers, traders and manufacturers to expand and develop their businesses.⁷⁷

Private property in the land and manufacturing means of production would be preserved but primogeniture would need to be abolished to encourage a wider spread of property through the community.⁷⁸ In the interests of lower rents, increased competition in the market-place and more social equality in general he also thought that a reformed Parliament may find it necessary to consider limiting farm sizes to 200 acres. He also proposed that some of the revenue released by cheap government could be used for waste land development, the land to be parcelled out in lots of 80 to 100 acres to the industrious poor. Such a programme, he claimed, would provide independent livelihoods for fifty thousand families and would compensate them for any loss

of common rights.⁷⁹ Landowners, he said, were only 'trustees of the community' who earned their rents by way of proper 'management' of their estates.⁸⁰ Thelwall believed that the measures he advocated would encourage such management and ensure that the rewards of agricultural production were spread right through the agricultural community without a loss of efficiency.

If wage labour was to be justifiable the labourer should receive, asserted Thelwall, a share of the final product not merely equal to that which is necessary to support him and family but 'proportionate to the profits of his employer'. Capital, he reminded the employing class, could 'never be productive' without the labourers to work it.⁸¹ He attacked the laws which restricted the labourers' bargaining rights in relation to wages and working conditions. In an economy in which the rights and economic power of the workers were established progress in knowledge and the useful arts could be applied to industry so that leisure (rather than unemployment and dependence) was increased.⁸² The abolition of all trading monopolies and the establishment of price competition in product markets would ensure that wage rises could not be undermined by unacceptable price rises.

Finally, and importantly, he advocated the establishment of schools for the education of *all* ranks of life and comprehensive legal reforms so that delays would be curtailed, expenses diminished and uncertainties avoided.⁸³ Each parent had a right, he said, to give each of his children an education which would 'enable them, if they should have the virtue and the talent, to improve their condition, and mount to their intellectual level — though it should be from lowest to the very highest station of society'.⁸⁴

IV

Central to Thelwall's politics was a clearly defined account of the transition that was to bring radical reform, constitutional and peaceful but radical and effective. The English Constitution was assumed to contain the means for its own alteration, which for many of the late eighteenth-century radicals meant *restoration*. To work within the English tradition then was not to doom one's politics to conservatism. 1688 was seen as a vindication of radical aims in that it 'proved, by practice, as well as by theory, that the only legitimate source of government is the approbation of the people'.⁸⁵ Associations of the people urging constitutional reform were not, therefore, unpatriotic and illegitimate in the English tradition.

The conservative argument that radicalism, terror, and revolution were bed partners was not ignored but challenged. The terror of the French Revolution, wrote Thelwall, was not part of its principles but the result of the particularly

oppressive nature of the regime being replaced (the monstrous oppression and cruelty staying in the people's memories and leading to a spirit of revenge), the existence of factions and parties within the revolutionary movement, and finally the provocations of the British Cabinet which led to fear and apprehension in France.⁸⁶ Thus personal animosity, malevolence and revenge were allowed to interfere with what was essentially a progressive development. '*Marat and Robespierre*', he wrote, 'were no more to be regarded as integral parts of *the new principles of France*, than *Pitt and Dundas* as parts of *the old principles of England*'.⁸⁷ He did believe, however, that the destruction of the Bastille, the opposition of the people to the interference of foreign mercenaries, and the defence of the Constituent Assembly were all 'acts of salvation, to which France owes what she yet possesses of liberty'.⁸⁸ Resolution in the face of opposition and even violence were legitimate weapons if necessary in the defence of rights and liberties but 'not one blow for vengeance' was ever justifiable.⁸⁹

The appeal to English exceptionalism was a constant theme in Thelwall's writings. A certain degree of space was still said to exist within the Constitution and this made a legal strategy possible. Nor had the degree of oppression — political and economic — yet reached the point where the people would be driven to violence and vengeance:

... no part of the excesses which have rent and convulsed the devoted land of *France* need be dreaded in *England*: for the causes of those excesses do not exist among us.⁹⁰

To ensure that this would be the case, however, civil and political liberty would need to be preserved and the popular movement well led, organized, knowledgeable and disciplined. The natural constituency for such a movement would be the labouring poor and the middling orders crushed under the weight of taxation. Only by organizing the people and restraining the Government could the French example be avoided.

Leadership was the first requirement. For example he described the Sheffield '*sans-culotte*' as a body without a head, badly in need of men and property and influence to lead them.⁹¹ But as we have seen when noting his attitude to the Whigs, he was very distrustful of any men who would seek to lead the movement but who were not believers in *radical* reform. Good leadership was needed to encourage moderation in approach. 'The enthusiasm of *principle*', said Thelwall, needed to be joined with the 'sacred love of *peace* and *order*'.⁹² To educate and instruct men in the principles of justice, he believed, was also to humanize them. This was particularly important given the tendency of poverty to drive men to violence. Thelwall consistently attacked all forms of direct action fuelled by traditional notions of moral economy as they encouraged vengeance and diverted attention from the system to individuals.⁹³ It was in the

context of these views that Thelwall felt so aggrieved by Godwin's attack on him as an 'impatient and headlong reformer'.⁹⁴

The movement needed to be organized, right from the locality up to some form of National Convention⁹⁵ which could act as the collective voice of the disenfranchised nation. This body of men would need to be united around the central demands of universal suffrage and annual parliaments. One of the problems with the 1649 revolution, he observed, was that the vast body of the people behind it had little comprehension of what they were doing, an 'active spirit of fanaticism' more than anything else prompting them to act. This allowed the 'ambitious usurper' Oliver Cromwell to take power.⁹⁶ An enlightened and united movement, free of factionalism and clear about its objectives could avoid such an eventuality. Thelwall's hope was that as the movement grew larger the moral, political and economic legitimacy of the existing system would decline, the threat or fact of national bankruptcy convincing 'tens of thousands of virtuous families, whose *well-earned* competence is now vested in government securities' that radical reform was needed.⁹⁷

Under the pressure of organized opinion and in the face of bankruptcy it was believed that the oligarchy would 'fly abashed from their lofty situations, and leave the reformation of abuses, and the regeneration of our Constitution, to more honest and more able hands'.⁹⁸ With their massive following and their clearly articulated programme of reform the radicals were expected to provide the solutions which Parliament could implement. Should the oligarchy attempt to fight back the revolutionary option was always there for the radicals. Thelwall never specifically precluded it. Nor, however, did he positively advocate it as he believed there were great dangers in any insurrectionary situation. The heat and fury necessarily generated, he argued, reduced the candour, moderation and disposition to tolerate opposition so necessary to peaceful political change.⁹⁹ Unfortunately, there were situations when reformers had little choice. Either they would perish by the thousands or fight force with force: 'Such was the case in many a nation — in Genoa — in Switzerland — in Holland *twice* — in America; and such was the case in France'. However, to enlist support from overseas was never justified:

... no country can have freedom, which cannot obtain it for itself; and that *foreign interference can only at best, produce a change of masters.*¹⁰⁰

What is clear from Thelwall's writings, then, is a preference for a peaceful and what he also saw to be a constitutional transition. For such a strategy to work freedom of association, speech and publication were essential as reason and moderation could only spread in an atmosphere of freedom and openness. At even the cost of one's life, he occasionally argued, it was necessary to defend

these most basic elements in the English Constitution. It was in this context that he proposed to the L.C.S. in 1794 that they call a secret 'General Convention of the People' if and when the Government landed foreign troops and suspended Habeas Corpus¹⁰¹. On whether or not he saw this simply as a means of keeping alive the opposition or the first stage in a process of revolutionary confrontation is not altogether clear. Certainly Thelwall's rhetoric at the time was highly charged and provocative¹⁰² but there is no hard evidence that plans for a revolutionary struggle existed in the L.C.S. It is not surprising, then, that Thelwall (as well as Hardy and Tooke) were acquitted on charges of High Treason brought against them by the Government. For nearly two years after the trial Thelwall could still see hope for the radical reformers, even after the passage of the Two Acts. However, a tour of the provinces lecturing on classical history finally convinced him that popular opinion was against the reformers. Rather than struggle on in the hostile atmosphere as many of his radical colleagues did¹⁰³ or turn to the revolutionary underground then emerging¹⁰⁴ he retired to the country to concentrate on his literary endeavours. Besides a brief excursion into radical politics in 1818 his life until his death in 1834 was devoted to other causes, the most important of which was the development of a cure for speech defects.

V

Thelwall can be seen carrying on the tradition of radical reformist politics which had emerged in England during the 1770's.¹⁰⁵ Belief in the existence of an English Constitution and tradition of constitutional thought and practice, the stress on radical reform as restoration, and the call for association and eventually national convention were all central elements. Like them as well he saw the looming bankruptcy crisis as the key to radical hopes of reform. Without reform along radical lines it was feared that revolution and possibly a new and frightening form of tyranny would be established in Britain. In one sense, then, Thelwall was an important standard bearer for the earlier radicals in the new conditions of the 1790's. However, in two important senses he took the argument further in ways that indicate the more aggressive and artisanal nature of radicalism in the years of the French Revolution.

In the first place there was to be no compromise on the radical programme of universal manhood suffrage and annual parliaments. This commitment to equal representation was thought to be non-negotiable by the small traders, artisans and working people who composed the popular political societies which emerged in the 1790's. The earlier radicals were happy to accept the case for universal manhood suffrage in theory but few dared suggest it as the basis for political reform in the contemporary period. In rejecting universal manhood suffrage Granville Sharp wrote:

We know not what would be the effects of it; probably *they would be good*: but we ought to walk in a trodden path and build on sure foundations.¹⁰⁶

The artisanal radicals, on the other hand, Thelwall included, articulated the claims of the common people to a place in the English Constitution in a direct and forceful way and looked forward to the day in which the aristocratic and monarchical elements of the constitution would be unnecessary. At the same time, however, they made it clear that the direct entry of the common people into the political nation required that they be aware of their duties as well as their rights, the whole point of democratic politics being that it allowed for the peaceful reconciliation of the many conflicts that existed within society.

In the second place he saw political reform as a preliminary to wide ranging social and economical reforms which would protect the small traders, farmers and manufacturers and uplift the wage labouring class within the newly emergent commercial society. It was the right to work and to receive a fair share of the final product which he stressed, along with the right to self-advancement by means of education or enterprise. Here again he was articulating the values and aspirations of the artisans who saw themselves opposed by an unproductive, wasteful and autocratic state intimately related to the wealthiest landowners, merchants and manufacturers.¹⁰⁷ The earlier radicals were aware of the need for social and economic reform but focused more directly on the political question. For them an 'open hierarchy' with cheap and honest government would be sufficient to secure the nation from social decay and establish 'equality of rights'. For the artisanal radicals there was an immediacy and urgency in their case for social and economic as well as political reform. For them the radical movement had to be quite consciously a movement of and for the wage labourers and middling orders against the monopolists of political, social and economic power. It was believed that in an expanding commercial society unfettered by monopoly and corruption and underpinned by genuinely 'equal laws' both the wage labourers and middling orders could prosper and intermingle. It was by way of thinkers such as Thelwall that the older traditions of radical thought and practice were taken up and sharpened in the light of the interests of the artisans who had come to provide the core of the radical movement.¹⁰⁸

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* My thanks to John Dinwiddy and Michael Durey for comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

¹ See E. P. Thompson, *The making of the English working class* (rev. edn. Harmondsworth, 1968); Gwyn A. Williams, *Artisans and sans-culottes: popular movements in France, and Britain during the French Revolution* (London, 1968); C. B. Cone, *The English Jacobins: reformers in late eighteenth century England* (New York, 1968); C. Bonwick, *English radicals and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N. C. 1977); H. T. Dickinson, *Liberty and property: political ideology in eighteenth-century Britain* (London, 1977), chs. 6-7; and Albert Goodwin, *The friends of liberty: The English democratic movement in the age of the French Revolution* (London, 1979).

² In later life Thelwall questioned the reliability of Coleridge's own account of his youthful politics. See B. R. Polling, 'John Thelwall's marginalia in a copy of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*', *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, vol. 74 (1970), 73-94.

³ *John Thelwall: a pioneer of democracy and social reform in England during the French Revolution* (London, 1906).

⁴ B. S. Allen, 'William Godwin's influence upon John Thelwall', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, vol. 37 (1922), 662-682.

⁵ V.O. Grumblin, *John Thelwall: romantick and revolutionist*. (University of New Hampshire, Ph.D., 1977).

⁶ *The Tribune, a periodical publication consisting chiefly of the political lectures of J. Thelwall*, 3 vols. (London 1795-6), II, 218.

⁷ *Tribune*, III, 96. Besides setting up the system of corruption the Glorious Revolution led to the beginning of the much maligned National Debt and the involvement of England in the system of continental alliances, *ibid.*, 97. On the background see H. T. Dickinson, 'The eighteenth-century debate on the "Glorious Revolution"', *History*, vol. 61 (1974), 28-45.

⁸ *Tribune*, III, 204.

⁹ *Tribune*, II, 374.

¹⁰ Thelwall saw the benefits of enclosure if they were conducted on the right principles. Unfortunately, however, they had become a means by which large proprietors monopolized the land and gained control over supply. *Ibid.*, 375-76.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 379.

¹² E. P. Thompson, 'The peculiarities of the English', in *The poverty of theory and other essays* (London, 1978), 49.

¹³ *Tribune*, I, 206.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 221. On the gradual acceptance of party in eighteenth-century political thought see Caroline Robbins, "'Discordant Parties': a study in the acceptances of party by Englishmen", *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 73 (1958), 505-529.

¹⁵ *Tribune*, I, 213-14. On Thelwall and the Whigs see Cestre, *John Thelwall*, 167-170.

¹⁶ *Tribune*, I, 263-64.

¹⁷ *Tribune*, III, 161.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁰ *Tribune*, I, 44.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 39-40. On taxation in eighteenth-century Britain see Peter Mathias and Patrick O'Brien, 'Taxation in Britain and France, 1715-1810. A comparison of the social and economic incidence of taxes collected for the central governments', *Journal of European Economic History*, vol. 5 (1976), 601-650.

²² 'War', said Thelwall, 'has become necessary for patronage, and revenue — for the creation of fresh places, pensions, dependencies, agencies, contracts, commissaryships and the like. Hence war has been found the best trade and merchandise that a minister can deal in', *Tribune*, III, 28-29.

²³ *Tribune*, I, 39.

²⁴ *Tribune*, II, 234.

²⁵ *Tribune*, I, 201.

²⁶ *Tribune*, II, 378.

- ²⁷ Ibid., 64-68, 73-75.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p. 64-68 and *The right of nature against the usurpations of establishments . . .*, 2 parts (London, 1796), II, 89.
- ²⁹ *The natural and constitutional rights of Britons to annual parliaments and universal suffrage . . .* (London, 1795), 42.
- ³⁰ Chiefly by Richard Price. See his *Funds. A just and impartial view of the funds of England, showing the consequence of a public bank, being at the disposal of any minister, with a full clear prediction of the bursting of the great national bubble*. (London, 1795). Cf. Richard Price, *Observations on the nature of civil liberty* (London, 1776), 70-87.
- ³¹ Emigration to the U. S. A., war and poverty were said to be the causes of a declining population, *Tribune*, I, 56-57. The population question was hotly debated in eighteenth-century Britain. See James Bonar, *Theories of population from Raleigh to Arthur Young* (London, 1931).
- ³² *Tribune*, III, 83.
- ³³ *Tribune*, II, 144-46.
- ³⁴ *Tribune*, I, 41.
- ³⁵ *Tribune*, III, 139.
- ³⁶ *Rights of nature*, I, 88-89.
- ³⁷ *Tribune*, III, 250.
- ³⁸ *Tribune*, II, 210.
- ³⁹ *Sober reflections on the seditious and inflammatory letter of the right honourable E. Burke . . .* (London, 1796), 44.
- ⁴⁰ *Tribune*, I, 197.
- ⁴¹ *Tribune*, III, 359.
- ⁴² *Tribune*, II, 213.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 217-18.
- ⁴⁴ Thelwall occasionally used the rhetoric of Anglo-Saxon perfectionism and the Norman Yoke but seems to have been under few illusions as to the realities of political power in Anglo-Saxon times; *Rights of nature*, II, 114-15.
- ⁴⁵ *Tribune*, II, 215-16.
- ⁴⁶ Joseph Priestley, *Political dialogues. Number 1. On the general principles of government* (London, 1791), 10.
- ⁴⁷ *Tribune*, I, 210.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 212-13.
- ⁴⁹ *Tribune*, II, 85-108. For Thelwall's account of the emergence of standing armies in European history see *Rights of nature*, II, 99-121.
- ⁵⁰ *Tribune*, III, 25.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 24-25.
- ⁵² *Tribune*, I, 336.
- ⁵³ *Tribune*, II, 214, 212.
- ⁵⁴ *Tribune*, III, 259.
- ⁵⁵ *Tribune*, I, 61.
- ⁵⁶ *Rights of nature*, I, 16.
- ⁵⁷ *Tribune*, III, 256.
- ⁵⁸ See Samuel Johnson, *A dictionary of the English language* (London, 1755): 'Equality', 'Community' and 'Leveller'. Thomas Spence was the most consistent advocate of a revolutionary approach to property in the 1790's. See *Pigs' meat: selected writings of Thomas Spence*, intro. by G. I. Gallop (Nottingham, 1982).
- ⁵⁹ *Sober reflections*, 33-34.
- ⁶⁰ *Tribune*, III, 257.
- ⁶¹ Allen, 'William Godwin's influence', 679.
- ⁶² *Tribune*, II, 66.
- ⁶³ See Paul H. Johnstone, 'In praise of husbandry', *Agricultural History*, vols. 10-11 (1936-37), 80-

- 95; and A. J. Sambrook, 'The English lord and the happy husbandman', *Studies on Voltaire and the eighteenth-century*, vol. 57, (1967), 1357-75.
- ⁶⁴ *The peripatetic: or sketches of the heart, of nature and society*, 2 vols. (London, 1793), I, 38-39. See Cestre, *John Thelwall*, 25-47.
- ⁶⁵ *Tribune*, II, 45.
- ⁶⁶ See Cestre, *John Thelwall*, 163-66, for an account of Thelwall's observations of manufacturing industry made during an excursion through the West of England in 1797. Some of his travel notes were published as 'A pedestrian excursion' in the *Monthly Magazine*, vols. 8-9 (1799-1800).
- ⁶⁷ *Tribune*, II, 33.
- ⁶⁸ *Tribune*, III, 29-30.
- ⁶⁹ *Rights and nature*, I, 18-19.
- ⁷⁰ *Tribune*, III, 38-46.
- ⁷¹ *Tribune*, II, 8.
- ⁷² *Tribune*, III, 39.
- ⁷³ Ibid., 42. For the eighteenth-century debate on luxury see Simeon M. Wade, *The idea of luxury in eighteenth-century England* (Ph.D., Harvard University, 1968).
- ⁷⁴ For a listing of Thelwall's major reform proposals see *Tribune*, I, 201-202.
- ⁷⁵ *Tribune*, II, 353.
- ⁷⁶ *Rights of nature*, I, 50.
- ⁷⁷ *Rights of nature*, II, 94-95.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid., 111.
- ⁷⁹ *Tribune*, II, 67.
- ⁸⁰ *Rights of nature*, II, 82.
- ⁸¹ Ibid., 80.
- ⁸² Ibid., 89.
- ⁸³ *Tribune*, I, 202.
- ⁸⁴ *Rights of nature*, II, 81.
- ⁸⁵ *Tribune*, III, 96.
- ⁸⁶ *Tribune*, I, 242-44.
- ⁸⁷ *Sober reflections*, 73.
- ⁸⁸ *Tribune*, I, 288.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid., 241.
- ⁹⁰ *Sober reflections*, 34.
- ⁹¹ *Rights of nature*, I, 18.
- ⁹² *Tribune*, II, xvi.
- ⁹³ Ibid., 305-306. The transition of crowd behaviour from direct action along 'moral economy' lines to democratic politics is traced in George Rudé, *The crowd in history: a study of popular disturbances in France and England 1730-1848* (New York, 1964).
- ⁹⁴ See [W. Godwin], *Considerations on Lord Grenville's and Mr. Pitt's bills . . .* (London, 1795), 13-23. For Thelwall's reply see *Tribune*, II, preface.
- ⁹⁵ On the development of this idea see T. M. Parssinen, 'Association, convention and anti-parliament in British radical politics, 1771-1848', *English Historical Review*, vol. 88 (1973), 504-33. The most prominent exponents of the idea were Obadiah Hulme, James Burgh, John Cartwright, John Jebb and Joseph Gerrald.
- ⁹⁶ *Tribune*, III, 188-90.
- ⁹⁷ *Rights of nature*, I, 50. It is clear that Thelwall wished to see the paying off of the National Debt. Strangely enough, given his clear knowledge of Richard Price's writings, he made no special mention of the Sinking Fund as a peaceful way of doing this. The revolutionary Thomas Spence wished to see the debt repudiated. See his 'Restorer of Society to its Natural State' (1801) reprinted in A. W. Waters, *Spence and his political works* (Leamington Spa, 1917), 54.
- ⁹⁸ *The speech of John Thelwall at the second meeting called by the London Corresponding Society . . .* (London, 1795), 19.

⁹⁹ *Peaceful discussion, and not tumultuary violence the means of redressing natural grievances* (London, 1795), 16.

¹⁰⁰ *Rights of nature*, I, 72, 45.

¹⁰¹ For the details see Goodwin, *The friends of liberty*, ch. 9.

¹⁰² See *The speech of John Thelwall*, 16-19.

¹⁰³ See J. Ann Hone, 'Radicalism in London, 1796-1802: convergences and continuities', in J. Stevenson (ed.), *London in the age of reform* (London, 1977).

¹⁰⁴ See Godwin, *The friends of liberty*, ch. 11.

¹⁰⁵ See esp. Dickinson, *Liberty and property*, ch. 6 and Goodwin, *The friends of Liberty*, ch. 2.

¹⁰⁶ Granville Sharp, *An account of the constitutional English polity of Congregational courts . . .*, 2nd edn. (London, 1786), 244.

¹⁰⁷ On the nature of artisan ideology see Iorwerth Prothero, *Artisans and politics in early nineteenth century London: John Gast and his times* (London, 1979); Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and revolutionary America* (London, 1976); and Williams, *Artisans and sans-culottes*.

¹⁰⁸ On the changing nature of radicalism from 1760 to 1800 see also Bonwick, *English radicals and the American Revolution*.

A FEW OBSERVATIONS ON DAVID HUME AND RICHARD PRICE ON MIRACLES

H.S. Price

'If Christianity is the truth, then all philosophy about it is false.'

(L. Wittgenstein)

I

David Hume's 'The essay on miracles' is widely known; not so so well known by far is the 'Dissertation on the importance of Christianity, the nature of historical evidence, and miracles' (1767) which Richard Price wrote in answer to it. Price sent a copy to Hume and received the following letter in reply:

Brewer St., 18 of March, 1767

Sir,

So far from there being any Occasion to make me an Apology for your late Publication that you have prevented me in my Intentions of writing to you, and of returning you thanks for the Civility with which you have treated me. I had almost said unusual Civility. For to the Reproach of Learning, it is but too rare to find a literary Controversy conducted with proper Decency and Good manners, especially where it turns upon religious Subjects, in which men often think themselves at Liberty to give way to their utmost Rancour and Animosity. But you like a true Philosopher, while you overwhelm me with the Weight of your Arguments, give me Encouragement by the Mildness of your Expressions: and instead of *Rogue*, *Rascal* and *Blockhead*, the illiberal language of the Bishop of Gloucester and his School, you address me, as a man mistaken, but capable of Reason and conviction. I own to you, that the Light, in which you have put this controversy, is new and plausible and ingenious, and perhaps solid. But I must have more time to weigh it, before I can pronounce this Judgment with Satisfaction to myself. My present Occupations shall not deprive me of the Leisure requisite for that Purpose; as no Object can possibly have equal importance. These Occupations, however, have bereaved me of the satisfaction of waiting on you, and of thanking you in person for your Attention, which I should have thought my Duty, if I did not find my time so fully employ'd. I am with great Truth and Regard, Sir, your most obedient and most humble Servant.

David Hume

Richard Price answered this letter less than a week later as follows:

Newington Green March 24th 1767

Sir,

The kind letter with which you have favour'd me has given me so much pleasure, that I cannot make myself easy without troubling you with this to thank you for it and for your great civility and candour. I was indeed afraid I had taken a liberty you would not approve, but I have very agreeably found the contrary. Should I ever have an opportunity I shall take care to correct the expressions to which I referred in the note I sent you. I am not, I hope, inclin'd to dislike any person merely for a difference in opinion however great, or to connect worth of character and God's favour with any particular set of sentiments. It is one of my most fix'd and favourite principles which I endeavour often to inculcate, that nothing is fundamental besides a faithful desire to find out and to practise truth and right. I am sensible that your time at present must be much taken up, and therefore I will not interrupt you too long. It would give me particular pleasure to see you at Newington-Green, but this is a greater favour than I have any reason to expect. I may probably take the liberty to call upon you, and stand my chance for finding you at home. Before you left London last Autumn I had call'd several times upon you, but always had the mortification of missing you. I am, Sir, with great regard,

Your most obedient and humble servant,
Richd Price¹

II

I shall concentrate here on what I think are some of the main topics of Hume's essay and Price's rejoinders to these. They have to do mainly with what Hume says about human testimony with regard to miracles and his view that a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature. These are topics that Price also concentrates on in his reply to Hume, and both of them thought that they were central in any discussion of the subject.

What Hume wrote is well known. I quote it here for ease of reference;

A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. Why is it more probable, that all men must die; that lead cannot, of itself, remain suspended in the air; that fire consumes wood,

and is extinguished by water; unless it be, that these events are found agreeable to the laws of nature, and there is required a violation of these laws, or in other words, a miracle to prevent them? Nothing is esteemed a miracle, if it ever happen in the common course of nature. It is no miracle that a man, seemingly in good health, should die on a sudden: because such a kind of death, though more unusual than any other, has yet been frequently observed to happen. But it is a miracle, that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed in any age or country. There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation. And as a uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full *proof*, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle; nor can such a proof be destroyed, or the miracle rendered credible, but by an opposite proof, which is superior.

The plain consequence is (and it is a general maxim worthy of our attention), 'That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavours to establish; and even in that case there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force, which remains, after deducting the inferior'. When anyone tells me, that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more probable, that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact, which he relates, should really have happened. I weigh the one miracle against the other; and according to the superiority, which I discover, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle. if the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous, than the event which he relates; then, and not till then, can he pretend to command my belief or opinion.²

In Part II of his essay Hume goes on to tell us that he has conceded too much in what he had said in Part I for he has supposed that 'the testimony upon which a miracle is founded, may possibly amount to an entire proof, and that the falsehood of that testimony would be a real prodigy'. And he goes on to give four reasons why he thinks that no miraculous event was ever established 'on so full evidence'.

These reasons are as follows:

(1) 'There is not to be found, in all history, any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good- sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves.'³

(2) There is, thinks Hume, a maxim which regulates the ways we reason. It is: 'the objects, of which we have no experience, resemble those, of which we have; that what we have found to be most usual is always most probable; and that where there is an opposition of arguments, we ought to give the preference to such as are founded on the greatest number of past observations'.⁴ But this maxim is sometimes disobeyed and people give in to surprise and wonder which are the result of their being told of some miraculous event.

(3) 'It forms a strong presumption against all supernatural and miraculous relations, that they are observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations; or if a civilized people has ever given admission to any of them, that people will be found to have received them from ignorant and barbarous ancestors, who transmitted them with that inviolable sanction and authority, which always attend received opinions.'⁵

(4) 'There is no testimony for any [miracle], even those which have not been expressly detected, that is not opposed by an infinite number of witnesses; so that not only the miracle destroys the credit of testimony, but the testimony destroys itself'. What Hume has mainly in mind here is that different religions which he thinks are 'contrary' to each other and so cannot all be true, all claim to depend for their truth on miracles. But if they are not all true, and for Hume none of them is, then neither are the miracles which they claim as their basis.

Hume's conclusion to his essay, which Price himself quotes, is one which many might find strange coming after his attack on miracles; others may see in it nothing but plain irony. Hume writes:

So that upon the whole, we may conclude, that the *Christian religion* not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity: And whoever is moved by *Faith* to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience.⁶ This seems at odds with what he says at the beginning when he mentions an argument of Dr. Tillotson against the *real presence* which he clearly agrees with, and then says that he has found 'an argument of a like nature, which, if just, will, with the wise and learned, be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and consequently, will be useful as long as the world endures. For so long, I presume, will the accounts of miracles and prodigies be found in all history, sacred and profane.'⁷

The argument, as Hume calls it, of Tillotson has to do with matters which Price also comments on in his dissertation. Tillotson, according to Hume

claimed that, 'the authority either of the scripture or of tradition, is founded merely in the testimony of the apostles, . . . Our evidence for the truth of the *Christian* religion is less than the evidence for the truth of our senses'.⁸ The apostles themselves, Tillotson and Hume claim, had not greater evidence than their senses to go on, and the weight of this evidence gets less when it is passed on from the apostles to others. For they only have the testimony of the apostles for things which they did not themselves see and they cannot give as much weight to that as they can to something which is based on the truth of their own senses. The evidence based on the truth of the senses is greater than that which is based on testimony and 'a weaker evidence can never destroy a stronger'; and so, even if the doctrine of the real presence 'were ever so clearly revealed in scripture', one cannot, according to the rules of just reasoning, accept it. Scripture and tradition cannot provide the weight of evidence that the senses do, for as 'external evidences' they are only testimony to something seen by the apostles. Something further is needed — 'the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit' which brings it 'home to every one's breast'.⁹ I shall have something further to say on this later, and now only point to the strangeness of the phrase 'the evidence for the truth of our senses'. What evidence is that?

III

Price claims that the main principles on which Hume bases his objection to miracles are the following:

- (1) That the credit we give to testimony, is derived *solely* from experience.
- (2) That a miracle is a fact *contrary* to experience.
- (3) That the previous incredibility of a fact is a proof against it, diminishing in proportion to the degree of it, the proof from testimony for it.
- (4) That no testimony should ever gain credit to an event, unless it is more extraordinary that it should be false, than that the event should have happened.¹⁰

For Price all these four claims are either 'false, or to need such explanation to render them true, as will render them of no use to the purpose which they are intended to serve'.¹¹

For Hume 'though experience be our only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact; it must be acknowledged, that this guide is not altogether infallible, but in some cases is apt to lead us into errors'.¹² So belief must be proportionate to the evidence, and if in some cases 'past experience' can be taken 'as a full *proof* of the future existence' of an event and here experience is infallible, this is not always the case, and when it is not 'the evidence exceeds not

what we properly call probability'.¹³ Hume thought that this is the case with human testimony too and claims that 'as the evidence, derived from witnesses and human testimony, is founded, on past experience, so it varies with the experience, and is regarded either as a *proof* or a *probability*, according as the conjunction between any particular kind of report and any kind of object has been found to be constant or variable'.¹⁴

Price's title for Section II of his dissertation is: 'The nature and grounds of the regard due to experience and to the evidence of testimony, stated and compared'.¹⁵ He thought that Hume had not considered seriously the differences that there are between the regard due to experience and that due to the evidence of testimony. This is one of the most important criticisms that Price makes of what Hume says and he attempts to give a number of examples of what he considers the differences to be. Whether all the examples he gives are of equal merit may be doubted, but I shall not attempt here to go into each of the examples, but just mention one which is important in his criticism of Hume's views, and which can still, I think, be defended. Price, in his discussion of the regard due to testimony, claims that here it is not just experience as Hume understands that, that is important. The ground for this regard 'is not experience only; meaning, all along, that kind of experience to which we owe our expectation of natural events, the causes of which are unknown to us. Were this the case, the regard we ought to pay to testimony, would be in proportion to the number of instances, in which we have found, that it has given us right information, compared with those in which it has deceived us [and that is Hume's view]; and it might be calculated in the same manner with the regard due to any conclusions derived from induction. But this is by no means the truth. One action, or one conversation with a man, may convince us of his integrity and induce us to believe in his testimony, though we had never, in a single instance, experienced his veracity'.¹⁶ Hume has set up experience as a supreme judge, and he attempts to use the word in such a general way that it is by no means clear in many cases what he has in mind, and it is to Price's credit to have shown that testimony can and must be distinguished from experience. For when one believes what someone tells one, one is depending on the experience of others and not on one's own. Price gives a very good example of the difference when he says:

It might be shewn here in many ways, that there is a great difference between the conviction produced by testimony, and the conviction produced by experience. But I will content myself with taking notice, how much higher the one is capable of being raised than the other. When it appears, that a man is not deceived, and does not design to deceive, we are so far sure of the truth of the facts related. But when any events, in the course of nature, have often happened, we are sure properly of nothing but the past fact. Nor, I think, is there in general, antecedently to their happening, any comparison between

the assurance we have that they will happen, and that which we have of many facts the knowledge of which we derive from testimony. For example; we are not so certain that the tide will go on to ebb and flow, and the sun to rise and set in the manner they have hitherto done, a year longer, as we are that there has been such a man as *Alexander*, or such an empire as the *Roman*.¹⁷

Perhaps the most well known thing that Hume said about miracles is that 'a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature'. Hume also says: 'A miracle may be accurately defined, a *transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent*'.¹⁸ Price, however, denies that 'a *violation or suspension of the laws of nature*' is 'necessarily included in the idea of a miracle'.¹⁹ In what he says about miracles Price comes nearer to the meaning of the words we find in the Bible which are translated as 'miracle'. For these words refer to strange and uncanny events, things which were totally unexpected; events so strange that some people could not believe their own eyes. Because for Hume miracles are violations of the laws of nature, they are, as Price says, contrary to experience for 'a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws'.²⁰ But why say that they are contrary to experience; they are, Price claims, different from experience not contrary to it. 'Were I to see', writes Price, 'a tempest calmed instantaneously by the word of a man, all my past experience would remain the same; and were I to affirm that I saw what was contrary to it, I could only mean, that I saw what I never before had any experience of'.²¹ And if we take into account what Hume thinks is an accurate definition of a miracle, then Price counters his definition by saying: 'A sensible and *extraordinary effect* produced by *superior power*, no more implies that a law of nature is *violated*, than any *common effect* produced by *human power*'.²² There can be little doubt that the common view that a miracle is a violation of a law of nature owes much to Hume, but it is clear that this is not what it meant for those people whose reports of miracles we find in the Bible and this consideration is important for what comes later. Price tells us in his dissertation that he had explained what he meant in his dissertation *On providence*, and there he says: 'I know it is common to think, that miracles imply a *suspension or violation of the laws of nature*. But no opinion can be more groundless. Were we to see the motion of water downwards cease at once at the word of a man, or a river parted in its course, as Jordan was, we should see a miracle. But we could not say that the law of gravitation was suspended; for the water might have gravitated as usual, and the true cause of the event be, the exertion of an adequate superior power to controul the effects of gravitation, in which its suspension is no more implied, than in a man's preventing a heavy body from falling, by applying his hand to it'.²³ So Price thinks that Hume has made an identification that is illegitimate; he has made a miracle identical with a violation of a law of nature, without making clear how we are to understand what 'violation of a law of nature' means.

IV

I have only picked out a few of the things that Hume and Price said about miracles, and what I have chosen is meant to relate to what follows. For the subject of miracles is still a matter of serious philosophical concern. The problem is still unsolved, as I shall attempt to show.

A great deal of water has passed by the philosophical bridge since the time of Hume and Price. Whether the water is murkier or clearer than it was in their time may be a subject of disagreement, even if now there seems to be a great deal more of it. But there is one matter which both Hume and Price speak of, one word that they not infrequently use, which may not be as clear as they seem to have thought it was. This is the word 'nature'. Hume thought that a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature and Price denied that a miracle could be thought of in this way. But if the word 'nature' itself is unclear, then it may not make sense to say or deny that a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature.

One difference that there is between philosophy in the time of Hume and Price and now is that now it seems to be much more concerned with language than either of them was. This interest goes back, in modern times, at least to Frege who in the preface to his *Begriffsschrift* suggested that 'it is one of the tasks of philosophy to break the domination of the word over the human spirit by laying bare the misconceptions that through the use of language often almost unavoidably arise'.²⁴ Wittgenstein was deeply influenced by this idea of Frege's. He said in the preface to his first book: 'The problems of philosophy arise because we misunderstand the logic of our language'.²⁵ Later in his *Philosophical investigations* he said: 'Philosophy is a struggle against the enchantment of our understanding brought about by our language'.²⁶ Bertrand Russell said that it was about 1917 that the problem of the relation of language to facts began to interest him. He tells us: 'I had thought of language as transparent — that is to say, as a medium which could be employed without paying attention to it . . . But I have never been able to feel any sympathy with those who treat language as an autonomous province. The essential thing about language is that it has meaning, i.e. that it is related to something other than itself, which is, in general, non-linguistic'.²⁷ When Russell refers to those who think of language as an autonomous province, he has in mind, I think, the later writings of Wittgenstein and people who have been influenced by it in what Russell thought was an unhealthy and misleading way. And Wittgenstein himself thought there was a great danger that his work in philosophy would only produce nothing but jargon in those who thought they had understood it and hadn't. In 1920 Wittgenstein wrote in a letter to Russell: 'The future will pass judgement on us — or perhaps it won't, and if it is silent that will be a judgement too'.²⁸ They both made judgements on each other later. In 1946 Wittgenstein is

reported to have said about Russell: 'Russell isn't going to kill himself doing philosophy now'.²⁹ Russell in 1956 was quite scathing in his criticism of the later writings of Wittgenstein, but praised his earlier work: 'The earlier Wittgenstein, whom I knew intimately, was a man addicted to passionately intense thinking, profoundly aware of difficult problems of which I, like him, felt the importance, and possessed (or at least so I thought) of true philosophical genius. The later Wittgenstein, on the contrary, seems to have grown tired of serious thinking and to have invented a doctrine which would make such an activity unnecessary. I do not for one moment believe that the doctrine which has these lazy consequences is true. I realise, however, that I have an overpoweringly strong bias against it, for, if it is true, philosophy is at best, a slight help to lexicographers, and at worst, an idle tea-table amusement'. He says of these later ideas of Wittgenstein that he finds them 'completely unintelligible. Its positive doctrines seem to me trivial and its negative doctrines, unfounded. I have not found in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical investigations* anything that seemed to me interesting and I do not understand why a whole school finds important wisdom in its pages'.³⁰

Wittgenstein at one point in his *Philosophical investigations* describes what he is doing as 'supplying remarks about the natural history of mankind; we are not contributing curiosities however, but established facts which no one has ever doubted, but which have escaped remark only because they are always before our eyes'.³¹ A later remark seems to contradict this. 'If the formation of concepts can be explained by facts of nature, should we be interested not in grammar, but rather in that in nature which is the basis of grammar? — Our interest certainly includes the correspondence between concepts and very general facts of nature. (Such facts as mostly do not strike us because of their generality.) But our interests do not fall back upon these possible causes of the formation of concepts; we are not doing natural science; nor yet natural history — since we can also invent fictitious natural history for our purposes'.³² Whether these two passages contradict one another may not be easy to decide, but at least both of them contain the words 'natural history' and it is these that need examination. And with regard to that one could quote a later remark of Wittgenstein's in *On certainty*: 'The sentences which one comes back to again and again as if bewitched — these I would like to ban from philosophical language'.³³ And the same goes for words and phrases of this kind.

The history of the word 'nature' in English and its equivalents in other European languages is a long one, but it is not irrelevant by any means to a consideration of the words 'natural history' nor of the word 'nature'. John Burnet in his *Early Greek philosophy* quotes a fragment of the poet Euripides who speaks of 'the investigation of nature'. (ἰστορία περὶ τῆς φύσεως). The English word 'nature' derives from the Latin 'natura' which is the equivalent of the Greek word 'φύσις', from which such words as 'physics' and 'physical' in English are derived. What we now call 'physics'

used to go under the title 'natural philosophy'. The fragment of Euripides goes as follows:

ὄλβιος ὅστις τῆς ἱστορίας
 ἔσχε μάθησιν, μήτε πολιτῶν
 ἐπὶ πημοσύνας μήτ' εἰς ἀδίκους
 πράξεις ὀρμῶν,
 ἀλλ' ἀθανάτου καθορῶν φύσεως
 κόσμον ἀγήρω, τίς τε συνέστη
 καὶ ὅπη καὶ ὅπως
 τοῖς τοιοῦτοις οὐδέποτε' αἰσχρῶν
 ἔργων μελέτημα προσίξει.⁸

Blessed is he who possesses the learning which comes from inquiry; who does not get involved in the sufferings of political life and unjust deeds, but contemplates the unchanging order of eternal nature, how it hangs together and whence and why. Such people have no truck with foul deeds.³⁴

There is something similar in Virgil's *Georgics*:

Me vero dulces ante omnia Musae
 quarum sacra fero ingenti percussus amore
 accipiunt caelique vias et sidera monstrent
 defectus solis varios lunaeque labores,
 unde tremor terris, qua vi maria alta tumescant
 obicibus ruptis rursusque in se ipsa residunt.
 Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas
 atque metus omnes et inexorabile fatum
 subiecit pedibus strepitumque Acherontis avari.

Roughly translated:

First may the muses, sweet above all else,
 Whose shrines I guard, smitten with deepest love
 Receive me and the paths and stars of heaven
 Show, the sun's decline, the moon's vast wandering;
 Whence comes earth's trembling, the oceans highest waves
 Which all at last again come to their rest.
 For he is blest to whom the power is given
 Causes of things to recognise himself.
 Beneath his feet inexorable fate
 And fear, the roar of greedy hell itself.³⁵

Peter Winch refers to the opening pages of Burnet's book: 'Whereas the

scientist investigates the nature, causes and effects of particular things and processes, the philosopher is concerned with the nature of reality as such and in general. Burnet puts the point very well in his book on Greek Philosophy when he points out (pp. 11 & 12) that the sense in which the philosopher asks, 'What is real?' involves the problem of man's relation to reality, which takes us beyond science: "We have to ask whether the mind of man can have any contact with reality at all, and if it can, what difference will it make to his life".³⁶

Our word 'history' derives from the Greek ἱστορία. It is the word that Herodotus uses at the beginning of his history: 'This is a statement of the inquiry of Herodotus of Halicarnassus. Its purpose is to prevent what men have done being destroyed by the passage of time, and that the remarkable and great deeds of both Greeks and barbarians should not go without notice – in particular to explain why it was they waged war against each other.'

The passage which Winch quotes from Burnet raises questions about idealism which I shall not go into now – questions which also interested Hume and Price. One should remember that Burnet wrote his book at a time when idealist philosophy was very common in Europe.

It is not as if people are in complete agreement about the Greek word φύσις. One of the earliest extant occurrences in philosophy is in a fragment of Heraclitus where he says: 'Nature delights in hiding herself.'³⁷ Why should he have said this? It seems that he was, in part, objecting to the views of Pythagoras whom he mentions in a well known fragment: 'Knowing a lot does not bring understanding. Otherwise it would have brought it to Hesiod and Pythagoras and also to Xenophanes and Hecataeus.'³⁸ It was Pythagoras, it seems, who introduced the two Greek words κόσμος and φιλοσοφία. He called himself a philosopher (philosophos) because, as he put it, only God possesses understanding.³⁹ The Greek word φιλοσόφος is often said to mean 'lover of wisdom', a translation which can be misleading, if it suggests, as it has suggested to some, that there is something called 'wisdom' which the philosopher loves, but if it means that, that is not the only thing it can mean; it can just as well be translated to refer to someone who wants to understand something he doesn't understand. As to the word 'kosmos', that meant 'order' in Greek, and Aristotle, who wrote a book about the Pythagoreans (now lost) tells us that they thought the whole of nature was a harmony (ἁρμονία), and for them it was the work of God. Heraclitus denied this, saying that this kosmos was not made by any man or god, but that it is an everliving fire (ἀειζῶον πῦρ) a source of unfailing energy. In one of his most telling fragments he tells us: ἁρμονία ἀφρονῆς φανερώης κρείττων. 'The hidden harmony is superior to the one that appears.'⁴¹ Apart from the striking alliteration of these words in Greek, they seem to express opposition to the Pythagorean view of the kosmos as harmonia. For Heraclitus it is strife that is the source of all (πόλεμος πατήρ πάντων),⁴² albeit a strife that is guided by that logos of which Heraclitus said: 'This logos which is forever human beings never understand.'⁴³

Some may think it permissible to speak of the Greek *concept* of phusis or what the Greeks understood by the word. In saying this they do not tell us just what Greeks they have in mind, and it would not be possible to find any general agreement among the Greeks whose views are known to us about this, i.e. about phusis. Nor for that matter would it be possible to find general agreement in later times or even now. This should lead us to realize that there are serious difficulties about words like 'nature' or 'natural', or such a phrase as 'the natural history of mankind'. Just what could that natural history be? Because of these difficulties it is even more difficult to make sense of such words as 'supernature' or 'supernatural'. Wittgenstein in his 'Lecture on Ethics' spoke of ethics as *supernatural*. Not so long ago Lyall Watson wrote a book called 'Supernature'; its subtitle was: 'A natural history of the supernatural'! If these words like phusis, natura, nature, have been common in philosophy for so long that may be why people have continued with them, though that is not a good reason for continuing with them any longer when they seem to have no clear sense. Perhaps we should follow Wittgenstein's advice and ban them from philosophical vocabulary. And when there is talk of 'natural laws' or 'laws of nature' is there any clear understanding of these phrases? When Hume tells us that 'a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature', that assumes too much. It assumes that we know what the phrase 'law of nature' means, or that we know what a law of nature is. If someone claims that such a phrase is a formal concept or just a matter of convention, someone might wonder what then becomes of debates in ancient and modern times about phusis and nomos — about nature and convention? Or is there no problem at all? Is it something which people who call themselves 'philosophers' go on talking about just to keep themselves in a job — to keep the wolves from the door?

In his *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* Wittgenstein says: 'At the basis of the whole modern view of the world lies the illusion that so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena'.⁴⁵ But there is as much difficulty about the phrase 'natural phenomena' as about 'laws of nature'. Certainly a phrase like 'law of nature' may impress a great deal, particularly, perhaps, if one has no idea how such a phrase came into existence in the first place. It is not easy to stop people going on saying things they think they understand when what they say does not express anything that they do understand.

But, surely, someone will say that one can give examples of what are called laws of nature. After all, there is no reason why we should not have names of this kind. Say someone mentioned Newton's laws of motion. Why shouldn't we call them laws of nature? There is at least one reason why we shouldn't. And that is that people may, can and do get misled by the *name*. We can quite easily refer to what Newton said without calling them 'laws of nature', though a similar difficulty may arise in just calling them 'laws'. In the English phrase 'law of nature' or the Latin one 'lex naturae' we have a conflation of the two Greek

words 'phusis', which we translate as 'nature' and 'nomos', which meant in Greek 'law', but is also translated as 'convention'. If someone were to ask whether the so-called laws of nature are true by nature or convention, he can only ask this question if he has been misled into thinking that he knows what the phrase 'law of nature' means when he doesn't. And that is not meant to suggest that the phrase does have a meaning of which the person is ignorant. Similar things could be said about the phrases 'law of nature' or 'natural law' in ethics and political philosophy.

What has been said is meant to suggest that words and phrases like 'nature', 'convention', 'law of nature', 'natural law', have no clear meaning or sense in philosophy, and that they have caused and continue to cause more trouble than the worth of it. The Pythagoreans, it seems, wanted to refer to what they called the kosmos — the ordered whole of everything that has existed, exists and will exist. Plato (particularly in his *Timaeus*) partly realized that that was not a sensible way of speaking, but many subsequent philosophers went on speaking as if it was. No one more so than Aristotle. Heraclitus, it seems, wanted to say that the order or harmony did exist, only it was hidden. One couldn't say what it is. But does one even *know* that it exists? And what is it that one is saying if one says that it does? It is in some cases possible to know that something exists even when one does not know what it is. But is this such a case?

In *On certainty* Wittgenstein says: 'It is always by the grace of nature that one knows anything'⁴⁷, and of this one can ask: 'But what is that?' What would an answer be?

V

Wittgenstein said: 'If Christianity is the truth, then all philosophy about it is false'.⁴⁸ Hume thought that 'it forms a strong presumption against all supernatural and miraculous relations, that they are observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations' and even if civilized people accept them it is because they have been handed down from people of that kind. When Hume at the beginning of his essay quotes with approval the views of Dr. Tillotson about scripture and tradition he makes no attempt to go into any real detail about those two matters. Price's attitude is much more serious when in speaking of objections that have been made to Christianity he says: 'Those who believe, that there is any question which they can clear of every difficulty, may be sure, that they are either very unfair or very superficial in their inquiries'.⁴⁹ Hume himself in speaking of the *Pentateuch* says: 'I desire any one to lay his hand upon his heart, and after a serious consideration declare, whether he thinks that the falsehood of such a book, supported by such a testimony [i.e. that of a barbarous and ignorant people] would be more extraordinary and miraculous than all the miracles it relates'.⁵⁰

Wittgenstein's remark raises the question about what it does mean to say that Christianity is the truth. Only, it seems, if we are able to answer this question can we say that all philosophy about it is false. Any genuine philosophy about Christianity will in the first place be an attempt to understand it, and perhaps it is this that Wittgenstein had in mind in saying that all philosophy about it is false. For if it is not possible to understand Christianity, then any philosophy which claims to provide an understanding of what it is, will be false. If that is what Wittgenstein meant, well and good; but if there is a philosophy about it which points out that it is not possible to understand Christianity, is this philosophy false? Is it only a philosophy which claims to understand it, when this is not possible, that is false? And is it only philosophy if it claims to give us an understanding of Christianity's truth?

If we begin with the question: Can we understand what Christianity is? someone might say that no one can possibly answer this question because no human being can know everything that has been called Christianity, but only certain things that go by that name. That so many apparently different things have been called Christianity also, it will be said, raises the question: Are all these different forms of Christianity really Christianity, or only some of them, or, perhaps even none?

The history of a religion two thousand years old contains so much that one might well despair of ever being able to put the question: Can we understand what Christianity is? let alone answer it. In any case there are so many historical accounts of what it is, that it seems impossible to say that any one of them is correct, and the last two hundred years at least, not to mention eighteen centuries before that, have provided so many historical investigations about Christianity's origins, that by now it might seem nothing but an idle pastime to provide another, for its only possible result can be to bring confusion more confused.

However, there may be one thing that these historical investigations seem to have in common; they all make what seems to be a common assumption, even if this common assumption is not exactly the same in all cases. The common assumption is this: they all assume in one way or other that the records that we have about the origins of the Christian religion are records that it is possible to understand, and it is because it is possible to understand these records that it is possible to give an understandable, if not perfectly accurate account of its origins.

But what if it is possible to show that there is a great deal in these records that it is not possible to understand? Then it would seem that the records cannot be used either to show, as some maintain, that Christianity is true, or, as others maintain, that it is false. But is there anything like this in the records? It seems that there is.

In philosophy, at any rate, one has to distinguish between what it is possible to understand, and what it is not possible to understand. But then someone might raise the question: Possible for whom? Perhaps the people who wrote these records were able to understand things that it is no longer possible to understand. In any case, whether they did or not, we should examine the language in which they wrote their records and ask ourselves whether there is anything in that language which prevents us from understanding what they wrote. A further question is: Did those writers themselves understand what they wrote? In order to deal with these questions we should pay attention, then, to the language of the records themselves. Some might argue that there are other questions which should be answered before this is done. They may claim that we need to know who the people were who wrote these records, because that should throw some light on the records themselves. But whoever those authors were, what they wrote can still be read and it is about what they wrote that it is asked: Is it possible to understand that?

One cannot begin with the Christian writings in the New Testament if one wants to consider relationships between those writings and the Jewish scriptures found in the Old Testament. For the Greek of the New Testament was deeply influenced by the Greek translation of the original Hebrew of the Old Testament — a translation commonly known as the Septuagint. This translation was begun towards the beginning of the third century B.C. and quotations from the Old Testament in the New Testament are often from this translation. In considering the Greek of the New Testament the Septuagint is a bridge which relates the New Testament and its language to the Hebrew of the Old Testament, a bridge, which if we can cross may lead us to see that there are things in both the Old Testament and in the New which it is not possible to understand at the present time. At least there is no one, known to me, who has succeeded in *explaining* the meaning of certain words that are to be found in both the Septuagint and in the New Testament. If it is impossible to explain the meaning of these words in passages which most people would agree are descriptions of what are called miracles, then we have to admit that we do not understand the descriptions of these miracles.

There are two words in particular in the Septuagint and the New Testament of which it is not possible to explain the meaning. They are the Greek words *nephele* and *doxa*. They are usually translated into English as 'cloud' and 'glory'. There are other words too which are found in association with them which are equally difficult to understand. Amongst these are: *angel*, *cherubim*, *seraphim*. (The last two are Hebrew words which were simply transliterated into Greek and other languages.) It is these *words* and their *meaning* that is the issue in hand; that we do not understand them means, I think, that the subject of miracles is still a matter of serious philosophical concern, and the problem is still unsolved. When Hume said what he did about the Pentateuch perhaps he did not know that the words 'glory' and 'cloud' first appear together in the Bible in

the book of Exodus (chapter 16): 'And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked towards the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud'.

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¹ *The correspondence of Richard Price*, I, ed. D.O. Thomas and W. Bernard Peach (Duke University Press, Durham, N.C. & University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1983), 45-47.

² David Hume, *An enquiry concerning human understanding*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd edn., (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1902) [hereafter Enquiry], 114-16.

³ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Richard Price, *Four dissertations* (London, 1767), 389. All quotations are from the this edition which is the only one I have read.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Enquiry*, 110.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 110-11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁵ *Four dissertations*, 384.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 399.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 400-401.

¹⁸ *Enquiry*, 115n.

¹⁹ *Four dissertations*, 423.

²⁰ *Enquiry*, 114.

²¹ *Four dissertations*, 402-403.

²² *Ibid.*, 423.

²³ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

²⁴ *From Frege to Gödel, a source book to mathematical logic, 1879-1931*, ed. John Van Heijenoort (Harvard University Press, 1967), 7.

²⁵ L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1922), 27.

²⁶ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical investigations*, (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1953), para. 109.

²⁷ B. Russell, *My philosophical development*, (Unwin Books edn., 1975 [1st edn. 1959]), 11.

²⁸ *Letters to Russell, Keynes, and Moore*, ed. G.H. von Wright (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1974), 86.

²⁹ Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein, a memoir*, 2nd edn. (Oxford University Press, 1984), 57.

³⁰ *My philosophical development*, 160-61.

³¹ *Philosophical investigations s.*, para. 415.

³² *Ibid.*, 230e.

³³ L. Wittgenstein, *On certainty* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1969), para. 31.

³⁴ John Burnet, *Early Greek philosophy*, 4th edn. (Adam & Charles Black, 1930), 10.

³⁵ Virgil, *Georgics*, 2, 484-492.

³⁶ Peter Winch, *The idea of a social science* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959), 8.

³⁷ G.S. Kirk & J.E. Raven, *The Pre-socratic philosophers* (Cambridge University Press, 1957), 193.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁴⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 985b, 23ff.

⁴¹ Kirk and Raven, 193.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 195.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁴⁴ 'Lecture on ethics', *Philosophical Review*, LXXIV, No. 1 (Jan. 1965), 7.

⁴⁵ 6.371.

⁴⁶ Plato, *Timaeus*, 27B-29B et passim.

⁴⁷ *On certainty*, para. 505.

⁴⁸ *Culture and value*, ed. G.H. von Wright in collaboration with Heiki Nyman, trans. Peter Winch, (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1980), 83. I have changed Winch's translation somewhat.

⁴⁹ *Four dissertations*, 367-68.

⁵⁰ *Enquiry*, 130.

**THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL STRATEGY OF PRICE'S
REVIEW OF MORALS.**

John Stephens

The *Review of the principal questions and difficulties in morals*, to give the work its original title, was first published in 1758. Two later editions appeared in Price's lifetime, in 1769 and 1787; both of these show extensive but mainly stylistic revisions. His intention was to give morality an objective basis which obliged him *inter alia* to attack the moral sense theory of Francis Hutcheson, which, he thought, makes morality out to be no more than 'the effect of a *positive constitution* of our minds, or . . . an *implanted* and *arbitrary* principle by which a *relish* is given us for certain moral objects and forms and aversions to others, similar to the relishes and aversions created by any of our other senses'.¹ This is, thought Price, to reduce virtue to a matter of taste. He retaliated by claiming that morality is eternal and immutable and that knowledge of ethical and other matters comes about not through a capacity analogous to the senses but through the mind, which is itself a source of new ideas. These ideas are true, however incomplete they may be; since the mind is not merely 'furnished with faculties' but participates in the Divine Mind.

Thus the foundation of Price's work is epistemological. 'If I have failed here, I have failed in my chief design', he wrote.² Commentators have realized the importance of this claim and have remarked acutely on the problems raised by Price's arguments.³ What none of them have attempted however is to place Price's work in its historical context. It is still not clear how far and in what way Price was dependent on Cudworth, for example, or how far he changed his views as a result of his reading of the work of the Scottish Common Sense School, notably Thomas Reid.⁴ This essay is a preliminary attempt to explore these problems and suggest some solutions.

It is fortunate that Price was so scrupulous in acknowledging his intellectual debts. The footnotes in the *Review* give a wide conspectus of the books he had read. As one would expect, moral philosophers are well in evidence. Besides Hutcheson, Balguy, Thomas Bayes, Richard Cumberland, Henry Grove, Shaftesbury and Wollaston are all cited.⁵ Elsewhere he acknowledges the crucial influence of Plato, Clarke and Cudworth. Also cited are Joseph Butler, and David Hume who, 'by attacking, with great ability, every principle of truth and reason . . . put me upon examining the ground upon which I stood and taught me not hastily to take anything for granted': also of crucial importance to Price were the physics and metaphysics of Isaac Newton.⁶

To achieve this aim Price had to combat the standard eighteenth century

view, enshrined in Locke's *Essay*, that the only source of our ideas is sensation and the mind's reflection thereon. Inevitably therefore his own work took the form of a critique of Locke and his successors. He was concerned to dispute (i) what he supposed to be Locke's assertion that all ideas are directly derived from sensation and reflection, (ii) the supposition (ascribed to Hume) that 'the immediate object of the mind in perception' is 'the same as perception itself'; and (iii) the relativism that he supposed to follow from these assumptions.⁷ This was because in Price's ontology sensations are no more than the mind's reaction to external stimuli. A sensation of redness therefore is on the same level as one of pain and reveals nothing about the reality that is presumed to lie behind it.⁸ Since this world cannot be described by sensation the knowledge we have of it has to come from some other source and it is part of Price's aim to show how this happens. It should cause no surprise therefore that his interest in specifically perceptual problems is limited.⁹

II

Price assumed that Locke had intended to give a genetic account of how ideas arise in the mind. Simple ideas appear uncompounded and are combined in various ways to form the several types of complex ideas described in Book II of the *Essay*.¹⁰ Price is not happy with Locke's exclusive reliance on sensation and reflection:

If by the former we understand, the effects arising from the impressions made on our minds by external objects; and by the latter, the notice the mind takes of its own operations; it will be impossible to derive some of the most important of our ideas from them. This is the explanation Mr. *Locke* gives of them in the beginning of his *Essay*. But it seems probable that what he chiefly meant, was, that all our ideas are either derived *immediately* from these two sources, or ultimately *grounded* upon ideas so derived . . .¹¹

Price supposes that Locke equated reflection with a capacity merely to divide, abstract or enlarge ideas the mind already has. He will want to argue that this process alone will not yield many of our most important ideas. This is related to another preliminary distinction in Price's discussion of ideas. He recognizes two means of classifying them and his preference for one of them is an important clue to his intentions. The first distinction is between 'original' and 'subsequent' ideas. This distinguishes between (i) those that are 'conveyed immediately by the organs of sense and our reflection upon ourselves' and (ii) those that presuppose other ideas and arise from the perception of their natures and relations. Although where such ideas — primary qualities, for example — are used to refer to things outside the mind any such reference must be elliptical since we can only be directly aware of the mind's conception and not of the

object itself. This use of 'idea' presupposes that a primary quality is in some respect an image.

Price's preferred distinction is between those ideas that imply nothing without the mind, that is to say, 'its affections and sensations' on the one hand, and those which denote something distinct from sensation on the other and which imply a real and distinct existence and truth. This eliminates the use of idea as image present in the first definition and thus squares with Price's explicitly non-imagistic use of the word. He prefers not to speak of it as an image in the mind, prefers not to equate it with sensation, and prefers to confine it 'to the mind's conception or notice of an object' which therefore implies something distinct from itself.¹²

It is in this context that Price comes closest to Cudworth. 'Mere sense can perceive nothing in the most exquisite work of art; suppose a plant, or the body of an animal; but what is painted in the eye or what might be described on paper. It is the intellect that must perceive in it order and proportion; variety and regularity; design, connection, art and power; aptitudes, dependencies, correspondencies, and adjustment of parts so as to subserve an end . . .'. All this is combined with a recitation of some traditional arguments about the superiority of intellect to sense — that one sense cannot judge of another and so on.¹³

Sensible impressions consist of 'Light, colours and sounds'. Sense 'sees only the outsides of things' whilst 'reason' acquaints itself with their natures: it is 'not discerning but suffering' and so on. The rhetoric is Cudworth's and the underlying system not dissimilar; that ideas which cannot be derived from sensation have their origin in the understanding. There is an important difference in context however. Cudworth is writing against those such as Hobbes who are attempting to reduce all mental processes to motion and to make all perceptions particular. He responds by insisting on the immutability of universals, citing whiteness, blackness and causation as examples. In 1758 the situation had in many respects changed but Price still found Cudworth's distinction between reason and sensation of use. This was partly because some — like Locke — had overextended the range of sensation and partly because others, like Hume, had, by attacking Locke's extravagance, denied any status to those ideas which Price was most anxious to use.¹⁴

The vital difference between Price and Cudworth, however, is that to Cudworth's distinction between particular and universal, reason and sensation, Price married a theory about the organization of the external world. Both, it is true, were atomists but Price's atomism was fused into Newtonian physics as interpreted by Samuel Clarke. Hence where Cudworth pointed to universals such as whiteness as an example of an idea which only the mind could produce,

Price instead cited concepts which are in effect the basic explanatory categories of Newtonian physics. But this is still just a change of emphasis. Price accepts Cudworth's distinction between 'phantasms' (light, colours, etc.) and conceptions (cause, effect, solidity, etc.). This accounts for some otherwise strange locutions such as 'a *coloured* body, if we speak accurately, is the same absurdity with a *square sound*'. This distinction between phantasms and ideas was ignored by Locke. Locke, as is well known, often confused the mind's ideas of (or experience of) an object with the object itself. This confusion masks the logical distinction that Price is most anxious to articulate.¹⁵

Price's argument takes the form of an examination of various ideas which Locke asserted came through the senses. The first of these is solidity which, according to Locke, 'we receive by our Touch; and it arises from the resistance which we find in Body, to the entrance of any other Body into the Place it possesses, till it has left it'. It is 'the Idea most intimately connected with, and essential to Body'. Although we only notice it in masses of matter 'of a bulk sufficient to cause a Sensation in us; Yet the Mind, having once got this *Idea* from such grosser sensible Bodies, traces it farther; and considers it, as well as Figure, in the minutest Particle of Matter, that can exist; and finds it inseparably inherent in Body, where-ever, or however, modified'. Implicit in Locke's account is the assumption that given the stimulus of the sensation of resistance the mind will proceed to arrive at other ideas, such as solidity and impenetrability. Locke never identifies solidity *with* that feeling, but as his discussion makes clear the idea of solidity he eventually arrives at goes a long way beyond what the senses give us. He assumes that atoms are impenetrable, but also admits that this is something that can never be experienced. This was the burden of Hume's criticism of this passage, 'In order to form an idea of solidity we must conceive two bodies pressing on one another without any penetration'. Price repeats this with a different twist: to experience impenetrability 'we must be sure, that we have, some time or other, made two bodies really touch, and found that they would not penetrate one another: but it is not impossible to account for all the facts we observe, without supposing, in any case, *absolute contact* between bodies'. However often we repeated the experiment we could never have a sufficient foundation 'for the absolute assurance' we have that no bodies *can* penetrate one another'. Price's 'absolute assurance' goes some way beyond Locke's more tentative claim and even farther removed from Hume's assertion that we can have no 'satisfactory idea of solidity; nor consequently of matter'. One strand of Price's argument is sufficiently clear: that if solidity is equated with impenetrability, it cannot be experienced by sensation. Price also asserts that the impenetrability of matter is a universal law. How could he justify this?¹⁶

Price's intentions and justification become clearer as he proceeds to enumerate other 'of our fundamental ideas'. After solidity comes 'the *vis*

inertiae, or *inactivity* of matter' and, by implication, Newton's three laws of motion. Citing the elementary laws of mechanics, Price states, 'Ideas so contradictory to sense cannot be derived from it. They must therefore be ascribed to a higher origin'. There follow substance, duration — which' is included in every notion we can form of reality and existence', and space. Alone of all these, Space and Time exist necessarily: if that were not so nothing else would be possible. 'These perceptions are plainly the notice the understanding takes of necessary truth . . .', says Price, specifying our 'ideas of *infinity* and *necessity in time and space*'.

More substantial is his discussion of causality:

What we observe by our external senses, is properly no more than that one thing *follows* another, or the *constant conjunction* of certain events; as of the melting of wax, with placing it in the flame of a candle; and, in general, of such and such alterations in the qualities of bodies, with such and such circumstances of their situation. That one thing is the *cause* of another, or *produces* it, we never see . . .'.¹⁷

Like Hume, whose discussion is acknowledged at this point, Price is saying two things. One is that knowledge of cause and effect in so far as it derives from sense is confined to the constant conjunction of ideas. Hume then states that the idea of necessary connection between the two ideas so conjoined is something 'which we *feel* in the mind'. Price's argument follows the pattern already noted: the certainty that every new event requires some cause 'depends no more on experience than our certainty of any other the most obvious object of intuition. In the idea of every *change* is included that of its being an effect'. Knowledge of this is 'an essential principle, a primary perception of the understanding'.¹⁷

A vacillation in terminology reveals more of Price's intentions here. In the first edition of the *Review* he refers to 'nothing being more palpably absurd and contradictory, than the notion of change without a changer' which is altered in later editions to read 'a change which has been derived from nothing'.¹⁸ Since matter is inert the possibility of causation entails the presence of an immaterial force, thus eliminating, for example, innate gravity or plastic nature. The notion that causation is necessary, in the sense that it consists of a natural power in matter was something that Price would find objectionable in Priestley's *Disquisitions on matter and spirit* (1777).¹⁹ In 1758 he has in mind only Kames's considerably feebler exposition. The consequence of this, as Price puts it, is that;

the Deity is always *present* and always *active* in all places, and that his energy as the *first mover* in every motion, and the true source of all powers and laws which take place in the natural world.²⁰

Commentators on this part of the *Review* have rightly drawn attention to what they see as Price's defective treatment of necessity. Raphael, for example, says that the difficulty with the list of ideas that Price produces is that 'it contains so few *simple* ideas'. He goes on to say that Price would allow the empiricist to 'analyse almost all these ideas into empirical ideas joined with the ideas of necessity and universality'. He argues that Price's weakness is that — unlike Reid — he concedes too much at the outset in supposing that 'we start from simple ideas . . . and combine them into complex ideas'.²¹ This is certainly correct. It is a weakness of eighteenth century empiricism that its basic data consisted of sensation: something that Reid saw very clearly. This raises questions that were much discussed then and later. Is an apparently identical sensation experienced at different times the same and if so, in what sense? What status should be given to propositions that assert a particular relationship — such as causation — to hold between objects? This is of obvious importance to Price. One can argue, as Raphael and others have argued, that these ideas cannot be said to be simple since they appear to involve necessity and universality. In another sense they can be said to be simple in so far as they function as the basic postulates of an explanatory scheme. Hence in describing these ideas as simple Price confused these two senses.

It is only in passing that Raphael notes the reason why Price felt himself able to do this. For Price, Newton's three laws of motion 'are self-evident truths'. In this sense something is self-evident if the system in which it inheres is self-consistent; thus for Price, Newton's system of mechanics constitutes a series of interlocking ideas all clear and distinct that may correspond to an external reality. Price's difficulty is that he cannot allow for the possibility that two or more contradictory but self-consistent systems can explain the same phenomena with equal success. In view of the tendency in eighteenth century science to conceive matter in terms of force this was unfortunate. Indeed his insistence on ascribing a superior status to those ideas originating in the mind itself precludes him from supposing that their status may be merely relative.

Price's view of Newton's laws of motion as self-evident is combined with a particular view of physics that he supposed to follow from this. Matter is inert and is made up of 'solid particles or atoms occupying a certain portion of space'. They are simple and un-compounded, and, being primary particles, are incapable of division. The manner in which these are organized creates different types of substance. Since matter is inert it cannot act at a distance; the power of attracting and repelling 'is the power of some foreign cause, acting upon matter according to stated laws'.²² Clearly Price was much influenced by the letters that Newton had written to Bentley in the 1690s but which were first published in 1756. They are quoted as an authority on numerous occasions.²³

Space and time apart all these ideas have another characteristic. They are all

contingent, which, in this context means that they all constitute relations between atoms or groups of atoms.²⁴ They are related in a non-material way which we are able to understand in part through Newton's work. A partial apprehension is given through the idea of cause and effect but this is limited to the particular sort of power which we know introspectively.²⁵ This cannot except by remote analogy explain gravitation or the laws of inverse squares: here we are aware that a power is at work even though we have no understanding of *how* it works. This is true of things at a more mundane level. 'I know my will moves my limbs. There is not anything more familiar to me; nor, at the same time, is there any thing I understand less'.²⁶

The limitation of the capacity of the human mind²⁷ can be contrasted with the perfection of God who is seen as the originator and sustainer of all things. Price writes:

It may at least be said, that thought, knowledge, and understanding, being the originals and causes of all particular *sensibles*, and therefore *before* them and *above* them, cannot be derived from them, or dependent upon them; and that what is thus true of *mind* in general and particularly of that first and all-disposing mind from which all inferior minds sprung and of which they participate, 'tis reasonable to think true, in a lower degree also of these inferior minds, and of their ideas and knowledge.²⁸

So in this sense the human mind participates in the divine. This belief was one to which Cudworth devoted much attention and Price quotes him to the effect that,

abstract ideas are implied in the cognoscitive power of the mind; which, he says, contains in itself virtually (as the future plant or tree is contained in the seed) general notions of all things, which are exerted by it, or unfold and discover themselves as occasions invite and proper circumstances occur.

Price notes that, 'This, no doubt, many will freely condemn as whimsical and extravagant. I have, I own, a different opinion of it, but yet I should not care to be obliged to defend it'.²⁹ This may be so, but on several occasions Price asserted his agreement with Cudworth on all points other than plastic nature. This does not amount to a revival of the doctrine of innate ideas as pilloried in Book I of Locke's *Essay*. Cudworth, Locke, and Price all argued that the mind is capable of arriving at certain ideas as it examines the sensations presented to it. Cudworth and Price differed in giving them a superior status.

The participation of the human in the divine mind is paralleled by God's constant presence in the material world. The laws and order of the world are nothing but God's uniform agency' and Price's doctrine of Providence³⁰ (and

much else) is founded on this presence. This is also the best guarantee for Price against the sceptical possibilities of his time. The 'external world' that he describes is intellectual: hence 'It is . . . possible that matter may not exist'.³¹ 'Upon the whole it may perhaps be possible to convince me that there is no such thing as matter',³² the apparent existence of matter being the result of the direct intervention of the Deity:

Analogy and intuition, in these cases, immediately inform us what is fact, and produce conviction which we cannot resist. In short, it is *self-evident*, that a *material world*, answerable to our ideas, and to what we feel and see is *possible*. We have no reason to think that it does not exist.

Only the bare possibility of non-existence argues against the reality of the material world, against 'actual feeling' and against 'all the evidence which our circumstances and condition, as embodied spirits, seem capable of'.³³

This of course stands in contrast to the Scottish Enlightenment Common Sense School's insistence on an intuitive knowledge of the existence of an external world. The substance of Price's work was written before the first exposition of these views — Reid's *Inquiry* of 1764 — but it is clear why Price could not accept them. If Hutcheson had reduced morals to an implanted instinct, Reid had done the same for perception, so eliminating perception as Price understood the term.³⁴ This was even more true of some of his followers. Where Hume had made the immediate object of mind in perception to be the idea, thus annihilating for Price external existence, Reid denied that there was any such object and so eliminated perception itself.

This runs counter to one orthodoxy in recent writing on Price to the effect that he originally had a doctrine of representative perception for primary qualities which in the light of Reid's criticisms he modified in the 1787 edition of the *Review*.³⁵ Price states that 'idea':

Generally signifying the apprehension or conception of an object, it is improperly used to signify the object itself of conception; but the poverty of language obliging us to this, it must be excused; and care must be taken not to be misled by it, as I think MR. HUME and some other writers have been.

Price refers to the 'real and primary qualities of matter'³⁶ and later opposes the view that primary qualities are ideas in the mind in the sense of being copies of past impressions. Hence, when Price states that an idea 'represents' an object he does not mean to say that it as an *image*. Reid also objected to this equivalence.³⁷

Their agreement on this point aside, Price and Reid used the word 'idea' in

radically different ways. Price was concerned to argue for a conceptual use of idea: as has been noted, most of his 'ideas' amount to relations between objects as part of a self-consistent scheme. This accounts for the difference between them on the use of words like 'conceive' and 'imagine' that Price remarked upon in the third edition of the *Review*.³⁸ It would seem that only with the attack on Hume commenced by Beattie did the connotation of 'represent' become restricted to image.³⁹ This is why Price found it necessary to change words like 'represent' to words like 'denote' in the third edition of the *Review*. It is significant that he felt no need to make these changes after reading the *Inquiry* on its first appearance, even though he refers to it in the second edition of the *Review*.⁴⁰

Previous commentators have pointed out the philosophical difficulties of this small section of the *Review*; what I have aimed to do is to place these in their historical context and try to suggest how Price came to write — or felt it necessary to write — in the way that he did. That his main aim was the refutation of scepticism must be clear. The problem was that any empirical system had to make statements about a material world that could not be directly perceived, whilst justifying them by what were supposed to be elements of experience, variously termed sensations, impressions or ideas. Such statements could therefore be seen to refer only to the mind itself: this was Hume's position.⁴¹ Alternatively, one could take the view that the powers of man have been given for a given purpose and that what knowledge we have is sufficient for our present state. This was the position of Locke and Hutcheson and entails a degree both of voluntarism and relativism that Price could not have accepted.⁴²

Price argued that whatever else may be said of these accounts of the operations of the mind, they do not show that the mind can possess ideas that are true: without this, knowledge of God or of anything else becomes impossible. The arguments for the reality of universals found in Plato and Cudworth must therefore have been very convenient.⁴³ Price asserts that the same logical status applies to the postulates of Newton's physics, altering their status from mathematical laws to indications of the operations of the divine mind.⁴⁴ Thus Price allows no scope for the possibility freely conceded elsewhere, that an explanation of the operation of the physical world can be an hypothesis and, to that extent, instrumentalist in character. Instead he takes the position that our apprehension of reality, though partial, is, so far as it goes, true. The mind's function, indeed, is to pursue truth.⁴⁵ But since the notion of hypothesis that was crucial to the development of eighteenth century science is predicated on the observation that what the mind conceives is not necessarily the case it should cause no surprise that Price finds it so easy to come to rest in a monolithic, self-evident, 'Newtonianism'. His roots ultimately lay in the rationalism of the seventeenth century.

¹ Richard Price, *A review of the principal questions in morals*, ed. D.D. Raphael (Oxford, 1974), 14. Unless otherwise stated all references are to this edition, a reprint of the 1787 text. Price cites Francis Hutcheson, *Illustrations on the moral sense*, sect. iv [i.e. pp. 160-64 in the edition edited by Bernard Peach (Cambridge, Mass., 1971)]. John Locke, *An essay concerning human understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1976), II, xxiii, 12.

² Price, *Review*, 3 (preface to first edn.).

³ Cf. D.D. Raphael, *The moral sense* (Oxford, 1947), 115ff. and his 'Introduction' to his edition of the *Review*; also D.O. Thomas, *The honest mind* (Oxford, 1977), 41ff.

⁴ John Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth* (Cambridge, 1951), 103-105 (Passmore argues that Price merely appropriates Cudworth's views); Raphael in *Review*, p. vi. On the Scottish Enlightenment see T.G. Segerstedt, *The problem of knowledge in Scottish philosophy* (Lund, 1935), 19ff.; S.A. Grave, *The Scottish philosophy of common sense* (Oxford, 1960), 9; D.D. Raphael in *Review*, 29n., D.O. Thomas, *The honest mind*, 44.

⁵ *Review*, *passim*. Price had subscribed to Henry Grove's *System of moral philosophy* (London, 1749). Cf. also Richard Brinkley, 'The library of Richard Price', *The Price-Priestley Newsletter*, 4 (1980), 4-15.

⁶ Price, *Observations on the importance of the American Revolution* (1784) in W.B. Peach *Richard Price and the ethical foundations of the American Revolution* (Durham, N.C., 1979), 205; Richard Price to Lord Monboddo, 11 Dec. 1780 (MS. National Library of Scotland); William Morgan, *Memoirs of the life of the Rev. Richard Price* (London, 1815), 19.

⁷ *Review*, 280.

⁸ *Review*, 20.

⁹ Cf. *Review*, 36n. In the last paragraph (added 1769) Price confesses that he was unaware that Locke's solution to the Molyneux problem had ever been questioned until he had read Smith, *Course of opticks* (London, 1738). Smith's work — though not his discussion of the problem — is cited frequently in Reid's *Inquiry into the human mind* (1764) which may therefore have brought this work to Price's notice. Cf. Thomas Reid, *The works*, 6th edn. (Edinburgh, 1863), 1012, for a list of references. Another possible source is Philip Doddridge, *Course of lectures on the principal subjects in pneumatology, ethics, and divinity* (London, 1763), 14. Doddridge's Proposition V, scholium 4, 'Many errors in our ideas of sensation are rectified by reflection' refers to Locke's discussion of the Molyneux problem at *Essay*, IV, ix, 8-9, as well as Smith's discussion (op.cit., II, 27, 28). If this is Price's source he failed to check Doddridge's other reference, to Edward Synge's letter to William Molyneux of 6 Sept. 1695, printed in Locke, *Some familiar letters* (London, 1708), 134-38 [see Locke, *Correspondence* (Oxford, 1979), V, 494-96]. This was the first positive answer. Hutcheson had come to a similar solution; a fact that would not have surprised Price given his citing of Hutcheson, *Essay on the nature and conduct of the passions* (London, 1729), 3-4n. at *Review*, 39, n.1. Cf. David Berman, 'Francis Hutcheson on Berkeley and the Molyneux problem', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 1974, 259-265.

¹⁰ Locke, *Essay*, II, iii-vii.

¹¹ *Review*, 17-18.

¹² *Review*, 38.

¹³ *Review*, 20. Although Price frequently cites Ralph Cudworth's posthumous *Treatise concerning eternal and immutable morality* (London, 1731), his citations are rarely verbatim.

¹⁴ *Review*, 19-20. In the footnote on p. 20 Price quotes Cudworth's *Treatise*, 185-187 at length; his quotation is in fact a loose paraphrase. This passage is not reproduced either in L.A. Selby-Bigge, *British moralists* (Oxford, 1897), or in D.D. Raphael, *British moralists, 1650-1800* (Oxford, 1969).

¹⁵ *Review*, 46, possibly an echo of Samuel Clarke, *A discourse concerning the being and attributes of God*, 4th edn. (London, 1716), 56. Cf. Passmore *Ralph Cudworth*, 30-31. Like Cudworth Price seems not 'much concerned to describe the nature of sensation; his main object is to argue that sensation whatever its precise character, is in any case not knowledge'.

¹⁶ Locke, *Essay*, II, iv, 1; *Review*, 21; David Hume, *Treatise of human nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1978), 229.

¹⁷ *Review*, 22-23, 25-26. Hume, *Enquiries concerning the human understanding and concerning the principles of morals*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd edn. (Oxford, 1975), 59. Price seems to be hinting at Laudan's distinction between the 'plebian' and 'aristocratic' problems of induction. Cf. Larry Laudan, *Science and hypothesis* (Dordrecht, 1981), 72ff.

¹⁸ *Review*, 26. Cf. Richard Price, *Four dissertations*, 4th edn. (London, 1777), 44ff.

¹⁹ Richard Price and Joseph Priestley, *A free discussion of the doctrines of materialism and philosophical necessity* (London, 1778), 139ff.; Price, *Four dissertations*, 28.

²⁰ *Four dissertations*, 28; Richard Price, *Review* (London, 1758), 35-36n., 318n., 485-86. Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Essays on the principles of morality and natural religion* (Edinburgh, 1751), 151ff., a concise summary of his views can be found on pp. 202-204. These were changed in the second edition of 1758 which gave rise to the 'Advertisement' inserted at the end of the first edition only of the *Review*. This text is not included in Raphael's edition, but was reprinted by W. Bernard Peach in *The Price-Priestley Newsletter*, No. 2 (1978), 77-78.

²¹ Raphael, *The moral sense*, 125ff.; *Review*, xxi-xxii.

²² Price and Priestley, *Free discussion*, 4; *Review*, 27; *Four dissertations*, 29.

²³ *Free discussion*, 39-40; Isaac Newton, *Four letters to Dr. Bentley* (London, 1756), cited by Price, *Review*, 291n.; *Free discussion*, 6; *Four dissertations*, 42-43n.

²⁴ *Review*, 23-24; *Free discussion*, 10-11. Price cites Newton as an authority on this point. Cf. Isaac Newton, *Opticks* (New York, 1952), 388-89. In his treatment of space and time Price is dependent on Samuel Clarke. See *Review*, 293-94.

²⁵ *Review*, 26-27.

²⁶ *Review*, 280.

²⁷ *Review*, 28. 'And, had we a perfect insight into the constitution of nature, the laws that govern it, and the motions, textures, and relations of the several bodies that compose it; the whole chain of future events in it would be laid open to us'.

²⁸ *Review*, 31n. Price here refers to Cudworth's *Treatise* presumably the discussion at 155ff. As before this passage is not included either in Selby-Bigge's or in Raphael's collections.

²⁹ *Review*, 30n. Elsewhere Price states his complete agreement with Cudworth on all matters except the notion of a plastic nature. See Richard Price to Lord Monboddo, 3 Aug. 1780 (MS. National Library of Scotland); William Knight, *Lord Monboddo and some of his contemporaries* (London, 1900), 122. On plastic nature, see *Four dissertations*, 46n. This would not seem to amount to a revival of the doctrine of innate ideas as attacked by Locke in Book I of the *Essay* and which is discussed by John W. Yolton, *John Locke and the way of ideas* (Oxford, 1956). D.D. Raphael in *Review*, xix-xx, is unclear but asserts that Price, 'is not . . . prepared to embrace a theory of innate ideas such as Cudworth's' whilst citing *Review*, 30-31, adding (in seeming contradiction), 'It is not clear just what view Price himself took'. D.O. Thomas, *The honest mind*, 43-44, takes a similar view. However it would seem that Cudworth does not believe in innate ideas either in the naive or in the dispositional sense described by Yolton: his views seem to conform to the Stoic principles described by Yolton, *John Locke*, 36-37. Yolton appears to accept that this was so. See his *Locke and the compass of human understanding* (Cambridge, 1970), 173 n. 2. Passmore argues on similar lines (see *Ralph Cudworth*, 39), citing Damaris Cudworth's letter to Locke, probably itself parodying Cudworth, of 7 Apr. 1688 (see Locke, *Correspondence* (Oxford, 1978), III, 433).

³⁰ *Four dissertations*, 13ff.

³¹ *Review*, 101.

³² *Free discussion*, 85.

³³ *Review*, 101-102.

³⁴ Reid, *Works*, 209b; *Review*, 280.

³⁵ Cf. D.D. Raphael and D.O. Thomas as cited in n. 4 above.

³⁶ *Review*, 280, 46n.

³⁷ *Review*, 39n. Reid equated idea and image. Cf. *Works*, 305a. This was doubtless a relic of Reid's original acceptance of Berkeley's idealism. Cf. Reid, *Works*, 7a, 283a. The extent of Price's knowledge of (or interest in) Berkeley is unclear. He refers to him in passing at *Review*, 56n. only.

The specific rejection of idea as image found in *Review*, 39n. was added in 1769, presumably in response to Reid.

³⁸ *Review*, 279.

³⁹ James Beattie, *Essays* (Edinburgh, 1776), 40. This from the *Essay on truth* first published in 1770. Price is listed in the subscribers to the 1776 edition of the *Essays*.

⁴⁰ Hence because an idea implies the possibility of the existence of a corresponding object, Price thought the theory of ideas a weapon against scepticism (*Review*, 281). This is why he disagreed with Reid's use of the word conceive: he rejected Reid's assertion that to conceive is no more than to 'understand distinctly' the meaning of a proposition (*Works*, 378a; *Review*, 279). Price argues that one can suppose anything however nonsensical to be the case; conception can only apply to things that are possible, i.e. non-contradictory. Cf. Michael Hooker, 'A mistake concerning conception' in Stephen F. Barker and Tom L. Beauchamp, *Thomas Reid: critical interpretations* (Philadelphia, 1976), 86-94.

⁴¹ Hume, *Treatise*, 216.

⁴² Locke, *Essay*, IV, xiv, 2: Locke's suggestion that God might have given matter the power to think (IV, iii, 6) extends this principle. Francis Hutcheson, *A short introduction to moral philosophy* (Glasgow, 1747), 112-113; *Illustrations on the moral sense*, 138.

⁴³ One suspects the dominant influence to have been Cudworth: so much of the phraseology of the *Treatise* appears in the texture of the *Review* that Price clearly knew it intimately. Cf. especially *Review*, 19-21. Nevertheless, as Raphael points out (*Review*, vi) Price was 'enough of a classical scholar to read and interpret Plato for himself'. See also Brinkley, 'The library of Richard Price', *The Price-Priestley Newsletter*, No. 4, and the references there given.

⁴⁴ Cf. Price *Four dissertations*, 39ff. and the discussion of this passage in *Free discussion*, 7-8, Price's Newtonianism is more that of Newton's followers, notably Samuel Clarke than Newton himself. Cf. Clarke *A discourse*, 52ff. for an earlier statement of this version of the Newtonian theory. Newton was much more cautious than Clarke or Price in asserting that (for example) the laws of motion were either necessary or self-evident. Cf. N.R. Hanson, 'Hypothesis fingo' in Robert E. Butts and John W. Davis, *The methodological heritage of Newton* (Oxford, 1974), 14-33. In spite of frequent citations of Newton's letters to Bentley, Price never cites Bentley's Boyle Lectures, the *Eight sermons* (London, 1693), though he cites works by Cotes, Derham, and Maclaurin in *Four dissertations*, 44ff.

⁴⁵ *Review*, 73.

MATTHEW TINDAL ON PERFECTION, POSITIVITY, AND THE LIFE DIVINE

Stephen. N. Williams

Fifty years ago, in the course of some comments on quantum physics, William Temple remarked that 'Deism is not a living theory at the present time and needs no killing'.¹ Accepting at least the fact of death by proclaiming a resurrection would be a dubious way of celebrating the jubilee of this statement. Yet acquaintance with Protestant church life in much of the English-speaking world reveals that the substance, if not the form, of Deism oft remains. If so, one is not compelled to decide between survival and resurrection; it might seriously be rejoined that churches should in such cases be identified with graveyards.² Still, this would denigrate the theological respectability, not the theological significance, of Deism. Deists could formulate a case against traditional Christianity that may appear as the epitome of rational, and hence sound, faith to many a churchgoer. Tindal's *Christianity as old as the creation* is arguably a case in point.³ Neither the man nor the work can go responsible for all the debts of Deism. There were Deists before Tindal and Samuel Clarke could have unearthed for you four kinds before this Bible of that movement saw daylight. However, both the man and the work gladly go responsible for the title 'Deist' whatever subsequent difficulties obtain with the definition of that term and the proper taxonomy when we consider the varieties.⁴

Labels aside, in opposing the necessity of revealed religion and proposing the all-sufficiency of natural religion, Tindal joined a company which crossed the ditch separating proponents from opponents of each.⁵ Deep and wide as the ditch might be, it need not look ugly, for the pasture of natural religion sustains the hungriest soul. Whether or not Tindal displays the heart-hunger of a rationalist *for* natural religion, he shows little sign of Temple's 'hunger *of* natural religion'.⁶ He conducts his business without hesitation, equivocation or remorse. Its purpose is stated in the preface to the work, its nature in the first chapter and its order at the conclusion of the penultimate one. If Tindal's claims are advanced in a way that leaves little doubt about their content, the lover of formal tidiness may yet be more than a little frustrated at their presentation. In coffee-house language, the whole book is a literary tumble dryer where the same items constantly reappear in unpredictable order. It is easy to enumerate these items. I aim, however, to go beyond the usual descriptions of the content of the work by showing that and how its principal argument should be described as one sustained deduction from the idea of God. By its formal use and on account of its analytic implications, the concept of God spells out the content of religious truth definitively. In conclusion, I shall make a suggestion about the significance of this.

In the preface to this, his literary swan-song, Tindal unfurls the banner of lay liberation whose emblem announces that the lowliest should 'distinguish between religion and superstition' (iii). Initially, the issues on the agenda are 'sincerity' and 'natural religion'. (2) 'Sincerity' is manifested in the willingness to exercise individual judgement in religion, but where this refers to the disposition of the seeker who may not find, its trail in the book is faint, if susceptible of pursuit. This is because Tindal is principally concerned to show that and how the truth can be known; hence the case of the sincerely unsuccessful searcher is relatively by the way. Tindal seeks to force his reader into a decision between the natural religion of reason and the positive religion of revelation — it is the glorious absence of any *via media* that enables the contours of the argument to stand out in sharp relief.

It would be false to claim that a single argument or pattern of argument is without exception used to justify the oft-repeated central claims. But a single pattern does completely dominate so that these claims can be deduced from a single axiom: the idea of God is the idea of a being of all perfections. No other axiom can apparently function within his framework so as to yield by purely logical explication all the principal conclusions of that work.⁷

Natural religion . . . as I take it, differs not from revealed, but in the manner of its being communicated: the one being the internal, as the other the external, revelation of the same unchangeable will of a being, who is alike at all times infinitely wise and good. (2)

Proving this point turns out to be surprisingly straightforward in principle. If it be granted that God gave mankind a universal and original rule whose observance He required, its perfection and immutability follow,

since no religion can come from a being of infinite wisdom and perfection, but what is absolutely perfect . . . Can therefore a religion absolutely perfect . . . not be as immutable as the author of it? (3)

Further, unless God's purpose is self-defeating, the means of knowing that rule, alternatively called 'law' or 'religion', must also have been given; infinite power achieves the goal of infinite goodness. Christianity is therefore valid only if original, its provisions identical with the very law of our creation. Only in the manner of its communication can it differ from natural religion. 'Internal revelation' or 'reason' is the appointed instrument for religious understanding and discrimination. The Gospel will liberate us from superstition only as the revelation of the 'law of nature, or reason' which is 'common or natural to all rational creatures' and 'like its author . . . absolutely perfect, eternal and unchangeable'.⁽⁷⁾ Both the eternity of a law perceived by reason and its identity with the precepts of external revelation will indeed require some

demonstration. For the present, let the simple logic prevail provisionally: no other state of affairs is consistent with the divine nature. What revelation can maximally require, reason must necessarily teach.

It is hardly surprising, in the light of this introduction, to gather that 'arguing from the divine attributes is a most certain way of reasoning'.⁽³¹⁾ It is the heterodox conclusion, not the method of arguing, which is initially a stumbling-block.⁸ Whatever the hints he drops, Tindal does not spell out his position on proofs for the existence of God nor actually demonstrate how the idea of God is formed and taken to correspond to His reality. While it may be somewhat gratuitous to classify his work as a radical theology rather than as a philosophical investigation into religion, it is important to make the point that the idea of God comes into play naturally and indisputably. Additionally, while the criteria of *vera religio* are described and Christianity shown to meet them, the validity of Christian religion is overtly regarded as a matter of fact, not of dispute. What we must get right from the start, as far as Tindal is concerned, is that idea of God.

Must we not . . . intend by it [the word *God*] a being of all perfections . . . And must we not have an idea of these perfections, before we can know whether there is any being who has enjoyed them from all eternity; and must we not know there is such a being from our reason before we can come to this question, whether He's made any external revelation? (55)

It is well to keep this in mind as we seek to uncoil the skein of the argument that follows.

What is the vaunted natural religion of reason? The best brief answer is not revolutionary: it is the love of God and of neighbour.⁽⁷²⁾ Its outworking, however, is far from an orthodox exegesis of this injunction. This is so principally because self-realization effectively replaces what may be offered to God in religion. If we consider the divine creation of the world, we must inevitably conclude that it was *pro nobis*.⁹ For God is infinitely happy in Himself, else He is imperfect. As creation for His own sake would signify divine deficiency, the world must be ours. If our happiness is His goal (and this follows from infinitely benevolent self-sufficiency) then it is legitimately ours too. But then our duty and happiness are united at a stroke: we ought to pursue our happiness. Herein is achieved an important aspect of the programme of lay liberation (iv). What Kant joined together with some studious and methodical care, Tindal relates with no trace of agony. Bold 'onto-theologizing', to use the Kantian phrase, moves swiftly and surely.¹⁰ As far as Tindal is concerned a little resting on one's laurels is in order here — once the happiness question is settled, all else is settled.⁽¹⁸⁾

Now of course,

God, who does nothing in vain, would in vain have implanted . . . this only innate principle [happiness] in mankind, if he had not given them reason to discern what actions make for and against their happiness. (18)

If the logic of perfection and the fact of creation determine the legitimacy of our joys and their intrinsic connection with our duties, it is the nature of that Creator that also directly informs us wherein our happiness consists.

If we know wherein the happiness of God, who is necessarily happy, consists, we might judge wherein consists the happiness of man made after God's own image . . . (19)

That (divine) happiness consists not in brute omnipotence but in the perfection of harmony of will and power with the 'infallible dictates of His own reason' so that, as Scott says,

there's nothing in him but what his own reason perfectly approves; no inclinations in his will or nature but what are exactly agreeable to the fairest ideas of his own mind. (19)

Made in the divine image, we are good and happy if we live likewise according to the rules of 'right reason'. Tindal does not analyse the nature of God-talk nor adumbrate a systematic doctrine of God and His relation to us. He operates with a form of *analogia entis*:

Our reason for kind, tho' not for degree, is of the same nature with that of God's; nay 'tis our reason which makes us the image of God himself, and is the common bond which unites heaven and earth; the creatures and the Creator. . . (20)

Tillotson shows how even the best clerics can get it right when he says that,

[man] finds these perfections in some measure in himself, which he contemplates in the divine nature . . . Every good man is in some degree partaker of the divine nature, and feels that in himself, which he conceives to be in God. (119)

Imitatio dei (25) is enabled by *analogia entis*; the life divine witnesses the implantation of God's moral perfections in us. (20) Of course, one does get a dastardly breed of 'anthropomorphites' who read their own weaknesses into God (386) and much superstition is rightly castigated as the tendency to 'debase and bring him down to us. . . compare, and judge him by

ourselves. . . clothe him with our infirmities. . . [Tindal quotes Charron, *Of wisdom*, p. 73]. But of what constitutes false anthropomorphism and sound ontology, or of literal and analogical predications we hear nothing. What we gather from the logic of divine perfections gives us all we need on these scores.

On one point, however, Tindal elaborates a little and this is a point of major significance. It concerns the relation of will and nature in God. The 'relations between things and the fitnesses resulting from thence' are 'the sole rule of God's actions' (26) and so 'the will of God is always determined by the nature and reason of things'. (36) To put it more crisply, with the 'judicious Mr. Scott', the will and power of God are 'perfectly subject to His moral perfections'. (198) This actually is fatal for traditional revelation. God's law unto Himself is His law unto us. As God is immutable, so is His law. 'In all God's laws, 'tis the reason of the law that makes it a law' (98) and 'the reason why the law of nature is immutable, is because it is founded on the unalterable reason of things. . . (51)

We must therefore ask,

how it can be conceived that God's laws, whether internally or externally revealed, are not at all times the same, when the author of them is, and has been, immutably the same for ever? (89)

Formally, then, religion is immutable because it reflects the will of an immutable deity, a will congruent to that nature. So as the worthy Sherlock puts it:

It would be as reasonable to suppose, that the three angles of a triangle should be equal to two right ones in one age and unequal in another, as to suppose that the duties of religion should differ in one age from what they were in another; the habitudes and relations from which they flow continuing always the same. (69)

The mathematical analogy employed here suggests how one element in the appeal of this doctrine of God is the aesthetic one: how could a Crucified Sufferer in history shed abroad a light of radiance comparable to that of the Immutable Deity of Eternity?¹¹ If one must elect either the God of Spinoza or the God of Luther to the throne of majesty, cannot reason rightly judge which is worthy of the diadem, just as the eye discerns shape and colour?¹² 'There should not always be storms or thunder, a clear sky would sometimes make the Church look more like heaven'.¹³ Let the reasonable man choose between the frowning, arbitrary God whose intrusions into History offer the consolation of an Epicurean thunderbolt, and the serenely immutable artificer whose absence from history is the very splendour of light.¹⁴

If, however, Tindal can shed a rational tear over this he gives away the fact that *analogia entis* has its limit. For God sheds no tears: He is entirely impassible.¹⁵ Religion can never be the service of God for Himself – that is ‘profane and blasphemous’ for it presupposes that God is defective in perfection, requiring something and capable of being affected. As service cannot be the service of God, so sin is against man, not God. (34) If we remember that rationally-bounded self-realization trades on divine impassibility then the proper content of religion, and the proper context of service, has to do with neighbour-love.¹⁶ The wise do well to substitute love for misdirected faith, for the latter, with God as its whole object, is fruitless. Faith is at best simply assent compelled on rational grounds, does God no favours and is practically valuable only as the recognition that neighbour love must derive from apprehension of the divine nature.¹⁷ Such an attitude must govern our response to the Gospel:

If faith in God himself, no more than any other act of religion, is not required for God’s sake, but for our own; can faith in one sent by God be required for any other end? (41)

Tindal does not need to dwell much on the way in which acts of benevolence constitute the *unum necessarium* for salvation. (43) The debate with orthodoxy is not over the propriety of neighbour love but over its religious adequacy, and that is settled by attending to the questions of self-realization and the service of God.¹⁸ Suffice it to say that charity is morality and morality is religion and the whole business is but one integrated activity according to the intrinsic reason of things.¹⁹

In sum, then, the pattern of natural religion derives from an eternal inner-divine archetype whose general principle and content emerge from a steady concentration on the idea of God. Tindal, as Sir Leslie Stephen remarked, was ‘perfectly capable of fathoming the divine nature’. But Stephen does not clearly present this fact as a logical basis for Tindal’s deduction of the nature of religion. He offers the following presentation of Tindal’s argument:

- (1) God is infinitely wise, good, just and immutable.
- (2) Human nature is also unchangeable.

Therefore,

- (3) The law which God lays down for men will be perfect and unchangeable.

He further comments that ‘the intermediate proposition as then understood, was tautologous’. That is, human nature is a concept abstracted from all existing

human individuals. Stephen’s criticism is that this claim is wrongly construed when its sense is that nature is always the same for religious purposes, rendering Tindal’s argument fallacious.²⁰

Now it can be taken for granted that (a) Tindal understood human nature in the way Stephen describes and (b) he was capable of the pattern of argument also described. But characteristically, the conclusion that the divine requirement is both perfect and unalterable derives directly from the first proposition. Additionally, Tindal’s only significant *argument* in *Christianity* for the unchangeability of human nature is drawn again from the perfection of the Creator who impartially wills one will for all everywhere, thus founding unchangeable religion. Were it supposed that a development in the human condition required an alteration in the divine requirement, the divine wisdom and goodness would be compromised. This is why the Fall is a non-starter in Deism, or at least for Tindal: it is checked by divine perfection.²¹ If we need to incorporate the elements in Stephen’s analysis in a description of Tindal’s argument, we can say: if anyone is constituted a person, the law of his nature (obedience to which is the basis of religion) is perfect, unchangeable and identical with that of any other person who is created (as we all are) by a perfect and unchangeable God. Tindal’s grasp of man is at least equalled by his grasp of God; from Him derives the natural religion of reason.

Less obviously, Sullivan, in a recent detailed study of Toland, lacks precision in the formulation of one of Tindal’s contentions. He says:

While the communications of self-styled prophets were riddled with inconsistencies, the decrees of reason were always and everywhere the same. Therefore a creed which came from God would have to be immutable as He was Himself.²²

If ‘therefore’ here is taken to signify a strictly logical move made by Tindal, it is hard to grasp the logic. Perhaps indeed, various patterns of argument incorporating the elements introduced by Sullivan feature in Tindal’s work.²³ But principally, for Tindal, the uniformity of rational decrees are established as a necessary consequence of the divine perfection; they must be uniform for only thus does God guarantee a certain means of knowing His will and the universality of its communication.

If Tindal’s advocacy of rational religion constitutes a sturdy defence of divine perfection, so the assault on revealed religion summons up the same divinely righteous indignation. A little more should be said on the question of revealed religion. First, there are limits to Tindal’s iconoclasm. It was possible in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to retain the concept of revelation as private revelation while rejecting revealed *religion*. Tindal’s interest lies in

revealed religion, but he does not deny outright that such a religion can stem from the external will of God. Christianity can thus hang on. What external revelation cannot do is add anything to what is knowable by internal revelation, the natural religion of reason. It cannot reveal anything new. Here Stephen is quite precise:

Unable, or even unwilling explicitly to deny the reality of revelation, he [Tindal] substantially argues that it was superfluous, or rather, that it amounted to a mere duplication of the original document written on the hearts of men.²⁴

Stephen's qualifiers qualify all our statements hitherto and henceforth on revealed religion. As a republication of the religion of nature we may even dare describe the Gospel as necessary – priestcraft had ruined religion and Christ restored it to its pristine purity. However, even if one is disposed avidly to gather all the crumbs that fall from the Tindalian table, they will provide little in the way of ideal nourishment. It will be clear from what follows that should the Bible of Deism replace the Bible of the Church and should its message be heeded, religion would flourish irrepressibly. This is the measure of Tindal's concessions to externally revealed religion.

Like the term 'revelation' the words 'positive religion' require comment. As a phrase, 'positive things' appears in the first chapter: some (wrongly) believe that the will of God may contain 'merely positive things'.⁽⁶⁾ At the end of the ninth chapter it is averred that the answer to the question of whether natural and revealed religion really differ depends on whether God can command 'merely positive' along with moral things in religion.⁽⁹⁹⁾ While 'rites, ceremonies, signs and symbols' appear here to provide the paradigm case of positivity, neither here nor in the first chapter is it suggested that this is all there is to it. The positive, as emerges from the extended discussion of it in the tenth and eleventh chapters, is anything allegedly commanded by God that is not founded 'on the nature of things'. It is not suggested, in the attack on positive religion, that such religion consists solely of such merely positive, arbitrary matters entirely unrelated to rational morality. It is the *inclusion* in religion of any positive thing as a matter of revelation that is under fire.²⁵ Indeed, one can sanction various mutable devices to achieve given ends (such as forms of church polity) but any such variety in religious practices has nothing whatsoever to do with the divine commands, which cannot extend to such things.²⁶

Revealed, positive religion, then, transgresses first in its denial of the essence of religion – morality founded on the nature of things. It foists on God the worst of all evils – arbitrariness. An arbitrary command is one not founded on the nature of things. Such arbitrariness is not consistent with divine perfection, manifested in goodness. The options are clear:

There are but two ways for any thing to oblige: either from the reason of the thing, or else from a positive command...(390)

To say that God,

issued out certain commands which have no foundation in reason. . . is it not to suppose God acts arbitrarily. . . Can such commands be the effects of infinite wisdom and goodness? (101)

Who could possibly live at ease in Zion, unable to predict what the arbitrary lawgiver would do next?

Must not our reason tell us, that infinite wisdom can have no commands, but what are founded on the unalterable reason of things? And if God could command at one time for commanding sake in any one point, he might do so in all points and times: and consequently that an arbitrary will, which might change every moment, would govern all things? (222)

This would defeat in magnificent style the divine purpose in creation, namely our happiness,

When men are at a loss to know from the nature and reason of things, what to believe, and what to practice. . . they must be in continual dread of such an arbitrary being. . . (110)

'The reason of things' is the 'relation of things', the intrinsic morality of a properly religious requirement and performance⁽²⁶⁾. Divine arbitrariness as epitomized in commanding the non-moral is a recurrent theme in Tindal.²⁷ Frail mortals that we are, we are all too prone to seek distraction from true, moral religion in all kinds of other things, be they rites or belief in miracles.²⁸ If Kant ever nodded assent to Deism from the depths of his dogmatic slumbers and was tempted to keep the hand of friendship extended even after his awakening, here, in the conviction that positivity tends to corrupt the moral incentive, is Tindal's best hope for support. Unfortunately, Tindal's triumphant denouement of positivity turns assenting nods into despairing dissent for Kant would not agree with the implications of this first clause:

If religion consists in imitating the perfections of God, what perfection of God do the superstitious imitate when they contend. . . for forms, rites and ceremonies? (107)

Exalting the moral at the expense of the positive in the name of God involves exalting the certain over against the uncertain in religion. This requires special attention,

Was there any thing but morality necessary to constitute true religion; we might be so certain that the goodness of God would give us a demonstration for it, equal to that he has given us for morality. (115)

Tindal never separates the treatment of the material content of religion (natural or revealed) from treatment of the epistemological issues (reason and revelation). He nails his epistemological colours to the mast, however, with singular deliberation when the mildly submissive enquirer into natural religion demands of its exponent that he clarify a central but hitherto undefined term. (The work is written in the form of a dialogue). That word is 'reason'. There follows this definition:

When we attribute any operation to it, as distinguishing between truth and falsehood, etc., we mean by it the rational faculties; but when we ascribe no such operation to it, as when we give a reason for a thing etc., we then understand by it, any medium, by which our rational faculties judge of the agreement or disagreement of the terms of any proposition. . . (159)

Tindal now seeks to market reason in the form of canned empiricism. The objects of our intellectual operations are 'ideas' whose content is expressed in corresponding words and propositions. Ideas arise from sensation or reflection and knowledge is the perception of their mutual agreement or disagreement. Relations between them are affirmed in propositions which convey truth, and truth arises when ideas or propositions are intuitively joined or when demonstration provides requisite knowledge of relations. From this, Tindal proceeds to affirm that propositions which are self-evidently true ground all knowledge on an intuitive base. This can be theologically described as an inner divine inspiration or illumination enabling any demonstration or knowledge whatsoever. Inevitably, God's knowledge is purely intuitive; ours involves intuition in the course of any given demonstration. Without demonstration something may be regarded as being probably true but it can never be known to be true. It is the formal relation of a proposition to self-evident truth that determines its epistemological status in this respect.²⁹

It is not important here to trace the pedigree of this epistemology; it obviously attempts to reproduce Locke though what follows will indicate just how far Tindal was capable of wandering from the former's position.³⁰ A tale might well be told here of how many a banished exile (in some form of innatism, rationalism or realism) crept back in the early eighteenth century under cover of Lockean terminology, reduced but restored with Jacobite joy in a good portion of their religious homeland. In *Christianity* the general epistemology is significant as the basis and pattern of religious epistemology. But it is worth a moment's pause in its own right.

General epistemology reveals the possibilities of divine self-communication:

Were it not for those self-evident notions, which are the foundation of all our reasonings, there could be no intellectual communication between God and man; nor, as we are framed, can God ascertain us of any truth but by showing its agreement with those self-evident notions. . . (162)

Truth is one:

If truth in general implies the agreement of our ideas with the things themselves, religious truth. . . must consist in the agreement of our ideas with those things which are the subjects of our enquiry. . . (53)

But if we identify the inward light which grounds the possibility of all knowledge with the divine illumination, do we not perceive *why* such illumination "resides" within?

What other reason can you assign why infinite wisdom should act thus; but to give mankind standing rules to distinguish truth from falsehood, especially in matters of the highest consequence to their eternal as well as temporal happiness? (10)

If religious epistemology must conform to general epistemology, God has seen to it that general epistemology is ordered to religious needs. It would go outside what the text actually says and what may be confidently inferred on its basis to claim that Tindal's general epistemology is formally required by his doctrine of God or that he shaped it precisely in conformity to his theological convictions and not on the basis of its intrinsic philosophical merits. To argue this would give the logic of divine perfection tremendous scope. What we can say is that Tindal's doctrine of God requires that we possess religious certainty and religious certainty actually depends on conformity to the canons of general epistemology. The point is this:

[The plainness of God's precepts] is agreeable to infinite wisdom directed by infinite goodness, which certainly will give us equal degrees of evidence for religious truths, which so much concern us, as it has done for truths of less importance. (114)

There are no exceptions to the mode of religious knowledge heretofore spelled out. "The Holy Ghost can't deal with men as rational creatures, but by proposing arguments to convince their understandings and influence their wills. . ." (176). The problem is that what is often proposed as evidence for there being a revelation or what is proposed in the putative revelation simply does not meet the criteria laid down for being religiously certain or religiously

acceptable. How can the claim *that* revelation has occurred ever be more than probably true? (162). Visions certainly do not fit the bill. (162) Miracles accredit nothing. Claims to them are found in all religions; (177) they can be performed by evil beings (313); consequently they cannot be credited with certainty as coming from God, let alone accredit accompanying propositions. This, Tindal thinks, is a significant point where Samuel Clarke gets off the track.³¹ Clarke claims that in the case of a doctrine intrinsically "indifferent" as regards substance (that is, one that is not required to be believed as an axiom of moral necessity) and one whose content renders it, therefore, probably true at best, miracles attest to its certainty. But quite apart from the question of whether God can command *adiaphora* and the question of the agency of evil spirits,

if it be but probable that whatever evidently tends to promote the honour of God, and the practice of righteousness is from God, it can't be more than probable that miracles done in their behalf are from God. (337)

Intrinsic content, antecedently known by reason, is the only evidence of truth.³² Clarke confounds faith with knowledge, building on probability what should only be built on demonstration.

Recourse to propositions "above reason" is impossible. Even if their intelligibility is guaranteed, their actual truth is not testable; they are consequently not propositions worthy of religious assent (198). This is the case with the doctrine of the Trinity.³³ Nor again can an unclear *idea* form the basis of an acceptable proposition. In a moment pregnant with epistemological possibilities, Tindal declares that we have no *idea* of Jesus that may really be called distinct.³⁴

Naturally, the debate between the advocates of reason and advocates of revelation shapes up largely over the question of Scripture. Here we must state and apply a rule of general hermeneutics: one must judge "words" by "things".³⁵ External revelation comes as a word; internal revelation is knowledge of the "thing".

Had God, from time to time, spoke to all mankind in their several languages, and his words had miraculously conveyed the same ideas to all persons, yet he could not speak more plainly than he has done by the things themselves, and the relation which reason shows there is between them. . . (22)

The very law of nature depends on immutable relations rather than words. (34)

To imagine any external revelation not to depend on the reason of things is to make things give place to words. . . (166)

This hermeneutical principle has significant implications for claims to revelation. Sullivan, commenting again on Tindal, claims that:

the central objections which he raised as a deist to any scheme of revelation were those which he had urged as a Socinian tractarian, or logical consequence of them: since scriptural texts were often either obscure or corrupt, they could not be automatically invested with binding doctrinal authority.³⁶

Now it is certainly true that Tindal spoke eloquently on the obscurity and corruption of biblical texts. He had a lot more to say about them too, which served to advance the claims of reason.³⁷ But from the standpoint of Tindal's argument, the objection to revelation does not rest on the state of the texts. Should the text of the Bible be a rationalist's paradise it would (a) belong to reason to describe it as such and (b) never affect the hermeneutical relation between "word" and "thing".³⁸ It may be that the empirical state of the biblical texts, as perceived by Tindal, played a major part in informing Tindal's convictions. Similarly, the empirical state of a priestly Christendom and the empirical history of Christianity may have formed Tindal's outlook. To do full justice to the Bible of Deism one would certainly have to describe his attitude on this front. But no more than an exemplary priesthood would an exemplary text affect the formal argument. A good priest, like a good text, is subject to the sovereignty of reason and what is revealed in the best of external media can never be more than a republication of what reason already knew. This is taken care of by the perfection of God.

To describe rational man in religious matters in the manner of Tindal is to describe the activity of a moral agent.

God will judge mankind as they are accountable, that is, as they are rational; the judgment must hold an exact proportion to the use they make of their reason. (5)

It is not only that morality requires the *use* of our natural faculties as far as they can go. It is that properly moral agency entails the *capacity* of such faculties to exercise religious discrimination.

If man had not natural abilities to distinguish between good and evil, or to know what is pleasing or displeasing to God, how could we say he was a moral agent, or even an accountable creature? (56)

This point is tirelessly repeated.³⁹ Both the importance of the rational deduction from the idea of God and the religious centrality of spiritual discernment are advertised very early in the work:

If . . . you allow that we are to measure what is pleasing or displeasing to God (which takes in the whole of religion) from what our reason teaches us concerning his nature, you allow all I contend for. (26)

While no one who read Tindal would be likely to get him confused with Tertullian, both men could settle the major part of the argument early on with a simple appeal to the logic of "God". *Quaere sit deus, et non aliter inveniens*.⁴⁰

In describing the argument of *Christianity* as, formally, an explication of the logic of "God" I have not undermined the claim that it represents contemporary popular "Deism". Such Deism need not maintain its tenets on the basis of such deduction; it need only recognize in such deduction the coherent and most compelling presentation of these tenets. But whatever should be said on this score it is the argument of the work and not its contemporary relevance that has occupied us. What, finally, is the significance of *Christianity* in its eighteenth century context?

It is natural to see Tindal in this work as an exemplar of that confident reason deemed characteristic of the Enlightenment era, with his own particular way of deploying it in the service of religion. There is, arguably, more to it than that. According to Hans Frei:

There was only one seemingly watertight device for protecting the theological indispensability of historical revelation against deistic insinuations of a natural nonpositive saving knowledge of God. This was a root-and-branch affirmation of the specific historical event of original, inherited and naturally inexpungeable guilt, the fatal moral, metaphysical and noetic flaw which could be wiped out only by a similarly factual saving occurrence.⁴¹

Tindal's attack on redemption as well as revelation in history features particularly in his concluding chapter on Clarke. He accuses the latter of blatant inconsistency in granting deistic premises and resisting deistic conclusions. To Tindal it was absurd to argue, as did Clarke, that the Fall rendered necessary the revelation that had actually come in history. Such historical illumination could only mean that God had left man for years without adequate religious knowledge, while historical redemption proclaimed the equally intolerable fact that God changes his disposition in time.⁴²

I do not think that Frei really means to claim or disclaim that the basic concern of orthodoxy of this period was with the preservation of revelation, with redemption as a means to that end. However orthodoxy or quasi-orthodoxy ordered its apologetics, it is worth reflecting on what revelation and redemption in history normally entail. Revelation in history tends to attack intellectual self-sufficiency in religious epistemology; redemption in history tends (also) to attack moral or religious self-sufficiency in the natural life. It is not that he who denies historical redemption thereby claims spiritual self-sufficiency; one can believe one needs forgiveness from a God who does not

redeem in history. But moral or religious self-sufficiency (within a Tindalian framework I think we may use the terms interchangeably) normally entails the denial of historical redemption. What is involved here can go deeper than epistemology. If one speaks of historical revelation only in order to retain historical redemption, perhaps another speaks of natural reason only in order to affirm "natural" moral-religious self-sufficiency. Again, if the eighteenth century defender of revelation did not always quite see it thus the eighteenth century opponent of it may still have used reason in the service of a something he knew not what. Burns claims that "the Deist attack on revelation can be viewed as an extremist version of the rejection of "enthusiasm" which was almost universal among the educated in the first few decades of the eighteenth century . . .".⁴³ Appraisal of this claim in the present context obviously awaits exposition of the grounds of rejection of enthusiasm. But as Locke's assault on enthusiasm and defence of revelation suggests, and the connection between reconciliation and historical revelation tends to reinforce, the logic of attacks on "enthusiasm" and on "revelation" respectively is likely to differ.

Such a perspective offers more than the promise of turning into vacuous generalizations at best. As far as Tindal is concerned, the power of judgement in religion is not exercised involuntarily - it is the deliberate activity of the moral agent. What better evidence is there of a clear conscience before one's maker (a crucial matter in redemption) than the willing use of given faculties in the highest things? Tindal thought he was completing the work of the Reformers and his programme derives at least one element of its dignity from his felt affinity with them. The Reformers had a sound purpose (to free the laity from Papal oppression) and a sound grasp of the principle needed to achieve it:

the Protestant principle of every man's being oblig'd to judge for himself in all religious matters, without prejudices or partiality. . . (286)

But they failed to implement the principle because they could not see that,

there are no doctrines of a divine original contained in the Gospel dispensation, but what by their innate excellency are knowable to be such . . . (276)

Tindal's affinity with the Reformers becomes more than a little suspect when one recalls Calvin's views on the perspicuity of Scripture and its relation to the created order, or Zwingli's refusal to allow the *imago dei* to induce spiritual complacency. But it is the contrast with Luther that is most to the present point. For Luther to live *coram Deo* is to live mindful of the link between accountability to God and justification *sola fide*. Reason prescribes another way - that of morality and works-righteousness. If *that* is rightly deduced from rational premises, the premises themselves are false.⁴⁴ To live *coram deo* is to be

more mindful of the reminder "thou shalt be judged" than the injunction "thou shalt judge" in religion. Ultimately, from this perspective, the overall sense of accountability of man before maker so differs from that element in it which demands sincere, rational adjudication in religion, as to rob the latter of the kind of epistemological force it has in Tindal. Translated into anti-Deism, this means that some might wonder less how Tindalian reason deduced its conclusions than that it arrived at them without qualms.

Seen in this light, Tindal's work invites a consideration that is more serious, perhaps, than is immediately suggested by an attempt to limit its logically significant argument. A spirit old as Christianity and perhaps old as creation emerges here; at least, there is one manifestation of the the spirit of Stoicism. Athenagoras believed about theology:

It is not the dignity of man and the nobility of rational behaviour but the answerability of man before his maker that is the guarantee of clarity in theology and purity of life.⁴⁵

Athenagoras's attitude can be interpreted as suggestive, at this point, of dissatisfaction with Stoicism. Of the latter (as, more broadly of Greek philosophy) Cassirer wrote that "judgment is the central power in man, the common source of truth and morality. For it is the only thing in which man entirely depends on himself; yet it is free, autonomous and self-sufficing".⁴⁶ If intellectual control is required by a type of self-knowledge and itself enables moral judgement, and if, further, the Christian-Stoic question is really over whether the vaunted autonomy of man is vice or virtue,⁴⁷ then epistemologies can reflect attitudes which "underlie" rational or intellective nature. Neo-Stoicism, in the air long before the time of Tindal, was making this issue practically, if not consciously, significant. If Pascal, wrestling with the moral-religious self-sufficiency of an Epictetus, could cry out that the Blood of the Cross is against all human pride, perhaps we should interpret that cry as a warning that reason will see no need for revelation until men see the need for redemption.⁴⁸ The difference between Pascal and Tindal is well summed up by one of Sullivan's concluding remarks on Deism: "their sense of the demands of a personal God was usually less urgent than their sense of the obligations which were theirs as reasonable beings".⁴⁹

What does this mean for our perception of the Enlightenment? The latitude of the question with its uncritical reference to *the* Enlightenment obviously precludes more than a hint here. The emergent hint is that where difficulties with traditional Christianity are presented in terms of epistemological difficulties, the principal difficulties may be moral. Cassirer has indicated how Tindal's work reveals a shift from the intellectual to the moral in this respect,⁵⁰ and our analysis of the work has suggested what the relative contours of the

"intellectual" and the "moral" might be. Cassirer compares Tindal with Kant at this point and more recently Garrett Green has compared Tindal with Fichte.⁵¹ In Kant and Fichte the "intellectual" and "moral" are joined in the form of "moral reason". It is frequently noted that with Kant the concept of reason shifts from the sense it bore in previous eighteenth century rationalism. But how significant was that shift? Behind the divergent conceptual frameworks of deistic rationalism and incipient romanticism which present divergent epistemological critiques of revelation, is there a unified instinct for the moral rejection of reconciliation which represents the underlying problem that the eighteenth century had with Christianity allying that century with, for example the Stoicism of another day? The answer may be a palpable truism or helpless simplification, at best. But it is worth asking what company of bedfellows is allotted to Tindal by moral necessity. He may have more modernity in him than meets the eye.

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¹ *Nature, man and God* (Macmillan, 1934), 228.

² Alan Richardson could put it less flatteringly from the Deist standpoint: 'Deism is dead but the corpse stinks'. The remark is made in his article on 'Deism' in *A dictionary of Christian theology*, ed. Alan Richardson (S.C.M. 1969).

³ I shall henceforth refer to this work as *Christianity*. Page references are from the third (1732) edition and for the sake of convenience will normally be placed in brackets in the text of the essay. I have retained capitals only where it is natural in modern English and have edited punctuation along similar lines where it is obviously needed.

⁴ Two years before the publication of *Christianity* the seventh edition of Clarke's *A demonstration of the being and attributes of God* emerged. Types of Deist are described on pp. 158-190. Leslie Stephen considers Tindal to be a constructive Deist, Mossner considers him a critical one, but the classification is thematic in the one case and chronological in the other, *A history of English thought in the eighteenth century* (London, 1961), I, 113ff.; E.C. Mossner, *Bishop Butler and the age of reason* (New York, 1936), 52ff.

⁵ On a sense in which 'revealed religion' could be considered 'necessary' even for Tindal, see below.

⁶ I borrow the phrases of Paul Hazard, *The European mind, 1680-1715* (Yale, 1953), 256, and Temple, op. cit., lecture xx. Dryden's poem, quoted by Hazard, lends poignancy to this characterization of Deism when one recalls Pierre Bayle's perception of the conflict of his day as one between the champions of reason and the champions of religion for the souls of men (Hazard, 1.5).

⁷ This claim must be interpreted flexibly on at least two counts. First, its validity depends on what may or may not be considered 'principal conclusions'. Secondly, I take the idea of perfection here to embrace such ideas as goodness and wisdom, although Tindal can mention such ideas alongside each other too as if 'perfection' were a quality along with 'goodness' etc. Further, I am concerned rather with the actual form, explicit and implicit, that Tindal's argument takes than with the possibility of other axioms as a basis for its reformulation.

⁸ Tindal's final chapter is on Samuel Clarke. Clarke gets off to a good start precisely because he too reasons in this way (p. 324).

⁹ For what follows, see the brief second and third chapters especially.

¹⁰ *Critique of pure reason*, trans. N. Kemp Smith (Macmillan, 1933), 525. I do not mean to suggest that Tindal's way of arguing conforms exactly to the Kantian distinction between theists and deists and various types of deism.

- ¹¹ See R. Stromberg, *Religious liberalism in eighteenth century England* (O.U.P., 1954), 52ff.
- ¹² *Christianity*, 5 and 357. I do not mean to suggest that Spinoza and Tindal have an ontologically similar understanding of God.
- ¹³ These words from Halifax, *The character of a trimmer* (1684) seem appropriate; they are quoted in Basil Willey, *The eighteenth century background* (Columbia University Press, 1940), 10.
- ¹⁴ As long ago as S.G. Hefelbower's work *The relation of John Locke to English Deism* (Chicago, 1918), at least, it was made clear that the 'typical' absentee God of Deism is not so typical. But Tindal's God seems to fit the bill rather well; see R.E. Sullivan, *John Toland and the Deist controversy: a study in adaptations* (Harvard University Press, 1982), 225.
- ¹⁵ See, *Christianity*, 32-34.
- ¹⁶ Whether 'reasonable self-love' (to borrow Butler's phrase) is appropriately termed a religious requirement in this context is probably a moot point. (It is, of course, to be *reasonable* for Tindal, not self-indulgent).
- ¹⁷ See *Christianity*, 41ff.
- ¹⁸ 'Self-realization' is not, of course, Tindal's term. I use it to cover the broad right of self-disposal which Tindal takes to be ingredient in creaturehood.
- ¹⁹ The cardinal thesis that morality is religion is frequently mentioned throughout the work (see, *Christianity*, 29, 146, 270, 335).
- ²⁰ Op. cit., 114.
- ²¹ See the final chapter on Clarke.
- ²² Op. cit., 219.
- ²³ The pattern of argument in chapter 2, for example, is not uniform. H. L. Allison neatly sums up Tindal's argument along lines I seek to develop in *Lessing and the Enlightenment* (Ann Arbor, 1966), 14. I think, however, that the identity of human nature Allison takes to be presupposed in Tindal's argument could, in fact, in the relevant respect, be deduced from his *a priori* concept of God.
- ²⁴ Op. cit., 114. But cf. G.R. Cragg, *Reason and authority in the eighteenth century* (C.U.P., 1964), 70. On Tindal's inference from God, see p. 69.
- ²⁵ As the title of chapter XI puts it: 'The supposing things merely positive to be made the ingredients of religion . . .' 26. See *Christianity*, 96.
- ²⁶ See *Christianity*, 96.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 26ff., 51, 54, 107, 123, 132, 151, 166.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 106f., 177.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 159ff.
- ³⁰ See Sullivan's brief comments here, e.g. p. 221. Peter Gay wrote that 'Herbert's *De Veritate* is important for deism not merely in the beliefs it seeks to defend but also more for the theory of knowledge it advocates — or, rather, for the prominence that the theory of knowledge has in Herbert's religious speculations . . . From now on, Deism sought to rest its case explicitly or implicitly on epistemological foundations.' (*Deism: an anthology*, Van Nostrand, 1968, 29). The distinction between the formal role and material content of epistemology here is doubtless meant to allow for Locke's influence on the latter. Possibly Tindal's epistemological position can be plotted in terms of his combination of Herbert and Locke. This work of Tindal's certainly appears to fit the characterization of the Deists' use of Locke as generally 'flashy and superficial' [J. Yolton, *John Locke and the way of ideas*, (Oxford, 1956), 204]. This, however, is not to suggest innate Herbertianism nor even Herbert's innatism. Broadly, one can see that 'there certainly exists no straight line from his religious philosophy to eighteenth century Deism' (A. Jeffner, *Butler and Hume on religion*, Stockholm 1966, 13). And see David Pailin, 'Herbert of Cherbury and the Deists' in *The Expository Times*, April 1983, 196-200; also R.D. Bedford, *The defence of truth: Herbert of Cherbury and the seventeenth century* (Manchester, 1979), ch.8. But cf. M.H. Carré's introduction to *De veritate* (Arrowsmith, 1937), 58-62.
- ³¹ Clarke's view is specifically dealt with in the last chapter.
- ³² The Reformers got it wrong on this, too.
- ³³ See *Christianity*, 182ff. The Locke-Stillingfleet controversy, for one, had revealed how issues of

- religious epistemology, including the intelligibility of discourse, could focus on this doctrine.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 41. In the whole context this tends to undermine the certainty of our conviction that Jesus was indeed sent from God.
- ³⁵ This is a point frequently made one way or the other, see *Christianity*, 166ff.
- ³⁶ Op. cit., 208.
- ³⁷ See *Christianity*, 178, 207, 226, 233, 260 among many others for biblical inconsistencies, errors, textual variants, obscurities anthropomorphisms, etc.
- ³⁸ The issue is an hermeneutical one to the extent that where the meaning of the biblical text is obscure and yet one wants to affirm its truth, it is reason that determines, by its own knowledge, the putative referent of the proposition in question.
- ³⁹ See *Christianity*, 166, 180, 333, and 371.
- ⁴⁰ *Adversus Marcionem*, trans. E. Evans (Clarendon, 1972), 1.3.
- ⁴¹ *The eclipse of the biblical narrative* (Yale University Press, 1974), 61.
- ⁴² See, particularly, *Christianity*, 352ff.
- ⁴³ R. M. Burns, *The great debate about miracles . . .* (Bucknell U.P., 1981), 14.
- ⁴⁴ See here B.A. Gerrish, *Grace and reason* (Clarendon, 1962) especially part 1.
- ⁴⁵ W.R. Schoedel in the introduction to *Legatio* (O.U.P., 1972), xxiii.
- ⁴⁶ *Essay on man* (Yale, 1965), 8.
- ⁴⁷ See Cassirer, op. cit., 9.
- ⁴⁸ See A. Bridoux, *Le Stoïcisme et son influence* (Paris, 1966), 222-24.
- ⁴⁹ Op. cit., 276.
- ⁵⁰ *The philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton, 1951), 174.
- ⁵¹ J.G. Fichte, *Attempt at a critique of all revelation*, tr. and intro. G. Green (Cambridge, 1978).

TWO PRIESTLEY DOCUMENTS

Jeremy Black

Priestley and the French Revolution: An enraged comment

William Eden, Lord Auckland, British envoy at The Hague in the early 1790s was no admirer of the French Revolution. He was convinced that the revolutionary ideology, in particular its atheism, represented a threat to civilized society. Though hesitant about committing Britain to the struggle with revolutionary France, he was a keen supporter of the 1792 invasion by Prussia. The increasing violence of the Revolution led him to become almost hysterical. On 24 August 1792 he wrote to Sir James Bland Burges, the Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, 'The Duke of Brunswicks success becomes highly important; if he fails (which thank God is not probable) Europe will become a forest of two legged wolves and tygers.'¹ Three days before he had claimed that 'the savage and bloody delirium of the Parisians . . . puts one in mind of the days of Herod and the Massacre of the Innocents . . .'.² On 7 September he wrote to Burges,

tho I abhor the whole chapter of the French Revolution and should be glad to erase it from the History of Mankind and from my own memory, it unhappily exists, and in despite of its horrors is very interesting. Under the mobocracy of Paris all authentic channels of information are shut up, and it is only by examining an escaped messenger as you have done, and by availing oneself of ocular [or occular] information that any truth can be attained. Is it possible that Dr. Priestley, with his profession, his years, and his natural frame of mind (which to appearance was mild and humane) can have become mad enough to run into that crowd of cannibals as a friend and admirer? I also wonder at Mackintosh being there. I heartily hope that all these active citizens of France may be found within Paris when the Duke of Brunswick arrives there. I feel no apprehensions respecting the intended manifesto of those Messieurs against the monarchies: a few weeks calm reflection will satisfy all mankind that the Parisian dream of liberty and equality is an abomination; that the carte must be governed as it has been from the remotest periods of History to the present time; & above all, that there are some nations (the French for example) unfit for any Government but that of a strict monarchy.³

Priestley and an agent of Revolutionary France, or Dinner with the respectable Dr. Priestley

A letter in the archives of the French Foreign Ministry mentions a meeting at

dinner on 17 September 1792 between Priestley and Francois Noël. Noël, the son of a merchant, had been educated at Louis-le-Grand with Dumouriez and Robespierre, whose friend he remained. A journalist and official of the premier bureau of the French Foreign Minister he was sent to London in 1792, one of a series of missions that testified to the disorganized state of French foreign policy, the lack of confidence in the young and inexperienced French envoy Chauvelin, and the concern over British policy in the wake of the disastrous beginning of the conflict with Austria and Prussia. The French ministry distrusted George III and what they saw as a war-party led by him, Thurlow and Hawkesbury, but they hoped that Pitt would be able to resist their pressure. Pitt was regarded as anti-French, but opposed to war with France for prudential reasons. It was hoped that Pitt's stance would be encouraged by evidence of genuine pro-French sentiment and partly for this reason French diplomats sought to develop links with the Dissenters who were regarded as sympathetic. Noël's account was sent on 18 September 1792 to the acting French Foreign minister, Pierre-Hélène-Marie Lebrun-Tondu, the premier commis des Affaires Étrangères. The full reference in Paris, Quai d'Orsay, Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Correspondance Politique Angleterre, vol. 582, fo. 174. The letter is printed as in the original.

J'ai diné hier avec le respectable Dr. Priestley à Hackney-College, à 7 milles de Londres. Quoiqu'il parle peu français, nous nous sommes fort bien entendus. Il m'a paru touché du choix que les citoyens français ont fait de lui et tenir à la promesse qu'il a d'envoyer à la Convention son tribut. Je lui ai présenté tous les regrets de mon pays, sur de ne pas trop m'avancer, et je l'ai quitté faisant des vœux pour la prospérité de la cause que nous défendons. Je me suis cru suffisamment autorisé à inviter tous ceux des Publicistes et de Philosophes anglais que j'ai pu voir à envoyer à la Convention le tribut de leurs veilles et de leurs méditations.

University of Durham.

¹ Auckland to Burges, 24 Aug. 1792, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Department of Western manuscripts, Deposit Bland Burges, vol. 30 fo. 181.

² Auckland to Burges, 21 Aug. 1792, fo. 179.

³ Auckland to Burges, 7 Sept. 1792, fo. 182.

'THE SHORT BUT COMPREHENSIVE STORY OF A FARMER'S BULL': PRIESTLEY'S PARTING GIFT FROM THE GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE

Alan Ruston

'No type of publication in the 18th century succeeded more completely than the Gentleman's Magazine in showing the dual character of the age, in revealing its baseness and idealism, its egotism and humanitarian aspiration, its smugness and enquiring spirit, its self-sufficiency and its liberal adventuresomeness.'¹

These words by C. Lennart Carlson sum up many of the problems researchers have in coming to grips with the mass of material contained in the *Gentleman's Magazine* [GM] which ran from 1731 to 1922. In the 18th century in particular it looked so many ways at once, often in the same issue. It has a unique place in English periodical literature. Commenced by Edward Cave (1691-1754) it was the world's first magazine — 'A Monthly Collection to treasure up, as in a Magazine, the most remarkable Pieces'. Under the *nom-de-plume* of Sylvanus Urban, Gent., Cave pioneered new fields, for example, in the first Parliamentary Reports in 1736.

While the success of its coverage of national events was quickly established, its strength from its inception to the mid-19th century lay elsewhere — in its readership in the country both in Britain and abroad.²

It was careful coverage of country matters, topical and topographical, literary and antiquarian, that made it the staple reading of educated gentry and amateur researchers, academics, and others of the growing professional classes, notably schoolmasters, surgeons, and soldiers. The clergy were eagerly courted: 'Articles of peculiar importance to that respectable and numerous body are to be found in every number'.³

This meant that public figures who were, in 18th century terms, 'progressive' in either religion or politics did not often get a kindly reception. Trevor Hearl neatly sums up the attitude of Cave and his even more powerful successor as editor, John Nichols (1745-1826):

The GM was a repository and sounding board for a relatively narrow, if locally influential, class of educated laymen, responsible earnest professionals and minor gentry. John Nichols, noted for integrity and philanthropy, detested party politics and religious sectarianism.³

It will thus come as no surprise that 'in its early years, the GM was strongly anti-Nonconformist' and that Nichols who was joint editor from 1778 and sole

editor from 1792 until his death, followed and developed the same line.⁴

Radical Dissenters were in many ways Nichols's pet hate, and Joseph Priestley in particular was the object of attack. A report did not even have to be true for it to be printed, just as long as it agreed with the line that Nichols saw, probably correctly, would be appreciated by his readership. His prefaces to the volumes of 1791 and 1792 make this very clear:

It is the glory of the GM to be founded on true Protestantism and true Patriotism, superior to the clamours of the day, whether extorted by mistaken humanity, misguided faith, or interested policy. . . . So much for the speculations which administer (we heartily wish the term could be avoided) fuel to controversy, religious or political: but we may surely be allowed to claim a merit from endeavouring to damp, if we cannot extinguish the fire; and to hope for the concurrence of good men of all denominations. (1791)

We have yet again lived to see turbulent and perilous times; but we do not fear that we shall continue to behold the solid good sense of Englishmen dispel the mists of sophistry and vain Philosophy. . . . We are compelled also to avow the melancholy truth, that we have beheld the cause of Religion, and consequently the best hopes of man, audaciously attacked by some, and insidiously undermined by others. In this respect we may venture to claim to ourselves some portion of applause. We have been vigilant in counteracting these attacks, in whatever form, and from whatever quarter they came. (1792)

So it is not surprising that 'Priestley, Dr.' is, for certain volumes, the name which appears more frequently than any other. Everything from his pen was reviewed and attacked. Much is shallow and hastily put together but what is important is that it reflects what Nichols saw his readership wanted, as well as confirming his own position. There is much evidence in the many articles and reviews that appeared of how Joseph Priestley was perceived in the country shires, which in turn was passed on to the rest of the English-speaking world. As in all such instances, Joseph Priestley was often grossly misrepresented but the mis-representation helped form opinion, even if it was corrected in the next issue.

The GM seemed to believe that one of the chief reasons for Priestley's leaving for America in 1794 was to avoid its attacks.⁵ His proposed departure was not exactly lamented, and the issue of March 1794 contained a thinly disguised skit on Priestley entitled 'The Short but comprehensive story of a farmer's bull'. It requires no explanation as anyone with even the briefest knowledge of the life of Joseph Priestley can follow its meaning. Nichols claimed it did not come from his pen; even if it did not it is likely that he was the inspiration.⁶

My reason for bringing forward this story is that it is valuable in demonstrating the attitude of the country gentry towards Priestley, a contemporary viewpoint from local tax payers who did not feel that money should be given to someone who they believed had brought the trouble on himself. It is possible that Priestley got better terms for the loss of his house and apparatus from the courts and the Government than he would have done if the country gentry, and their mouthpiece the GM, had had it in their power to determine.

Alan Ruston,
Watford,
Herts.

**THE SHORT BUT COMPREHENSIVE STORY OF A FARMER'S
BULL FROM GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE LXIV (Mar. 1794), 235-6.**

A certain troublesome fellow, who turned his back upon the Church, having occasion to pass through a large Farm-yard in his way to the Meeting-house, met with a fine majestic, venerable old Bull, lying down at his ease, and basking in the sunshine. This Bull was at times the tamest creature in the world; he would suffer the curs to yelp at him, the flies to tease him, and even some of the mischievous fellows in the farm-yard to pull him by the horns. He was at this very moment in one of his gentlest humours; ruminating upon past and present scenes of delight; contemplating the neighbouring dairy and the farmyard, where the milch-cows had all their bags distended till they were nearly running over; the calves, and the pigs, and the poultry, were frisking, and grunting, and crowing on every dunghill; the granaries were full, and the barns ready to burst. There were, besides, many a goodly rick of wheat, and barley, and oats, and pease, and beans, and hay, and rye-grass, and clover. The dairy was full of curds, and cream, and butter and cheese of every kind. To be sure, there was plenty for the master and his family, and all the servants, and every body belonging to the farm. Nay, those that were poor and needy, and idle, and lazy, and sick, and proud, and saucy, and old and infirm, were freely supplied: and even this troublesome fellow himself, notwithstanding he had long since quarreled with the head-farmer and all his best friends, and an old grudge was still subsisting betwixt them, yet upon making, at any time, a solemn promise, to do no mischief, had free ingress, egress, and regress, into every part of the farm and the dairy, and was at liberty to help himself wherever he liked. In short, he was allowed to do any thing but skim the cream, and set his own mark upon the butter.

Now, because the Bull had happened to place himself a little across his favourite foot-path, although there was plenty of room both to the right and the left, nothing would satisfy this impudent fellow, but he must kick *Old John*, for that was the Bull's name, out of his way; and all the world agrees that *John* suffered him to kick a long while before he shewed the smallest inclination to rise and resent the affront. At last, however, he got upon his legs, and began to look around him, but still it was a look of contempt only, which the foolish fellow mistook for the marks of fear; and now, growing bolder and bolder, and hallooing the curs, and calling all his comrades to prick and goad him in the tenderest parts of his body, the Bull began to threaten and roar: — this was on the 10th of June, one of the hottest days in the summer, when *somebody* threw a fiery=stick under his tail, at the very moment that a parcel of impudent half-witted fellows were trying to flourish a French flambeau (lighted and blazing at both ends) full in his face. — No wonder that the Bull should set off with a vengeance into the streets; down went the ginger-bread stalls, and the hardware

shops, the buckle menders and the razor-grinders, and, the dagger makers: he even got into private houses; and in one place threw down whole baskets full of bottles and chemical glasses, crucibles and gun-barrels — smash went all the jars of inflammable air, which instantly took fire, and spread all over the place; every thing went to rack and ruin; nothing was safe; even the religious houses themselves, where nothing had ever been heard but the most pious exhortations (like those of Dr. Vicesimus Knox), to peace and harmony, and obedience to the governing powers. In short, nothing could pacify, or put a stop to, the fury of this poor enraged animal, till his honest master the Farmer, as quiet and as good a kind of church-going man as ever lived in the world, father of a large family, hearing of the rumpus, sent a number of his best and steadiest old servants to *muzzle* the beast, which had already tossed the fellow with the fiery-stick over the tops of the houses, and gored him in fifty different places. It was next to a miracle that he escaped with his life; and every body thought he had reason to be thankful that he got off so well as he did; but no sooner did he find himself safe in a *hackney-coach*, than, to the astonishment of all the world, he began to *preach* up his innocence, and to lodge a complaint against poor *Old John*, who, in the end, suffered a great deal more than himself. Some silly people pitied him; some laughed at him; others again were wicked enough to wish him at the devil — even his best friends were ashamed of him; and although they, one and all, defended him as much as they could in publick, there was a confounded deal of muttering and grumbling in private. “I thought what it would come to,” said one; “a Pretty method of driving a mad Bull through the church-pales,” said another.

But the strangest part of the story remains to be told; for, no sooner was the bull fairly muzzled, and properly confined, than the friends and neighbours on both sides were called in, to enquire into the whole affair; but there were so many contradictory stories that it was impossible to come at the truth, how it happened, or who had first provoked him but since it was plain to everybody —, Old John did the mischief, and as he was proved to be the Town Bull, it was finally settled that the parish should pay the the damages for not keeping him in proper order.

And here again was fresh matter for discontent: some thought it hard to pay for all the inflammable air, which had done as much mischief as the Bull. Others again objected to a monstrous heavy demand for a large quantity (several reams) of fools-cap paper, which had been scribbled upon and spoiled long before the affair happened. Indeed in the opinion of some sensible persons, it was fit for nothing but lighting the fire . . . Caetera desunt.

¹ C. Lennart Carlson, *The first magazine: a history of the Gentleman's Magazine* (Brown University Press, 1938), 239.

² By 1741 Cave could boast in his preface, ‘The Gentleman's Magazine is read as far as the English language extends, and we see it reprinted from several presses in Great Britain, Ireland and the Plantations . . .’ quoted in Carlson, p. 81.

³ Trevor Hearl, ‘The Gentleman's Magazine: a 19th century quarry’, *The Local Historian*, Vol. 16, No. 6 (May, 1985), 346 and 349.

⁴ Peter Christie, ‘The Gentleman's Magazine and the local historian’, *The Local Historian*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (May, 1982), 81. For more on Nichols see the entry in DNB. His survey of the period is to be found in *The general index to the Gentleman's Magazine, 1787-1818*, Vol. 3, with prefatory introduction by John Nichols, 1821.

⁵ For the example (May 1794) and the subsequent riposte, see Alan Ruston, ‘Priestley and the Gentleman's Magazine’, *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1 (April 1983), 9-13.

⁶ A correspondent in the following issue (April 1794), p. 320, obtained an odd form of denial from Nichols:

My personal knowledge of Dr. Priestley is so slight, and my avowed line of religious conduct so totally opposite to his, that I can have no motive but indignation, at seeing insult after insult heaped on the oppressed, for offering a few strictures on the “Story of a Bull,” in p. 235. Even in that allegory, such as it is, we find a frantic animal, provoked by nobody knows whom, wreaking indiscriminate vengeance on chapels or shops, and breaking crucibles, whose owner the fabulist goes on bespating with abundant scurrility for having demanded legal compensation. But the Church of England must be considered as almost equally ill-treated with Dr. Priestley, on finding itself thus injudiciously confounded with execrable ruffians, two or three of whom expiated their crimes at the gallows: it is pointed out as a beast, devoid of understanding, sluggish by nature, and when once roused, setting no bounds to its fury.

Allow me to propose the following short question: Are we to consider the tale as an avowed production of your Editor? (We answer NO, but cannot conceive the inducement to such a question. EDIT.)

PARADIGMS AND TRADITIONS

Wealth and virtue: the shaping of political economy in the Scottish Enlightenment, ed. Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, first paperback 1985). Pp. ix, [1], 371.

The fifteen essays collected in this volume deal with different aspects of the progress made during the Scottish Enlightenment towards the creation of the highly distinctive science and the immensely fruitful practice of political economy. As the editors acknowledge the study of this development owes a great deal to two recent spates of intense intellectual activity: one, a renewal of interest in the Scottish Enlightenment and the contribution made by it to the development of European culture, investigated and related, not without pride, by several eminent Scottish historians and historiographers; the other, the flowering of an interest in Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, in Grotius and Pufendorf, the leading exponents of the school of natural jurisprudence, and in those whom J.G.A. Pocock has taught us to regard as the proponents of the neo-Harringtonian forms of civic humanism.

As one would expect of scholars who are either agents or beneficiaries of this intellectual ferment, the predominant interest in the study of the Scottish Enlightenment lies in identifying the traditions which influenced the teachings of the leading figures and in locating the practical problems to which they responded. The contributors to this volume are not concerned to study the *The wealth of nations* simply as the logical elaboration of a theoretical model, nor as an exposition of the timeless universals of abstract theory: on the contrary, they believe to a man that understanding such a work requires identifying the cultural traditions from which it springs and which it seeks to develop. In addition to identifying these traditions they are particularly concerned to describe them in terms of the conceptual frameworks that were available to the authors they study. They are therefore sensitive to the dangers of anachronism and prolepsis and anxious to avoid explaining the thought movements of the eighteenth century in categories that did not become relevant until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This emphasis upon the importance of the study of the historical development of different forms of thought may perhaps go a good way towards explaining the sympathy which many of the essayists have for the works of Adam Ferguson, John Millar, David Hume and Adam Smith, for they all in their different ways made considerable contributions to the study of the historical development of economic, social and political thought.

The opening essay by the two editors, Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, deals with a theme that inspires the title of the volume and that recurs either

explicitly or implicitly throughout the whole work: the relative weight of indebtedness of the leading thinkers in the Scottish Enlightenment to the tradition of natural jurisprudence on the one hand, and to that of civic humanism on the other. They consider whether the economic and political thought of Adam Smith owes more to Grotius, Pufendorf and Locke than it does to Machiavelli and Harrington. According to the authors the main problem that Adam Smith addressed himself to in *The wealth of nations* was the resolution of the paradox of commercial society. Compared with previous societies, commercial society produces greater inequalities in the distribution of wealth, yet at the same time is more successful in satisfying the basic needs of the labouring classes that create the wealth. How is this possible? Adam Smith shows that the success of commercial society in creating and distributing wealth depends upon an extensive application of the principle of the division of labour and upon an unrestricted market for the exchange of goods and services. Dismissing the cult of austerity favoured in the civic humanist tradition, Adam Smith celebrates the creation of wealth by the determined pursuit of individual gain. Essential preconditions for the creation of this wealth are the removal of restrictions upon the mobility of labour and a guaranteed security for property rights. The kind of justice upon which this prosperity depends is commutative justice: guaranteeing to each individual the peaceful enjoyment of that which is rightfully his. Hont and Ignatieff show in considerable detail how the tradition of natural jurisprudence from Grotius through Pufendorf and Locke refined the concept of indefeasible property rights the enjoyment of which Smith believed to be essential to the wellbeing of commercial society. They show too how in many other respects Smith favoured the tradition of natural jurisprudence rather than the tradition of civic humanism – the celebration of luxury, the permissibility of depending upon standing armies rather than upon militias, according priority to the enjoyment of civil liberties in preference to the enjoyment of political rights (that is, preferring liberty understood as the absence of restriction to liberty understood as participation in the political process), emphasizing the possibility of progress rather than the pessimistic cycle of growth and decay. Hont and Ignatieff conclude that with the acceptance of Adam Smith's characterization and justification of commercial society, the tradition of civic humanism had run its course.

T.C. Smout assesses the progress the Scottish economy had made by 1776, the year in which the first volume of *The wealth of nations* was published. The accepted picture is that there was not much perceptible quickening of activity until after 1745. This picture, according to Smout, does not even in the light of much recent research require extensive modification, but it is important to take account of the fact that the harvest failure of 1740-41 did not lead to the increase in mortality rates that followed the famines of 1697 and 1699. This development suggests either that by 1740 the organization of famine relief had improved considerably, or that the means of transporting grain in times of

famine had improved, or that there had been a marginal increase in taxable wealth, or, perhaps, some combination of all three. Whatever the cause there is no denying that a relatively primitive agricultural society had advanced to the stage where bad harvests were not of necessity followed by high mortality rates. The quarter century preceding the publication of *The wealth of nations* saw gradual growth towards prosperity in several different fields, in the development of trade in cattle, linens and tobacco, in improvements in agriculture, in the growth of towns and markets, in the development of banking facilities, in the increasing monetization of the economy, and in rising incomes, particularly in the middle classes. This period, Smout claims, can best be thought of, not as a quarter of a century of industrial revolution, but as a period of pre-industrial growth. It was not until the end of the century that Scotland could be said to have entered fully upon the industrial revolution. For this period the writings of Sir James Steuart, particularly his advocacy of government intervention to stimulate the economy, are more relevant, Smout argues, than the prescriptions to be found in *The wealth of nations*. Smith's preoccupation with the sources of capital, the division of labour and the introduction of new technology were more relevant to the end of the century than to the period immediately preceding the publication of his masterpiece. In this respect at least he was more of a prophet than a historian.

James Moore and Michael Silverthorne examine the contribution made by Gershom Carmichael (1672-1729), who was a regent at Glasgow University from 1694 until 1727 and professor of Moral Philosophy there from 1727 until his death, to the transmission and elaboration of the tradition of natural jurisprudence. Francis Hutcheson thought that the supplements and notes that Carmichael introduced in his edition of Pufendorf's *De officio hominis et civis*, were superior to the original work. He included modifications derived from Leibniz's criticism of Pufendorf, the moral philosophy of the Scholastics and a rather idiosyncratic interpretation of Locke on the origin of property and on the social compact. Although Carmichael had an ascetic conception of the duties of property owners which, as Moore and Silverthorne point out, could be of little service to the theorists of commercial society, his transmission of natural theology and natural jurisprudence made a profound contribution to the shaping of the cultural context in which the Scottish Enlightenment developed. It might also be worth pointing out that the emphasis upon *natural* theology and *natural* jurisprudence, together with its attendant relegation of the significance of revelation and 'God's positive law' made a substantial contribution to the secularization of social and political thought which is such a distinctive characteristic of many of the leaders of the Scottish Enlightenment. And this point holds good even we take into account Carmichael's adoption of Leibniz's criticism of Pufendorf: that he failed to include the after-life in his account of the goal of human endeavour.

In an essay entitled 'The Scottish professoriate and the polite academy, 1720-1746' Peter Jones examines in considerable detail the attempts to establish an education based on 'liberal studies appropriate to the citizens of a free Commonwealth'. Here the Commonwealthmen come into their own. At Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen there was a lively contest between those who sought to turn the universities into schools of godliness and good behaviour and those who sought to establish a 'gentlemanly republican culture'. In the period under review the latter were the more successful. At Edinburgh, George Turnbull and William Wishart, much under the influence of William Molesworth, were dominant; Glasgow came under the influence of Francis Hutcheson who moved there from Dublin; at Aberdeen, Alexander Gerrard sought to promote a system of education that would be 'useful to life'. All were hostile to scholasticism, a hostility symbolized by the replacement of Latin as the medium of teaching. The movement was successful largely because it awakened responsive chords in the nobility and the gentry who were fascinated by and saw themselves playing the roles of the defenders and promoters of a civilized and worldly culture that it offered them.

The theme of secularization is again manifest in a characteristically deep-seated analysis and erudite study by John Dunn of the contrast between John Locke's theocentric formulation of the nature of political obligation and the account favoured by Hume and Adam Smith both of whom see authority as the creature of opinion. It contrasts the pessimism of Locke who despaired of founding stability in the shifting sands of opinion with the implicit optimism of Hume and Smith who supposed that the emerging commercial society could be held together by a continuance of the habits of deference to established forms fortified by perceptions of long term utilities. For Locke atheism is totally subversive, 'he who takes away God, even in thought, takes away all'. For Hume and Smith, on the other hand, belief in God, at least as far as political philosophy is concerned, should no longer be thought to be practically relevant. In drawing this contrast Dunn comments on the relevance to our own century of the gulf that divides Locke from Hume and Smith. His description and assessment of their contributions implicitly condemns Hume and Smith as relatively superficial, for it is only now that we are beginning to appreciate how far reaching and how well justified Locke's anxieties were. It is only now that we are beginning 'to feel what we know'.

One disadvantage of presenting the thought of Hume and Smith as antithetical to that of Locke is that it may have the unintended consequence of playing down the elements that they have in common, and, consequently, of doing less than justice to the extent to which and the ways in which Locke had a formative influence upon the development of thought in the period of the Enlightenment. The precise extent to which Locke was a rationalist has been, and probably will remain, a matter of lively controversy: witness in recent

scholarship the divergences in the interpretation of his moral philosophy between von Leyden and Colman and in the interpretation of his religious philosophy between Ashcraft and Snyder. But whatever the merits of these rival interpretations, it can hardly be denied that many of the leaders of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century believed that Locke had given substantial aid to the process of demystifying thought and practice by insisting that belief should be confined to what can be clearly understood and to what can be supported by sufficient evidence.

Accompanying the confidence in rationalism there is a tendency in the Enlightenment towards the secularization of thought. In Locke's work this is most clearly seen in his political philosophy and in his defence of religious toleration. Although Locke never departed from his theistic framework (the denial of which could not be tolerated), his attack upon Divine Right, his defence of the claims that political authority stems from the people, that initially at least, they have the right to choose the forms of government, to define the scope of their authority and to locate that authority where they choose, his defence of the right to resist the abuse of power and his limitation of the magistrate to the care for civil concerns, gave a considerable impetus to the belief, particularly among the Rational Dissenters that men should exercise and rely upon their own judgement and that those in authority should confine themselves to defending their civil interests.

John Robertson argues that in the thought of David Hume the civic tradition (he prefers this term to civic humanism) reaches its limit. Although Hume was very well versed in the tradition and although he addressed himself to the same problems, the solutions he offered were radically different, to all intents and purposes taking him outside the tradition. He presents this thesis by comparing and contrasting Hume with Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun (1655-1716), whose vision of Scotland as an economically self-sufficient and politically autonomous community embraced the principles of a balanced constitution, defence by militias, the need for domestic servitude, the celebration of freedom construed as participation in the procedures of government, and the need for direct political intervention to increase wealth. Whereas Fletcher had attacked commercial society because he believed that the virtues essential to the maintenance of society would be corrupted by the pursuit of private gain, Hume dismissed the traditional complaints against the growth of 'luxury'. Nonetheless he was aware of the dangers of corruption. Those dangers were acute in a commercial society even if only because such a society stood in need of strong government to protect property rights. The peril most to be feared was that those in authority would use their power for their own particular ends and not for the public interest. Hume sought to frame a form of government strong enough to combine security with the minimum diversion of resources from the pursuit of gain. One immense advantage of commercial society was that it

offered the prospect of liberating the community from dependence upon servitude.

What is distinctive about Robertson's exposition of Hume is that compared with other commentators, Duncan Forbes for example, he lays much greater emphasis than they do upon Hume's interest in political participation. Although Hume's order of priorities differed from Fletcher's — freedom *from* interference is higher in the order than freedom *to* participate — nonetheless he looked forward to a time when both freedoms would be enjoyed throughout the community. Robertson invites us to consider that it is Hume's view that the integration of the ideals of citizenship and individualism is the goal we should try to achieve. Whereas Pocock maintains that in the eighteenth century there was a dialectical movement between those who favoured the traditional concepts of civic virtue and independence and the moderns who sacrificed 'virtue' to the pursuit of gain, Robertson maintains that in Hume's thought this antithesis is transcended. Hume did not share the view generally held by those working within the civic tradition that republican forms of government are necessarily superior to monarchical forms — the acceptance of the rule of law by the 'civilized monarchies had removed this prejudice against them'. Nonetheless Hume looked forward to a time when the virtues of both forms could be combined. Robertson regards Hume's 'Idea of a perfect Commonwealth' as the culmination of his thought in this direction.

The title of Nicholas Phillipson's essay 'Adam Smith as civic moralist' might lead the reader to expect that Smith is to be placed within the tradition of civic humanism, but, initially at least, this is not the intention. For Phillipson states that he is to present Smith as a 'philosopher who was concerned with the principles of propriety as well as with those of virtue, and valued the spirit of independence and sense of ego of commercial man rather than the libertarian virtues of the classical republican'. But the account that Phillipson gives of Smith and the Scottish moralists is not committed to such a radical antithesis as this contrast would suggest. In describing his own position as against Pocock and Winch he says that he sees Scottish civic language as a variant of the language of virtue and corruption. Phillipson is concerned primarily with Smith as a moralist rather than as a moral philosopher. Smith's concerns are eminently practical: to demonstrate to his contemporaries how they could derive and apply a set of moral principles that would satisfy the needs of commercial society. It follows that Smith was not concerned to establish a highly generalized system or science of ethics, but rather to meet the needs of a particular form of society that had not long come into being. That this is so can be seen in the use that Phillipson makes of the distinction between empathy and sympathy in the account he gives of the latter, the key concept in Smith's system of ethics. We need to distinguish the different kinds of fellow-feeling: empathy, the communication of the feeling we find in close-knit face-to-face societies, and

sympathy, the communication of emotion that requires an imaginative construction of the experiences of others. Sympathy thus understood as the imaginative placing of oneself in the position of the other is essential to the generation of the kinds of responses that commercial society needs. Correlative to this distinction between different modes of communication is the distinction between different kinds of social groupings. Empathy characterizes the relationships that are to be found in the family, the clan, the tribe, and the nation; sympathy as Smith understands it is characteristic of voluntary societies, such as associations and clubs. The morals that are appropriate to commercial society are a development of the forms of politeness and civility celebrated by Addison and Steele. It is a merit of Phillipson's analysis that he sees that the development of commercial society envisaged by the leaders of the Scottish Enlightenment requires a transformation rather than the rejection of the concept of virtue. Although commercial society could dispense with the values, or at least change the order of priorities, of pre-commercial society, it nonetheless needed to establish the morality that was essential to its own survival. What would be welcome would be a more exhaustive demonstration that Smith was more concerned to establish the morality that is appropriate to commercial society than he was to give a generalized account of the operations of moral judgement, and a much fuller demonstration of the claim that the principles that commercial society requires can be shown to derive from the operation of sympathy.

In commenting upon Hume's ethics Phillipson makes two conflicting statements: first, he writes that 'by demonstrating that moral distinctions are matters of sentiment, Hume had, at a single stroke, undermined the credibility of the entire casuistical tradition of the ancient and modern world'. Then he writes that, 'a concern with the relationship between wisdom and virtue framed by a renewed interest in Cicero and Stoic morality in general, was to play an increasingly important part in shaping the Scottish philosophers' understanding of the principles of morals, politics and history'. Doubtless, if we allow our attention to centre upon Hume's moral epistemology, in particular upon his attack upon rationalism in ethics and his demonstration that moral judgement is a function of feeling, we can be misled into concluding that Hume's stance on the questions of practical morality was much more radical than it actually was. We need to bear in mind, however, that his subjectivism was prevented from collapsing into relativism by his acceptance of the assumption that all men share a common human nature and that they are in large part constitutionally disposed to approve of the same things and to disapprove of the same things. In some respects so far from being the iconoclast of the tradition of natural law, he can justly be presented as one of its latest luminaries. It is this acceptance of the universality of our moral judgements that allows Hume to retain within his work a great deal of the moral insights of Cicero and Seneca. It is intriguing to speculate what might have happened had

he allowed his scepticism to play upon this assumption, but he does not appear to have done so. At any rate we must treat with caution Phillipson's claim that Hume had 'completely undermined the credibility of the entire casuistical tradition of the ancient and modern world'.

The tensions in the thought of the Enlightenment between the *a priori* and the empirical, between the universal and the historically conditioned, are neatly presented by David Lieberman in his essay on Henry Home, Lord Kames. Kames was a voluminous writer on a wide range of subjects who won contemporary acclaim for his work in moral philosophy and aesthetics. But the writing Lieberman concentrates upon is the contribution Kames made to jurisprudence by his study of the historical development of Scottish law. Although Kames was highly critical of feudal society he did not repudiate the study of the past; on the contrary, he believed that a detailed study of the relationship between law and economic and social realities is an essential propaedeutic to legal reform. He saw clearly that changes in the law and in the processes by which those changes were to be achieved had to be made if the needs of commercial society were to be met, but such reforms should only be undertaken after a careful historical study of the way in which law in the past had facilitated or obstructed social change. For example, Lieberman studies in detail Kames's critique of the Scottish law of entail. The tension between the need to refer to *a priori* principles and the need to adjust to changing circumstances can be clearly seen in the contrast in Kames's thought between the comparative simplicity of the appeal to moral principle and the complexities of legal decisions. What is not clear is the extent to which Kames can be enlisted among the utilitarians. On the one hand Lieberman stresses that for Kames justice did not reduce to benevolence — the validity of the principles of justice is immediately perceived — but on the other hand Kames also held that where the claims of justice conflict with the claims of utility within a legal system, the former must give way to the latter. 'Equity when it regards the interests of a few individuals only, ought to yield to utility when it regards the whole society'. As Lieberman himself points out, on 'the utilitarianization of equity jurisprudence' Kames eliminated the function that orthodox theories of equity explained and justified.

Another tension explored by Lieberman is that between Kames's sensitivity to the needs of commercial society and his retention of the attitudes to luxury and corruption that characterized the civic tradition. Of importance too is the concern with patriotism, for there is plenty of evidence of the emergence of the spirit of nationalism to take the place of 'civic pride'. Lieberman shows how Kames's concern with legal reform and the means of achieving it fits into Phillipson's thesis that the loss of political identity in the post-Union period turned the Scottish intelligentsia to other means of establishing and maintaining a Scottish identity. In legal circles this tendency is manifest in the increasing

importance of judicial procedures. The difficulties of obtaining legal reforms through legislation at Westminster led to increasing weight being placed upon 'judge-made' law and the activities of such bodies as the Court of Sessions.

J.G.A. Pocock invites us to consider and compare the merits of two vastly different accounts of the development of the economic, social and political thought of the Scottish Enlightenment and the genesis of the Scottish school of political economy: the first, with which Pocock himself is closely identified as progenitor, advocate, and defender is the thesis that the development of Scottish thought in the period under review is best understood as a response to the civic humanist paradigm. According to this account the liberal paradigm made its appearance in answer to the civic. The alternative thesis, favoured by another school of Cambridge historians and historiographers is that this development can best be understood, quite independently of the civic humanist paradigm, in terms of the language and vocabulary of the school of natural jurisprudence. What we have here then, according to Pocock, is a battle of the paradigms.

Before any attempt is made to accept Pocock's invitation to consider which paradigm or which conflict of paradigms is likely to be most fruitful in explaining the development of Scottish thought, it is worth asking whether we can expect progress to be made by deploying the notion of a conflict of paradigms. It might be the case that a thorough discussion of the difficulties of employing this notion would lead us to decline Pocock's invitation, or at least to suggest a revision of the form in which it is extended. On p. 236 Pocock asserts that he reserves the term 'paradigm' to denote the employment of the ideal of civic humanism as an 'interpretative matrix'. I take this to mean that he restricts the denotation of the term to a tool to be used by the twentieth century historian to organize the constituent values and principles of a political ideal, this tool to be used in explaining the development of a particular tradition of thought. Yet on the same page Pocock also uses it to refer to a set of values to be found dominating the thoughts of actors on the political stage — in this instance, eighteenth century critics of 'the Whig oligarchy'. Doubtless, if Pocock's thesis is to have any purchase, there must be some considerable correspondences between the 'interpretative matrix' of the twentieth century historian and the thought processes of the eighteenth century critic, but to use the same term for both is likely to engender anachronisms. Pocock's procedures suggest that the eighteenth century critic and the twentieth century historian entertain the same concept of civic humanism. What is even more implausible is that it suggests that the concept which Pocock has constructed with the benefit of a vast and elaborate erudition played into the mind of every commonwealthman and 'republican' sympathizer, and that it did so with all the richness that Pocock has been able to give to it. This is not, however, the most disturbing consequence of the dual employment of the notion of a paradigm. In the way that Pocock uses

the term 'civic humanist', the constituents of that ideal are internally related: that is, the terms *polis*, citizen, virtue, equality, freedom, independence, luxury, and corruption have meanings that are determined by their relations with the other concepts employed in the model. Pocock's dual employment of the paradigm 'civic humanist' suggests that every eighteenth century critic who sympathizes with the 'republican' standpoint uses these terms with the same loading and significance they have for Pocock. To my mind it is exceedingly dangerous to assume that this is so, that when the eighteenth century critic uses the terms which are deployed within the classic form of the civic humanist model, they always have for him the same meaning as they have within that model. It is at least open to speculation that these terms have been enriched by their deployment in other traditions of thought and do not derive their meaning solely from their relations with other terms in the same model.

There are other considerations which lead me to suggest that this line of criticism should be developed. Pocock tends to reify and even to personalize his paradigm 'civic humanist' suggests that every eighteenth century critic who sympathizes with the 'republican' standpoint uses these terms with the same just tools to synthesize the constituents of the ideals of eighteenth century critics. In Pocock's prose the paradigms have a life of their own and walk on to the eighteenth century stage to engage in a sharp conflict with other paradigms. Doubtless it might be said that to understand Pocock in this way is to be as obtuse and pedantic as only an unsympathetic reviewer could be. Pocock's lively metaphors, it may be said, are not to be taken as anything other than metaphors. Metaphors or no, my point is that they are misleading if they beguile us into thinking that the constituent elements of the eighteenth century critic's 'republican' vocabulary had a much greater degree of organic interrelatedness than they did in fact have, and to treat a paradigm as though it were an active agent in a historical process tends to mislead in just this way.

Further difficulties arise if we take into account the systematic ambiguity of some of the terms that Pocock deploys within the civic humanist model. Let us, for example, consider what Pocock takes to be the key concept in that paradigm, the concept of 'virtue'. As Pocock himself points out, within the civic humanist model it has a highly specific reference. Virtue is not simply a body of praiseworthy dispositions, a cluster of established tendencies to behave in morally acceptable ways; neither is it just the set of behaviour patterns that must be sustained if a certain way of life is to survive; nor is it just the set of qualities that is essential in a prince if he is to maintain his authority and power (Machiavelli saw clearly enough that the exercise of virtue in this sense could take one beyond the limits of the morally acceptable); virtue is linked conceptually to quite specific political requirements, and thus logically can only be exercised in certain types of society: where all free men have equal access to positions of power and responsibility. Now it follows that the richer the content

of the concept of virtue within the civic humanist model, the more restricted will be its application and power of explanation. (Strictly speaking it is only within the 'polis' that the virtue that is internally related to the 'polis' can be exercised). It is then possible that the richer use of the term 'virtue' (i.e. where it is internally related to all the other terms within the model) becomes confused with looser uses of the term where it does not necessarily have these associations. The danger arises that all those who were concerned for the preservation of virtue (in its looser sense) are taken to have been concerned for the preservation of 'virtue' in the sense in which it is employed within the model. But relatively few of the critics who complained of the corruption they found in the conduct of government in the eighteenth century were thinking of the practice of virtue in the classical republican form. Many Christians and theists, for example, were prepared to rail against the corruption of virtue who would not have been willing to count themselves as humanists. The concept of civic humanism therefore has a much smaller part to play in the unfolding of eighteenth century thought than Pocock suggests that it has. His suggestion is plausible because it is fatally easy to conflate 'virtue' as it is understood in the civic humanist model with virtue in some or all of the other senses that I have mentioned.

If for the reasons I adduce the civic humanist paradigm in its pure form has a much more restricted application than Pocock thinks it has then the questions he poses need reformulation. The question as to how the conflict of paradigms is to be resolved is not so urgent. For this may be an instance in which a question posed for historians is to be answered not by seeking further historical evidence but, in part at least, by reformulating the terms in which the question is put.

Donald Winch claims that the prize for producing a satisfactory account of the relations between the civic tradition, natural jurisprudence, and political economy is reserved for the one who will succeed in giving a satisfactory interpretation of the role played by Adam Smith's *The wealth of nations*. He himself sees Smith as an advocate for the 'science of legislator' an enterprise which synthesizes for Smith's moral philosophy, his political economy and his lectures on jurisprudence, the role of the latter being to provide a bridge between *The theory of moral sentiments* and *The wealth of nations*. Winch had no sympathy with those who see Smith as a proponent of 'laissez faire'. The role of the statesman is 'neither trivial nor vestigial'. Neither, although he has great respect for Ronald Meek's scholarship, does he have much sympathy for the latter's version of the materialist theory of history. He appreciates that it is crucial to show that Smith did not hold that political decisions are always determined by economic considerations and he demonstrates his thesis neatly by showing that Smith was aware of the divergence between the decisions made by politicians and those that they might be expected to make if purely economic considerations were always paramount. Winch also appraises Pocock's interpretation, more sympathetically even if rather more tentatively. He

acknowledges that Pocock does not claim that his model will explain everything that happens in the eighteenth century, and that he allows that it is possible that natural jurisprudence may provide an alternative explanation quite independently of the civic tradition. Winch admits that Pocock's thesis that there is a dialectical movement between the traditions of civic humanism and the development of commercial society alerts us to issues to which we might not otherwise have paid sufficient attention, such as for example, the effect of the division of labour upon the martial spirit, and the identification of the point where the development of commercial society works to the disadvantage of man as citizen and political animal, but he also claims that there are elements in Smith's thought to which it does not do justice, including the importance of the notion of 'the hidden hand', Smith's concern with the debit side of 'unintended consequences', his interest in institutions, the cosmopolitan dimension to his thought, and the economic analysis of *The wealth of nations*.

Istvan Hont writes about the rich country – poor country debate in the eighteenth century. The civic humanist tradition was a pessimistic one: no society however successful in the short term could expect that its prosperity would be indefinitely prolonged. Sooner or later it would fall prey to the corruption engendered by a love of luxury. Its virtue would decline both in the more general sense that the love of pleasure, ease and comfort would weaken concern for the public good, and also in the more technical sense that success would lead to a fatal weakening of the dispositions that had secured it and upon which its continuance depended. Hont traces both the preoccupation with these fears and the factors that finally dissipated them in the period from the publication of Hume's *Political discourses* in 1752 to the appearance of Lord Lauderdale's *Inquiry into the nature and origin of public wealth* in 1804. Hume, the import of whose work on this problem was widely misunderstood by his contemporaries, confronted the problem whether the prosperity of the rich countries would inevitably be undermined by the lack of competitiveness in external markets brought about by paying the higher wages that the increase in prosperity would lead the workers to demand. Do economic forces tend to lead to the equalization of incomes between nation and nation? Hont shows that Hume could be easily misread as a prophet of inevitable decline. But this reading is false because Hume pointed to a solution. The rich countries could maintain their prosperity and avoid decline by generating new industries. As Hont points out, a rich country's escape from decline is predicated upon its ability to diversify, upon its ability to move from the established products in which it can no longer compete with the poorer nations to new products. Here it is interesting, especially when considering the legacy of the civic tradition, to ask whether this kind of flexibility is to be regarded as a virtue. Perhaps the capacity to adapt is dependent not merely upon moral factors or upon virtue in the more technical sense, but upon factors in the environment that are not

amenable to moral control (a question not without relevance to similar problems in the twentieth century).

Adam Smith has a different solution to the problem. He predicates the possibility of such nations escaping decline not just upon greater flexibility in the use of resources but upon the beneficial consequences of the more intense application of the principle of the division of labour. If specialization enables unit costs to be lowered high wages do not necessarily lead to lack of competitiveness and unemployment. A commercial society does not have to pay for the well-being of the poor with the loss of its markets. There is, however, a high price to be paid: the stultification of that part of the labour force engaged on repetitive work. The impact that Adam Smith had can be seen in the work of John Millar, who early in his career had followed Francis Hutcheson in holding that luxury spreading through the community would lead to higher wages in a rich country and the consequent lack of competitiveness in export markets. After the publication of *The wealth of nations* Millar changed his lectures to show that the arguments of the pessimists had been refuted by Smith and Josiah Tucker. In the work of Dugald Stewart the argument is taken a stage further: the advantages secured by the division of labour are enhanced by the introduction of machinery; here it is important to note that an interesting twist is given to the displacement of the pessimism that characterized the civic tradition: developments in the commercial world would lead to the elimination of the differences between the rich and the poor countries not by the impoverishment of the rich but by the enrichment of the poor.

In an essay entitled 'John Millar and individualism' Michael Ignatieff attempts the difficult task of establishing Millar's identity in the history of political thought. To do so he has to note his reservations about previous attempts – of which there is a bewildering variety – to locate Millar's position and the extent of his influence. I have already noted the impact that Adam Smith's *The wealth of nations* had upon Millar's stance in the rich country – poor country debate. In tracing Millar's development Ignatieff shows how he departed from the 'sceptical whiggism' (to use Duncan Forbes's phrase) which he embraced in the 1760s and 1770s, to rediscover the virtues of an extensive political participation. In the earlier phase he was opposed to extending the franchise, disapproved of Wilkes and the attempts to gain tri-ennial Parliaments, was prepared to defend standing armies and believed that the rising middle class could be relied upon to curb the excesses of the Executive. By 1787 all this had changed, largely due to the awakening of the fear that the development of commercial society had placed the Executive in an excessively strong position. Millar now supported the extension of the franchise, approved of tri-ennial Parliaments and condemned standing armies as well as a growing reliance upon an ever-increasing National Debt. Whereas both Hume and Adam Smith had stressed the priority of civil over political liberties Millar

joined forces with Adam Ferguson in valuing civic participation more highly than the passive enjoyment of property. But it would be a mistake to identify Millar too closely with the Commonwealthmen. To my mind Ignatieff's painstaking analysis which seems to catch every nuance in Millar's thought amply demonstrates the difficulties of employing the accepted classification of the dominant traditions. However carefully the net is constructed, however fine the mesh Millar seems to slip through. As Ignatieff points out, while Millar adopted the language of virtue and corruption, he jettisons the myths surrounding the Anglo-Saxon Constitution, and though he condemned the selfishness of modern individualism, nonetheless he conceded that it was the development of commercial society that had made the enjoyment of liberty, both in its negative and in its positive forms feasible.

The volume concludes with a wide-ranging essay by Franco Venturi, entitled 'Scottish echoes in eighteenth century Italy' in which the author discusses, as the title suggests, the influence of leading figures in the Scottish Enlightenment upon Italian thought including the impact of such diverse thinkers as Adam Ferguson, Allan Ramsay, Kames, Monboddo, Hume, William Robertson and Adam Smith. Particularly interesting is the comparison of Beccaria and Adam Smith and the growth of the tendency to regard the public good as something that can be quantified and so brought within the realm of public activity. Important too is the stimulus the Scottish thinkers gave to study of the historical evolution of social and political institutions.

A collection of essays performs a function different from that of a book written by a single author. In the latter one expects a conclusion that integrates the various themes discussed into, at least as far as the material will allow, a coherent and a consistent whole. To establish such a conclusion is no part of the duties of the editors of a collection. One of its consequent merits is that it provides a diversity of interpretations and sympathies, leaving the reader with something to do. Although the several contributors define their position clearly enough, at the conclusion of this volume it remains for the reader to answer for himself the question posed by the editors — to whom does the foundation of the science of political economy owe most: the school of natural jurisprudence or those engaged in the dialectic between the defenders of commercial society and the upholders of the older tradition of civic humanism.

The device of generating a body of critical investigations by setting a number of highly skilled and vastly experienced scholars to answer rather specific questions has the undoubted merit of producing as it does in this volume a highly interesting and a very intriguing set of answers. But it is a method the conclusions of which must be treated with caution, for it is a procedure which if not handled with great care and circumspection has an inherent severely disabling feature. In discussing Pocock's contribution I questioned the value of

the concept of a paradigm, and particularly the notion of a conflict of paradigms, in interpreting the development of thought. I posed a dilemma. Either the constituents of a paradigm are internally related or they are not. If the former then the range of application of the paradigm is of necessity severely restricted and its explanatory value consequently limited. If the latter, then it is possible that some of the constituent elements in a paradigm might appear in other paradigms with the consequence that the notion of a conflict of paradigms might not prove very useful. Many pronounced theists, for example, found it perfectly feasible to take on board several of the elements in the tradition of civic humanism — opposition to standing armies, aversion to luxury and corruption, the importance of participating in political processes — without in the least feeling that the integrity of their faith had been compromised. For these reasons it may be better to speak of the concurrence of traditions rather than of the conflict of paradigms. But even here, dangers lurk. For to ask whether the evolution of a body of thought owes more to tradition A than it does to tradition B is to suggest that the disjunction is exclusive. In these cases it is well to remember that there may be other possibilities: that a debt to tradition A may not exclude a debt to tradition B; or again that A and B do not exhaust the possible candidates. No harm is done if the answers to the questions posed in this volume are treated just as answers to those specific questions. Difficulties arise, however, if the impression is gained that something more comprehensive than the answers to those questions has been achieved, namely, a statement of the preponderant influences governing the evolution of the science of political economy.

To illustrate this danger I conclude this review with mentioning some of the tendencies that had a pronounced influence upon the development of the thought of the Enlightenment and the foundation of the science of political economy but which cannot be wholly derived solely from either the tradition of natural jurisprudence or the tradition of civic humanism. First, there is the tendency towards the secularization of social and political thought. The point here is not that secularization owed nothing to the tradition of civic humanism and nothing to the tradition of natural jurisprudence — to maintain that would be patently absurd — but that the tendency does not derive wholly from either considered separately or jointly. The impetus to the secular also came from sources that were relatively independent of both. Paradoxically, the secularization of social and political thought owed a great deal to the movement to secure greater religious toleration and legal recognition of the right to freedom of worship. This happened through the attempt in the name of spiritual freedom to limit the scope of political authority to the management of man's terrestrial welfare. The secularization of political thought can be seen not only in the conception of the true ends of social and political activity. It can also be seen in the exaltation of human reason, the elimination of mystery, the gospel of candour, and the belief that the source of political authority is in the people.

One of the striking features of the development of ethical and political thought in the eighteenth century is the abandonment in certain quarters of an assumption that was widely held in classical political thought and which still appears in a great deal of modern political thought, namely that the true good and real interest of each individual coheres in the true good and real interest of the whole society. The political problem in these circumstances is largely conceived to be that of ensuring that each individual acts in accordance with his own true interests (and that of the community) and is not deflected from pursuing them through ignorance or by passion. This is an assumption that is, as far as I know, widely shared, by all the proponents of the school of natural jurisprudence. Indeed it is an assumption shared by all systems that embrace a teleological conception of ethics and politics. Once the assumption that all real interests necessarily cohere is discarded then the problem arises as to how one can justify the imposition of a rule upon a minority that is disadvantaged by it. For example, the utilitarian who seeks the greatest happiness of the greatest number is faced with the problem of justifying the imposition of a policy upon a minority who do not participate in the benefit. That this is a problem for the political philosopher was clearly seen by Thomas Hobbes for whom political authority is justified not by the pursuit of a shared comprehensive goal, but by the avoidance of a specific common evil. Hobbes realized that although men may share a common purpose, say, avoiding a common evil, nonetheless some of their real interests could conflict. What remains intriguing is the extent to which those of the leaders of the Enlightenment who shared this insight were indebted to Hobbes. We have seen that Adam Smith justifies the inequalities that commercial society engenders on the ground that despite the emergence of inequalities in commercial society the condition of the least well off is better than it would otherwise have been. To what extent this can be regarded as a justification of the inequalities that do arise, is a further question and a difficult one. What is clear, however, is that we no longer inhabit the territory of teleological ethics and politics.

The third element I wish to mention is the stress placed by several of the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment on the relevance of experience, particularly of historical experience. What is crucial here is the notion that the norms of social and political behaviour change through time and are modified in part at least by the need to respond to changes in the environment. The implicit assertion of the plasticity of human behaviour and the possibility of development and progress, exemplified pre-eminently in the thought of Turgot, represented a deadly challenge to the belief that human values are universal and sempiternal. But to what extent could this challenge find its inspiration either in the traditions of civic humanism or in those of the school of natural jurisprudence? To the extent that the Scottish Enlightenment may be said to embrace cultural or historical relativism, and to the extent to which it modified belief in the universality of human nature, the source of that inspiration must be

found in places other than the traditions of civic humanism and the school of natural jurisprudence.

As I have intimated these questions are of significance only to those who are tempted to seek the genesis of the Scottish Enlightenment and the science of political economy wholly within the traditions of civic humanism and natural jurisprudence. They present few problems to those who are concerned only to estimate the debt of the Enlightenment to these traditions without excluding the influence of factors that operated independently of them.

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HOWARD WILLIAMS, *KANT'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY* (BASIL BLACKWELL, OXFORD, 1983), pp. xii, 292. HARDBACK £29.50; PAPERBACK £7.95

In recent years there has been a significant growth of interest in Kant's political thought. Howard Williams's book has already contributed to and confirmed this trend.

The reasons for the neglect of Kant's political thought are not hard to find. There is, for example, no master work, no 'central text' of Kantian politics to place alongside the familiar works which make up the staple repertoire of history of political thought courses. Moreover, translations into English have not been comprehensive or especially convenient. Fortunately the Library of Liberal Arts translations and the collection *Kant's political writings* edited by Hans Reiss have remedied the problem for English readers. Indeed, Reiss's collection presents in one volume most of the important political texts so providing something like a composite master work. Reiss also provides an excellent introductory essay which, as a short treatment of Kant's political thought, is greatly to be recommended.

Another reason for the neglect of Kant's political thought must lie in the way it has been overshadowed by the *Critiques* and the *Groundwork to the metaphysic of morals*. Yet this is no longer a reason for neglect as Williams, and others, now draw out the essential continuities between the seemingly 'occasional' political pieces and their most famous counterparts. Now, at least, the unity of Kant's thought is more readily grasped. One final reason, worthy of mention, must be the relatively slight impact Kant has had on political thought outside Germany. Of course, as Williams and Reiss point out, there is an indirect influence through his reception by Hegel and Marx; but if this is compared to the impact both succeeding thinkers have had on later generations of political thinkers, Kant's impact can only appear negligible. Yet this cannot be left without qualification because it is tempting to draw striking parallels between Kant and Rawls, contributing something to the curiously Enlightenment air that the latter's work often has.

With the reasons for neglect now receding, Williams's book is most timely. One has a sense that Kant has somehow 'arrived' as a political thinker of consequence. There is much to be done, but Williams has provided essential reading for that work. More so if one compares his book to others of recent vintage with similar titles. (A valuable survey of works is provided by Peter Nicholson's 'Recent studies in English of Kant's political philosophy', *Political Studies*, XXIII (1975). For example, there is *Kant's political thought: its origins and development* by Hans Saner, *Kant's political philosophy* by Patrick Riley

and *Lectures on Kant's political philosophy* by Hannah Arendt (ed. R. Beiner). One cannot fail to think these titles are a trifle misleading if one expects them to cover the main topics of Kant's political thought in the manner of well-known classic studies of great political thinkers. It is not because they are inadequate, quite the contrary! Rather each uses a very wide, even eccentric, notion of what is central to politics. Thus Saner is concerned primarily with certain recurring patterns of philosophical thought in Kant's polemics with his contemporaries. Riley's book has the same title as that of Williams but is, as the author says, 'an attempt to answer the question what place does politics or public legal justice occupy within the Kantian critical philosophy?' It is not primarily concerned with Kantian politics itself (for which Riley directs the reader to Reiss's *Introduction*). Finally, Arendt's book tells us more about Arendt than Kant and also employs her own rare concept of the political. One must also mention Susan Shell's *The rights of reason* which looks in detail at Kant's *Metaphysics of morals* and Jeffrie Murphy's *Kant: the philosophy of right*. It is, in fact, Murphy's book that comes closest to Williams's comprehensive treatment of the central ideas of Kant's politics. Both Murphy and Williams successfully show the continuity between Kant's metaphysics, ethics and politics, but in Murphy only the last third of a short book is left, after discussion of metaphysics and ethics, to deal with the politics itself. By contrast, Williams carries out the same essential task by continuing references across Kant's work which is ultimately a more successful strategy.

Williams begins by discussing Kant's view of history which proves to be one of progress through the dynamic conflict of man's 'unsocial social-ability'. This conflict is utilized by nature in a 'secret plan' whose ultimate purpose is to bring mankind to final perfection. Yet, as Williams notes, Kant's history is really an idealization, historical experience as such being seen as unworthy of the dignity of philosophy. Next, Williams tackles the task of relating Kant's politics to his ethics. This is vital because for Kant politics, or rather 'true' politics, is a moral activity. It comes as no surprise that Kant contrasted his vision of politics with that of utilitarian politics where political experience is used to make people happy rather than moral principles used to allow them to do their duty.

Williams draws an even more striking contrast between Kant and Machiavelli where politics and morals are radically torn asunder (or, if you follow Berlin's interpretation, Christian and pagan moralities are divorced). This is only one of the many points where Williams locates Kant in reference to other, better known, political thinkers such as Hobbes, Locke, Hegel, Rousseau and Burke. And, of course, this not only helps locate the character of Kant's politics but is essential if his political thought is considered worthy of joining their company. Williams also demonstrates how legalistic Kant's politics are. It is not accidental that justice at once a moral, legal, and political concept is a focal point. Again, sympathetic treatment is required for here, in particular, Kant inhabits a

continental tradition of political thought viewed as part of legal philosophy. This is a tradition which has not found favour in the English speaking world.

Having located Kant's politics in history and in its relation to ethics and law, Williams is then able to consider the main political concepts as each receives its own distinctive Kantian treatment. These concepts include property, punishment, freedom, equality, political obligation, revolution and international peace. Previously Kant's views on punishment and revolution have been singled out for special treatment. The first for its apparent viciousness, the second for its seeming blatant self-contradiction. Here, in contrast, Williams shows how Kant's punishment follows logically from the ethics and their resolutely anti-utilitarian stance. His view of revolution is now seen as consistent with his view of history where a revolution appears as an unwelcome attempt to 'hurry along' the working of Providence, — yet where the reaction of sympathizers provides evidence of the possibility of disinterested hopes for the moral improvement of mankind.

Williams pays special attention to Kant's treatment of property (see also Alan Ryan's recent *Property and political theory*) which emerges as an essential attribute of freedom and an incentive to form political society. Needless to say, familiar Lockean themes are radically re-worked. Kant's state of nature is one of hypothetical lawlessness not far removed from that of Hobbes. (But it is its immorality not the likelihood of death that makes it so undesirable for Kant). Civil Society is not formed to protect strong property rights but, as it were, to confer legal status on the precarious holdings otherwise passing for 'property' in a pre-legal state. One of the few regrets one has about Williams's book is the chapter devoted to 'two Marxist views of Kant's political philosophy' (namely those of Goldmann and Marcuse). Perhaps this would have been better as the subject of an independent article. Its place could then have been taken by a drawing-together of the relationships between Kant and other thinkers, including Rawls.

So far, it should be apparent that Williams provides an erudite and sympathetic account of Kant's position. But he is also critical and this emerges most strongly in the concluding chapter on the merits of Kant as a political thinker. It is here, picking up his earlier remarks, that Williams identifies, arguably, the major problem.

Just as man in the *Critique of pure reason* inhabits a dualistic world of phenomena and noumena so, through the ethics to the politics, the dualism is pervasive. The way of putting this in politics is to say that whilst in fact men lived as subjects in monarchical, even despotic, political societies, they also lived as citizens of a rational republic (a kingdom of ends where reason is sovereign). This republic is immanent in any political society and stands as the ultimate

fulfilment of politics when Progress has completed its purpose. If one *can* identify a republican tradition it is disconcerting, to say the least, to find it now expressed in the language of legalistic duty and thrown into the realm of noumena. Inevitably, the result is a consistent idealization of existing political arrangements. In its most acute form this is clear if one ponders Kant's views on political obligation. Kant's maxim is that of Frederick, 'Argue as much as you will, and about what you will, only obey!'. The subject must be allowed responsible criticism but must otherwise be passively obedient. It is an obedience that is absolute because it is an obedience owed as a citizen in a rational republic as a possibility (even a *mere* possibility) within the imperfect, yet morally essential, legal orders of Eighteenth century states. So even if his state is that of a benevolent despot, with all this implies for Kant in its confinement of men's reason, the subject must obey *as if* a citizen. Kant concludes that if all act as *as if* they were such citizens then they would indeed become so, for they would thereby bring experience into line with rational principles. There is, however, a rather startling imbalance between subject and ruler here. Whereas the subject will be forced to obey whether he is acting *as if* a citizen or not, there can be no legal compulsion to make the ruler do likewise. Indeed, Kant is always anxious to point out that such coercion would be, by definition, illegal — jeopardizing the legal order whose existence is a moral requirement in making justice at least *possible*.

Whatever the consequences for politics, and Kant is not prepared to see consequences as morally relevant, this continual movement to supplant experience with moral principles is everywhere present in his political thought. In Kant's hands this movement is distinctive and, one must say, not a little difficult for his reputation as a liberal.

To conclude, Williams has produced a fine book and one which provides a strong argument for Kant as a political thinker in his own right. It is to be hoped that Williams will continue this work and illuminate some of the tantalizing figures surrounding Kant, such as Fichte, who are (even yet) mostly forgotten.

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**M.M. GOLDSMITH, *PRIVATE VICES, PUBLIC BENEFITS.*
*BERNARD MANDEVILLE'S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL
THOUGHT* (CAMBRIDGE, CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS,
1985, x, 182. £20.00.**

This study takes the form of a series of essays rather than of a monograph. Sandwiched between two opening chapters which previously saw the light of day in *Eighteenth Century Studies* in 1976, and a concluding chapter based on an article published in *The Journal of British Studies* in 1977, are two fresh essays on Mandeville's politics. Although the whole sandwich is appetizing, the filling is rather more refreshing than the slices of bread.

Where most people are familiar only with Mandeville's *The fable of the bees*, Professor Goldsmith exploits his own familiarity with his other publications to good effect. This is especially the case in Chapter Two, 'Private Vices', where the *Fable* is scarcely mentioned. Instead Mandeville's contributions to *The Female Tatler* are drawn upon to argue that he developed his attack on the association of private with public virtue in challenging Richard Steele's advocacy of their mutual dependency in the *Tatler*. Again much of the last chapter's thesis that Mandeville 'was more a theorist of the spirit of capitalism than of its economic structure' is based on the journal rather than the book, though it is conceded that the claim 'cannot rest on evidence from the *The Female Tatler*; it must be based primarily on *The Fable of the Bees*'.

It might be objected that to draw on the Lucinda-Artesia papers of 1710, as well as upon the editions of the *Fable* published in the 1720s, is to attribute too much consistency to Mandeville's thought, and that the journalist who teased the censor of Great Britain in Anne's reign did not necessarily subscribe to the views which were censored by the Middlesex Grand Jury in 1723. After all, as Professor Goldsmith acknowledges, 'his writings did not take the form of systematic treatises.' Yet there is a remarkably coherent set of assumptions running right through his publications. All the major ideas elaborated in the *Fable* and other essays associated with it in George I's reign can be found in embryo in 'The Grumbling Hive', the doggerel verse which Mandeville first published in 1705.

In one of the newly coined chapters, 'The skilful politicians', Professor Goldsmith deals directly with the *Fable*, and tackles head on the central problem it poses: the resolution of Mandeville's celebrated paradox 'private vices, public benefits'. Mandeville himself resolved it by arguing, not that private vices were intrinsically beneficial to the public, but that they could be made so by the management of skilful politicians. These could dexterously transform even the seven deadly sins into social virtues. Thus pride, perhaps the

deadliest of them all, could be converted into patriotism. The cynical exploitation of man's baser instincts by such practitioners was the typically Mandevillean explanation of how men were persuaded to move from a Hobbesian state of nature into civil society. Professor Goldsmith argues that this implausible and unsatisfactory explanation, if taken literally, is in fact an analogy for the historical process: 'the beneficial arrangements supposedly invented by wise moralists and skilful politicians were in fact the "joynt labour of many ages"'. This ingenious explanation perhaps attributes to Mandeville more profundity than he possesses. Although it can be supported by passages in which he does discuss the slow evolution of society, the actual history of the transformation from a state of nature into a civilized state seems to have been much less thoroughly worked out than his views on human psychology and politics.

His own politics were whig. In a chapter on 'Whig government' Professor Goldsmith investigates how far Mandeville's political views were shared by other whigs. Where it has been claimed that he was in fact an ideologue for the Walpole régime, it is demonstrated that his overtly political comments in print were confined largely to Anne's reign, while the Robinocracy defended itself against accusations of corruption rather than justifying itself on Mandevillean grounds. Mandeville in fact was a maverick. His Hobbesian view of human nature had far more in common with Swift and the tory satirists, or Gordon, Trenchard and the country whigs than with the Lockean optimism of court whigs like Addison and Defoe. Yet he was a skilful enough politician to manipulate it into an optimistic social and economic philosophy.

How far it was in tune, as Professor Goldsmith insists it was, with the spirit of capitalism depends on the definition one gives to that elastic term. He defines it as 'both a system of institutions which promotes and encourages money-making and a mentality which regards continuous money-making as an acceptable way of life.' The necessary institutions — banks, stocks, a stock market and a public debt — he sees as being established in England after the Glorious Revolution, while the appropriate attitudes were reflected in contemporary periodicals. Yet all the machinery of public credit was established in Amsterdam much earlier in the century, while the Dutch were notorious for preferring gain to godliness. Nevertheless it was England rather than Holland which first experienced the culmination of capitalism in industrialization. One of the many reasons for this was that its economy developed mass production of cheap goods for mass consumption. Previously consumer demand had been stimulated more by affluent élites than by the masses. As Eric Hobsbawm so vividly put it, the transformation from a traditional to a truly capitalist society really comes about when a Montague Burton replaces a Christian Dior as the major influence in textile sales. From this perspective, for all his advanced thinking about the stimulus of

consumption on the economy, Mandeville remains the apologist for Dior rather than for Burton. He was not the apostle of the mass market. The private vices which could be manipulated into public benefits were very much those of the richer citizens. The poor willing wretches who laboured with scythes and spades, or provided cannon fodder in the army, he would not even have educated in charity schools in case they got ideas above their status as hewers of wood and drawers of water.

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