
HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT



An International Journal

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History of Political Thought seeks to provide a forum for the interpretation and discussion of political thought in its historical context. It is intended to foster exchange and communication between scholars in the English-speaking world and those on the continent and elsewhere.

The journal is devoted exclusively to the historical study of political ideas and its associated methodological problems. Studies dealing with ancient, medieval, renaissance, early modern and recent political thought are invited.

The primary focus is on research papers but from time to time reviews and surveys designed to familiarise students with the 'state of studies' concerning a particular thinker or area of research will be included.

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Editorial

We earnestly hope that our readers will not be disagreeably surprised by the appearance of *The Price Priestley Newsletter* in a new format and under a new title. The main reason for the change is that the responses to our request in the last editorial for advice on the format of the journal included from more than one trusted and respectable quarter a firm plea that we should consider printing it in a more orthodox fashion. It is clear that some librarians are not much impressed by typescript however clearly and legibly it is reproduced, and that in consequence the journal has not always been as accessible as we believe it should be. It is also clear that printing it would make it more generally acceptable and thereby bring to our contributors the wider readership they so richly deserve. These reasons for printing are impressive and difficult to resist. Undoubtedly, we should do as much as we can to bring the work of those who write for us to as wide an audience as possible. But although the reasons for changing are impressive and difficult to resist we have not found it easy to change. The great merit of the original format, or so it seemed to us, was that it enabled us to produce a legible and durable collection of material on rather a specialized topic for a fairly restricted readership at a low cost. And it seemed to us that in these days of shrinking budgets our readers would welcome economies. To print inevitably involves higher costs, and this in turn means that we must secure a wider readership in a short space of time if we are to remain solvent. There is therefore an element of risk in changing.

Increasing the number of subscribers requires further changes: we have to widen the scope and appeal of the journal, but the reasons for enlarging the field of study are not entirely concerned with securing a wider readership, for it is doubtful whether the number of scholars working upon studies connected with Price and Priestley is sufficiently large to ensure an adequate supply of contributions for an indefinite period, especially at a time when research opportunities are diminishing. Added to this is the more academically cogent reason that there are subjects relevant to the understanding of Price and Priestley that do not come within the purview of the journal in its original form, and that to do justice to them we need to widen the scope of the journal to stimulate independent studies of neglected figures such as Benjamin Hoadly, Nathaniel Lardner, David Hartley, Catherine Macaulay, James Mackintosh and Robert Hall, and of persons who deserve further attention as, for example, Christopher Wyvill, Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, and William Godwin. Similarly, certain topics of great contemporary interest such as providence, the millenium and progress, political and moral corruption, political liberty, stability and independence, are worthy of reappraisal and deeper investigation without being confined to Rational Dissent with a capital 'R' and 'D'. It is the purpose of *Enlightenment and Dissent* to encourage such research and to provide a forum for the discussion of such issues.

Printing the journal therefore involves changes and a certain element of risk. To minimize the latter we respectfully ask our subscribers to bring the new venture to the notice of as wide a circle as possible. The change in title and scope gives us an opportunity to bring the date of publication forward—thus what was to have been the fifth (1981) issue of *The Price Priestley Newsletter* is incorporated in the first (1982) issue of *Enlightenment and Dissent*. We hope that in future years the journal will continue to appear in early March. The 1983 issue will, as previously intended, be devoted to the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the birth of Joseph Priestley. To meet the increase in costs involved in printing the journal we have had, we regret to say, to increase the subscription to £4.00 for readers in Great Britain, and to \$9.00 or £4.60 sterling for overseas readers.

This year we have great pleasure in welcoming three new members to the advisory editorial board: Dr. Margaret Canovan of Keele University, who will already be well known to readers of the journal for her lucid and cogent articles on Joseph Priestley; M.E. Ogborn, formerly General Manager and Actuary of the Equitable Life Assurance Society, whose *Equitable Assurances* is the authoritative history of the Assurance Society with which Richard Price was so closely connected; and D.A. Rees, of Jesus College, Oxford, one of the first subscribers and earliest friends of the journal, whose encyclopaedic knowledge over a wide range of subjects we are privileged to draw upon. Our thanks to these kind persons and to all who have given the journal their support in the past, and who, we hope, will continue to give it in the future.

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

TOLERATION AND TRUTH*

Martin Fitzpatrick

The eighteenth century represents a watershed in the history of toleration. By the end of the century most European countries had taken steps to relax the persecution of religious minorities which had been a special feature of the history of the previous two centuries. The essential contribution of the Enlightenment to this process is well known. This stemmed from its adherence to the scientific method which, linked to a rejection of Original Sin and an espousal of Lockean epistemology, led to optimism about reforming man and society, and to a marked hostility to revealed religions especially Christianity.¹ In England, the main ideological impetus for the campaigns to extend toleration in the late eighteenth century came from the Rational Dissenters. In common with the *philosophes* they were profoundly influenced by Locke and Newton and had little time for the notion of Original Sin, but unlike them they rejected relativism and eclecticism and remained emphatically Christian. It is therefore of special interest to examine their attitudes towards truth and tolerance and to attempt to assess their significance in the history of toleration.

The Rational Dissenters were associated with two political campaigns for the extension of toleration, the one for the relaxation of the requirement of the Toleration Act of 1689 that all Protestant Dissenting Ministers, Tutors and Schoolmasters should subscribe to all the doctrinal articles of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, the other for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. The former campaign was successful, though somewhat fortuitously, in 1779; the latter failed decisively in 1790. The Rational Dissenters also campaigned in print for the acceptance of the Mansfield verdict of 1767, by which it was finally decided in the courts that nonconformity was not a crime, for the relaxation of all penal laws concerning religion, and for the severance of all links between church and state. Their *curriculum vitae* for reform is superficially impressive, but should it be taken

¹ See Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: an interpretation*, I, *The rise of modern paganism* [Wildwood House, London, 1973], 169—171; II *The Science of Freedom* [Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1970], 398—401. Sir Isaiah Berlin has argued that, properly speaking, no Enlightened thinkers were relativists. Some, however, were pluralists. He defines pluralism as 'the doctrine according to which there exists a finite multiplicity of objective values (finite because there is a limit to what even on the broadest interpretation can be described as human), some of which are at times incompatible with one another, but all equally ultimate, and so entailing the need for choices that may be agonising'. Clearly, Rational Dissenters were neither pluralists nor relativists. See I. Berlin, 'A note on the alleged relativism in eighteenth century European thought', *Transactions of the Fifth International Congress of the Enlightenment*, 5, 561—564.

seriously? The Rational Dissenters had an obvious self-interest in the extension of toleration and their propaganda could be viewed—and was viewed—as a rhetorical smoke screen created for the furtherance of their own interest which at best, was only tangentially related to toleration *per se*. Such a view would be short sighted, for self interest was an ambiguous master. As regards subscription, it was the case that before the petitions to the Commons in 1772 and 1773 many Dissenting clergymen and schoolmasters ignored the law and were not prosecuted;² again, as regard the Test and Corporation Acts, they were rarely enforced and the Dissenters were partially protected against prosecution by annual indemnity acts. Finally, to complete the quirky English situation, the Rational Dissenters, being heterodox, were beyond the law, and, in theory, would benefit neither from relaxation of subscription nor from the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. It is true that they applied, belatedly and unsuccessfully, for the legalization of Unitarianism in 1792, but the Rational Dissenters continued to remain beyond the law until 1813. Issues of principle were therefore at stake in the campaigns for the extension of toleration in the late eighteenth century, and it is my purpose now to establish whether questions of truth as well as justice and equality before the law were involved.

The Rational Dissenters inherited the Protestant attachment to the scriptures as the sole source of religious truth, but if they were to a degree primitivists, they were certainly not fundamentalist. The attitude of the Dissenters generally towards scripture was expressed in a work advocating the relaxation of subscription by Israel Mauduit published in 1772. In this, Mauduit declared, 'They [The Dissenters] believe that the holy Scriptures are the only sufficient Rule of faith and Practice and can submit to the Authority of no human decisions as a supplemental Amendment to them. They believe the holy Scripture to contain the whole of that Revelation, which God has been pleased to make to us.' And he underlined the absolute nature of the Dissenters' commitment to Scripture by citing with approval Chillingworth's belief that he would subscribe to anything out of Scripture 'seem it never so incomprehensible to human Reason'.³ The Rational Dissenters would have agreed wholeheartedly with the declaration of the sufficiency of the Scriptures, but they did not believe that that involved the acceptance of the incomprehensible. On the contrary, revelation was authoritative because it was the voice of divine reason, which spoke directly and compellingly to

² Israel Mauduit, in 'The case of the Dissenting Ministers'. *Addressed to the Lords Temporal and Spiritual* [London, 1772], 12, admits that Dissenters have preached 'for these forty or fifty years past, and no evil consequences have arisen from it'.

³ *Ibid.*, 35—37.

human hearts and minds.⁴ Whatever difficulties there might be in the interpretation of Scripture, these could be resolved by the application of individual reason which was regarded as 'the distinguishing gift of God to man'.⁵ Truth was, therefore, accessible to man through the application of reason to Scripture. Herein lay a major motivating force behind the Rational Dissenters' campaigning for the extension of toleration. The requirement for Dissenting ministers, tutors and schoolmasters to subscribe to the doctrinal articles of the Church of England was contrary to their beliefs not so much because they could not in conscience subscribe to doctrines which they disbelieved but because they objected to subscription to *any* articles of faith. In this all the petitioners—though not all Dissenters—were in agreement; relief from subscription was 'no more than the principles of reason, christianity and protestantism, warranted them to request'.⁶ The right of private judgement was regarded as essential to Christianity and to religion itself.⁷ According to Fownes, that right was antecedent to the formation of civil society, and the magistrate had a primary obligation to protect it; in doing so, he promoted 'the advancement of truth, the real interest of society; and the cause of pure and undefiled religion'.⁸ The magistrate, however, was entitled to limit the protection of the rights of conscience to those who were able to 'give proper satisfactory pledges for their being faithful subjects'.⁹ Most Rational Dissenters, following Locke, accepted the right of the state to limit toleration to those whose religion was consistent with the safety of the state, but they were by no means agreed on the interpretation of such a principle, for they did not want to concede the magistrate authority over

⁴ See e.g. Capel Lofft, *Observations on the first part of Dr. Knowle's testimonies from the writers of the first four centuries in a letter to a friend* (Bury, 1789). Capel Lofft was an active campaigner for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, the author of a work on their history, a founder member of the Society for Constitutional Information and a member of the Unitarian society. Thomas W. Davies (ed), *Committees for repeal of the test and corporation acts* (London Record Society, 1978), pp. xiii, 8, 40; Dr. Williams Library [henceforth D.W.L.] P 7279, *Unitarian Society* (1794). He can be regarded as an English *philosophe* and is described in the *D.N.B.* as 'a good classical scholar, a great lover of literature and natural history, an enthusiast in music, an authority on botany and a skilled astronomer'.

⁵ Charles Wellbeloved, *The principles of the Roman Catholics and Unitarians contrasted* [York, 1800], 23.

⁶ Joseph Fownes, *An enquiry into the principles of toleration*, third edn. [London, 1790], preface to second edn., xiii.

⁷ Robert Robinson, *Arcana* (Cambridge, 1774), 33.

⁸ J. Fownes, *op. cit.*, 20, 21.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

conscience; to do so would be 'in reality to annihilate religion'.¹⁰ Their difficulties were compounded by the fact that Parliament would not accept the abolition of subscription without some alternative declaration of religious principles. The bill drawn up for relief from subscription in 1772 therefore included a declaration of belief in the Gospel 'as a Revelation of the Mind and Will of God, and as a Rule of their Faith and Practice'.¹¹ The campaign committee, chaired by a Rational Dissenter, Edward Pickard,¹² convinced itself that this would be acceptable to their brethren 'As it is virtually a Renunciation of Human Authority in Matters of Faith—The Sufficiency of Scripture and the Right of Private Judgement'.¹³ Andrew Kippis, a fellow Rational Dissenter and an active member of the committee, argued that acceptance of the declaration did not involve an abandonment of principle, but clearly was rather embarrassed by it.¹⁴ It appears that in the early 1770s his ideas concerning toleration were undergoing change and liberalization, and that at the time he was writing in defence of the declaration he had arrived at an uneasy half way house between a Lockean emphasis on the safety of the state and Priestley's cheerful insistence that the state ought not to take cognizance of opinions but should only concern itself with overt acts. The Declaration he regarded as needless but harmless, for it involved no subscription to any worldly authority: it amounted to a 'disavowal of human authority in matters of religion';¹⁵ it was agreed upon by the committee and was thus not a requisition of the magistrate. His arguments are indicative of the sensitivity of the Rational Dissenters to the imposition of any form of religious subscription or declaration by the state, particularly in view of the fact that the declaration of 1772 would admit of an heterodox interpretation. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that some of them, including Richard Price, were not persuaded by Kippis and found the declaration

¹⁰ Ibid., 25.

¹¹ I. Mauduit, op. cit., 48, 49.

¹² On Pickard see Thomas Belsham, *Memoirs of the late Rev. Theophilus Lindsey, M.A.*, second edn. (London, 1820), 45—47. Pickard died in 1778.

¹³ D.W.L., MS. 38106. Minutes of the body of Protestant Dissenting Ministers in and about the cities of London and Westminster, 150.

¹⁴ A. Kippis, *A vindication of the Protestant Dissenting Ministers with regard to their late application to parliament*, second edn. (London, 1773), 63, 66, 98—99. For a further discussion of Kippis's ideas see my article, 'Joseph Priestley and the cause of universal toleration'. *Price-Priestley Newsletter*, no. 1, 1977, 11—15.

¹⁵ Ibid., 65—67.

unacceptable.¹⁶ For them the campaign for relief from subscription ended in failure, for when relief was granted in 1779 Dissenting ministers, tutors and schoolmasters were required to declare that they were Christians and Protestants, that they believed that 'the Scripture of the Old and New Testament, as commonly received among Protestant churches' contained the revealed will of God which they accepted as 'the rule of their doctrines and practice'.¹⁷ The proposers of the bill in 1779, supported by the Dissenters' Committee, had hoped that the bill would pass in its initial form without any form of declaration, but the bishops had insisted on a declaration which was less catholic than those of the previous bills.¹⁸ But it was the fact of the declaration rather than the substance which Rational Dissenters objected to. According to Theophilus Lindsey, Richard Price would have submitted 'to be silenced, to imprisonment or any thing, sooner than comply with such a requisition from the civil magistrate, to intitle him to the liberty of worshipping his Maker in his own way'.¹⁹ Lindsey himself was not prepared to go to such lengths. Although sympathetic with the viewpoint of Price and others, he understood the real difficulties in the way of convincing even well wishers to the bill that there were good reasons why a 'christian can ever refuse to subscribe a belief of the Scriptures wch he allows and preaches from'.²⁰ This is what the committee attempted. In a memorandum drawn up to influence M.Ps., they stated, 'It is *their* opinion, not merely that the civil magistrate hath no right to demand of them, as a Term of Toleration, the subscription of such a Declaration; but that, in Case of its being required, it is their duty to refuse submission to the Exercise of this Power, it would in *their* estimation, be giving up the natural rights of Men, and the Rights of Conscience, to make at his Requisition, a Declaration, of the Truth of which they cannot have the least Shadow of doubt'.²¹ Given such an argument, in what sense, if at all, was truth at stake? In the sense of the truth of the declaration it was to only a limited degree, although the heterodox could only subscribe it [i.e. the declaration of 1779] by means of certain intellectual

¹⁶ D.O. Thomas, 'Proposed protest concerning dissenters: Richard Price and the Earl of Chatham', *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, XVI, no. 2, 1976

¹⁷ D.W.L., MS. 38106. Minutes, 207—213. My underlining.

¹⁸ Lambeth Palace, MS. 2098, Transcript of Bishop Porteus's Diary, 69—94.

¹⁹ John Rylands Library, Autograph Letters of Theophilus Lindsey, 1774—1785, T. Lindsey to William Tayleur, 27 March 1779; see also John Stephens, 'An Unrecorded Letter from Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur', *Price-Priestley Newsletter*, no. 4, 1980, 65—68.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ D.W.L., MS. 38106. Minutes, 206—209; MS. 38. 7, Josiah Thompson, History of Protestant Dissenting Congregations, v. 1, ff. 4—5.

convolutions. But taking a wider perspective, it was a vital concern, for what the Rational Dissenters aspired to was not so much toleration as the acceptance of the natural right to worship freely and to pursue truth whenever it took them.²² They interpreted in a radical way the Protestant principle of obedience to conscience, and the strength of their religious pre-occupations led them to insist more completely than their mentor, Locke, on the separation of church and state. Joseph Priestley, whose other-worldly optimism and proselytizing zeal incurred the odium of Edward Gibbon, who saw in him a threat to the safety of the state and who to his eternal discredit would have happily seen him incur the penalties of the Blasphemy Act,²³ was the foremost amongst the liberal dissenters in his insistence on the total separation of church and state. He believed that 'civil power is an inflexible thing, and is deaf to all kinds of argument and persuasion; so that truth has no chance where it prevails'.²⁴

The question of truth was less to the fore in the campaign for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. For Kippis and Priestley, repeal was not a first priority. Both regarded the penal laws relative to religion as far more objectionable as they operated against all Dissenters who could not accept the terms of the Toleration Act, whereas the Test Act 'only excludes those who cannot comply with it, from the enjoyment of certain civil honours and preferences'.²⁵ Priestley, himself, thought it was no bad thing for the Dissenters to be reminded that the things of importance were not of this world. Kippis went even further when he suggested that the denial of relief from subscription in 1772 and 1773 might promote scriptural Christianity and religious liberty. Failure prompted the thought that Christianity 'has always had the secular arm against her; and that she has never yet been, I say, not established but even legally tolerated in any country of Christendom'.²⁶ These were, however, the reflections of a disappointed man convinced that Providence was on his side but puzzled by Her ways, and they could only be squared with his arguments for relief in the sense that truth benefits from commitment and not indifference and that tolerance and free inquiry were

²² Their aspirations were not necessarily couched quite in this way. Samuel Heywood for example wrote of toleration as a natural right. See his *The right of Protestant dissenters to a complete toleration asserted* (London, 1787), 98, and his *High Church politics*, 140, 159–61. Cf. however, R. Price, *Observations on the importance of the American Revolution*, ed. Peach, 194.

²³ See J.G.A. Pocock, 'Gibbon's "Decline and Fall" and the World View of the late Enlightenment', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 10, (1976–77), 301–302.

²⁴ J. Priestley, *Letters to the author of remarks on several late publications relative to the dissenters, in a letter to Dr. Priestley* (London, 1770), 16.

²⁵ A. Kippis, op. cit., 16; D.W.L., MS. 12.12, J. Priestley to T. Lindsey, 24 March, 1787.

²⁶ A. Kippis, op. cit., 121–122.

fostered by the open opposition of the bigoted, the intolerant and the worldly-wise. They were possible because the Dissenters were aggrieved but rarely persecuted,²⁷ and indeed, despite the opposition of the bench of bishops and the ministry to the bill of 1779 *without* the declaration, the Dissenters' committee was assured that those who could no more subscribe to it than to the doctrinal articles of the Thirty-nine Articles would continue to be tolerated by connivance.²⁸ Later, Joseph Priestley poured scorn on Revd. Spencer Madan's view that the Test Act acted as a bulwark of the constitution in Church and State, when he likened 'this boasted statute' to 'a fly upon a chariot wheel saying "what a dust I raise"'.²⁹ The Rational Dissenters were not, however, inconsistent in thinking that repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts was not a first priority, but that once the campaign was decided upon, it should be supported with the utmost vigour. That campaign was primarily concerned with justice and civil equality rather than with the pursuit of truth, or, to use Preston King's categorization of toleration, it was about organizational and identity toleration rather than ideational toleration.³⁰ Yet the Rational Dissenters were least likely to compartmentalize their attitudes towards toleration. Not only did they insist that the principles of justice and equity should be uniformly applied so that the Roman Catholics too should be relieved of Caroline proscription, but also they saw such principles as stemming from their concern for truth. If the Test and Corporation Acts did not positively restrain the pursuit of truth, they acted as a barrier to the progress of Knowledge and potentially perpetrated error and so constituted a

²⁷ The Dissenters did, however, view their situation as one of persecution. Furneaux defined persecution as 'an injury inflicted on a person for his religious principles or profession only'. The moderate Henry Beaufoy in proposing the motion for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1787 likened the position of the Dissenters to that of Indians in Spanish American mines in order to underline the principle of oppression which made such a comparison possible. Robert Robinson put the matter with characteristic pungency when he wrote '*The putting forth of the finger and the wagging of the head differ from burning a man, only as the whelp that snaps your fingers differs from the dog that worries you to death*'. *Arcana, or the principles of the late petitioners for relief in the matter of subscription* (Cambridge, 1774), 93, P. Furneaux, *Letters to Blackstone*, 2nd edn. 164, cit., *The Monthly Repository and Review*, N.S. v. 1, Jan.—Dec. 1827; *Parliamentary Register*, XXI, 1787, 547.

²⁸ D.W.L., MS. 38106, p.214, 2 June 1779; the chairman of the application committee reported that 'the committee had received the fullest Assurances from Persons of the first consequence and Station in the Kingdom, that there would be no design of disturbing those who would not be relieved by the Bill—And that they had the further satisfaction of having those assurances confirmed by Lord North in the House of Commons . . .'

²⁹ J. Priestley, *Familiar letters addressed to the inhabitants of the Town of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1790), Letter IV, 12.

³⁰ Preston King, *Toleration* [George Allen & Unwin, London, 1976] chs. 3, 4, & 5.

'negative . . . restraint' on the exercise of religion.³¹ This in turn was damaging to liberty generally, for liberty was incomplete without that 'self government' or 'becoming conduct' which was the consequence of religious liberty.³² Such Dissenters therefore urged repeal 'for the sake of truth, christian liberty and justice, which constitute the basis of sound policy'.³³

Concern for truth thus lay at the root of the Rational Dissenters' involvement with the campaigns for extending toleration in late eighteenth century England. At the time the Dissenters were accused of wanting toleration for themselves and no one else.³⁴ This was certainly untrue of the Rational Dissenters who increasingly expounded the cause of universal toleration. But is there a deeper truth in the charge in the sense that they preached toleration and freedom of inquiry because they were convinced that truth as they understood it would prevail? This can only be answered by investigating their conception of truth and its relationship with their idea of toleration.

Rational Dissenters were broadly agreed on the following doctrines:

1. There is one God, the maker of all worlds, and the governor and Judge of all men.
2. That God is the only proper object of religious worship.
3. That Jesus is the sole mediator between God and Man.
4. That Jesus was commissioned by God to instruct men in their duty, and to reveal the doctrine of a future life.³⁵

³¹ Rev. J. Smith, *Some remarks on the resolutions, which were formed at a meeting of the Archdeaconry of Chester . . . 15th Feb. 1790* [Liverpool, 1790], 26.

³² William Wood, *Two sermons preached at Mill Hill Chapel in Leeds, on the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the happy revolution* (Leeds, 1788), 27, 28, 32–36; R. Robinson, *A discourse on the sacramental tests*. (Cambridge, 1788), p. 15. Such notions of liberty were probably considerably influenced by the ideas of Richard Price for whom the concept of 'self-direction, or self government' was central to his analysis of liberty. See *Observations on the nature of civil liberty, the principles of government and the justice and policy of the war with America*, 8th edn. (1778), repr. B. Peach, *Richard Price and the ethical foundations of the American Revolution* (Duke Univ. Press, Durham, North Carolina, 1979), 68.

³³ Anon. *An address to the bishops upon the subject of a late letter from one of their lordships to certain clergy in his diocese* [London, 1790]. Internal evidence suggests that this was written by a Rational Dissenter.

³⁴ Numerous examples of such charges can be found in pamphlets and newspapers of the time. One of the most powerful attacks was *A look to the last century: of the Dissenters weighed in their own scales* [London, 1790], which specifically attacked Priestley and the Rational Dissenters.

³⁵ *Unitarian Society* (1794) Capel Lofft, *Observations on the first part of Dr. Knowles's testimonies*, passim; T. Lindsey, *Vindiciae Priestleianae*, passim; Charles Wellbeloved, op. cit., 18, 19.

To put their agreement in a negative way, they were united in their rejection of the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity, of Original Sin and Atonement. These doctrines, they believed, were impurities introduced into the Christianity of the early church through the influence of pagan philosophy, but they were (in themselves) incapable of withstanding the test of reason, and of preventing 'another reformation', for 'plain scripture facts are adapted to all capacities, and cannot be overthrown by the learned sophistries of the world'.³⁶ Such plain facts had been emasculated for centuries by the pernicious alliance of church and state which, hostile to liberty of conscience and freedom of enquiry, perpetuated error and encouraged idolatry and superstition. For many Rational Dissenters, established churches were, in their very nature, anti-christian, and the supreme established church, that of Rome, was presided over by Anti-Christ in the person of the Pope. His power had been shaken at the Reformation, but the Reformation had itself been incomplete because the reformed churches had sought alliances with states in order to protect themselves; in consequence 'dominion over conscience' remained.³⁷ But not, so they believed, for much longer. The times were propitious for the extension of toleration—freedom of conscience and worship (or non-worship) would be granted to all, including non-christians and atheists, and the bonds between church and state would be loosened. Their confidence was derived in part from the evidence of the progress of enlightenment in Europe and America, but it rested more fundamentally on their knowledge of the achievements of the scientific revolution. Reason was now beginning to triumph on her own account. Newton was their hero, and they knew that he, like their other mentor, John Locke, had been heterodox in religion.³⁸ And so they confidently expected that just as the book of nature had yielded her secrets to mathematics, scripture, the book of revelation, would yield hers to reason. Robert Robinson echoed the view that 'superstition is to true religion . . . what astrology is to astronomy, the foolish daughter of a wise mother', while

³⁶ W. Hopkins and J. Disney, *A friendly dialogue between a common christian and an athanasian*, 2nd. edn. [London, 1787], 3.

³⁷ R. Robinson, *A discourse on the sacramental tests*, passim; Joseph Priestley argued that 'as systems are reformed by reverting to their first principles, Christianity can never be restored to its pristine state and recover its real dignity and efficiency till it be disengaged for all connexion with the civil power', *Letters to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, 2nd. edn. corr. [Birmingham, 1791], Letter VIII, 83.

³⁸ R. Price, *Observations on the importance of the American Revolution*, 2nd. edn., repr. B. Peach, op. cit., 200.

Richard Price took it as axiomatic that religion constituted 'the perfection of reason'.³⁹

This emphasis on scriptural sufficiency and reason was not new, but the expectation that scriptural truths, like scientific truths, were plain and simple was characteristic of Rational Dissenters. There are clear parallels here between their religious attitudes and the political attitudes of the radical parliamentary reformers—with the supposed Anglo-Saxon constitution serving as the constitutional equivalent of the New Testament. Both believed that the truth which they sought would be clear, obviously appealing and persuasive.⁴⁰ Predictably, many political radicals were also Rational Dissenters. One of the most notable was John Jebb. He believed the 'Newtonian and Maclaurin method of proving a deity' to be conclusive and despaired of those unable to comprehend it.⁴¹ For him 'religion was a science', but a science whose truths were not austere; it was a science 'which has for its proper object the culture of the human heart'. His religion assumed a natural affinity between spiritual truths and morality, and between reason and emotion. Its truths, laid out in the gospels were 'few in number, easy of comprehension, propounded with the utmost perspicuity and plainness, and withal of a nature so entirely practical, that not a single article of faith . . . is therein proposed as of necessity to salvation, which hath not an obvious connection with a just and honourable conduct'.⁴² For Jebb and others, science and religion were not in conflict. They believed, on the contrary that they had discovered a harmonious relationship between reason and revelation and the fact that they counted in their number philosophers and scientists of the distinction of Richard Price and Joseph Priestley served as a distinct recommendation for their theological views. The lofty sentiments inspired by the study of nature which Priestley expressed for example in the preface to his *History of Electricity*, where he wrote, 'The more we see of the wonderful structure of the world, and the laws of nature, the more clearly do

³⁹ R. Robinson, *The history and mystery of Good Friday* [London, 1777], 7; R. Price, *Additional observations on the nature and value of civil liberty and the War with America*, B. Peach, op. cit., 151.

⁴⁰ C. Wyvill, *Political papers* [York n.d.], II, no. XVI, paper II. 'The First Address to the Public from the Society for Constitutional Information, April 1780'; John Jebb, *The Works* (London, 1787), III, 403, 'Report of the Sub-Committee of Westminster, May 27, 1780'.

⁴¹ Colin Maclaurin was one of the 'second generation' of disciples of Newton in the 1720s. He became Professor of Mathematics at the University of Edinburgh through Newton's sponsorship and he was later chosen by Newton's family to write an account of his work. See Frank E. Manuel, *Freedom from history* [University of London Press, London, 1972], 162—163; Anand Chitnis, *The Scottish enlightenment* (Croom Helm Ltd., London, 1976), 129, 162.

⁴² J. Jebb, *Works*, II, 5—10, 178.

we comprehend their admirable uses, to make all the percipient creation happy; a sentiment which cannot but fill the heart with unbounded love, gratitude and joy',⁴³ impressed such critical spirits as William Godwin and Samuel Taylor Coleridge who were only Rational Dissenters for relatively short periods of time. The latter, who became a Unitarian in 1793 and remained so for just over a decade, regarded 'every experiment that Priestley made in Chemistry as giving wings to his more sublime theological works'.⁴⁴

Even those Rational Dissenters who were not distinguished scientific practitioners were usually admirers of science and they sometimes maintained a respectable amateur involvement in it. They too, had no doubts that Christianity would benefit from scientific discoveries as well as from the scientific method. Science, they all believed, provided them with a powerful aid towards the recovery of pristine christianity, which had been obscured by the sophistries of the 'fathers, schoolmen and partial reformers'.⁴⁵ Yet, although it taught them impatience with 'metaphysical disquisitions' (Jebb) they themselves were not without their own theological differences, differences which would appear abstruse to later ages.⁴⁶

The main theological divide amongst the Rational Dissenters was between the Socinians and the Arians, the former believing in the simple humanity of Christ and the latter in His divinity and pre-existence. The Socinians necessarily rejected completely the doctrine of Atonement, arguing that Jesus's purpose was not to reconcile God to man but man to God, whereas the Arians adopted a modified doctrine of Atonement in which Christ's sacrifice was not efficacious and repentance alone was not sufficient for salvation.⁴⁷ There were further differences between the 'High' and 'Low' Arians. The

⁴³ Theophilus Lindsey who cited this in his *Vindiciae priestlieanae* (pp. 64—65) believed that at the Second Coming, the discoveries of Boyle, Newton and Linnaeus 'will furnish him (Jesus) with new and unceasing songs of praise and adoration'. *ibid.*, 205.

⁴⁴ Henry A. Bright (ed.), *Unpublished letters from Samuel Taylor Coleridge to the Rev. John Prior Estlin*, 69, cit. D. Wigmore Beddoes, *Yesterday's radicals, a study of the affinity between Unitarian and Broad Church Anglicanism in the nineteenth century*. (James Clarke and Co., Cambridge and London, 1971), 155, f.n. 24. Estlin, a former student at the Warrington Academy, was a "lover of science" [*ibid.*].

⁴⁵ David Jones, *Reasons for Unitarianism: of the primitive christian doctrine* [London, 1792], 99. For Jones 'the man of science . . . has the only the merit of teaching us to practice on plain and simple principles, which when once brought to light, we think all mightily easy, and such as we should ourselves have hit upon' (*ibid.*). Coleridge went further when in his *Aids to Reflection* he argued that 'the mistakes of scientific men have never injured Christianity, while every new truth discovered by them has either added to its evidence or prepared the mind for its reception'. cit. Wigmore Beddoes, op. cit., 90.

⁴⁶ J. Jebb, *Works*, II, 143.

former believed that Jesus was the embodiment of the Word which dwelt with God at the creation and that he was a fit object for worship and petition. They associated themselves with the ideas of Samuel Clarke who in his *Scripture-doctrine of the Trinity* (1712) taught what was really a heterodox Trinitarianism rather than the doctrine of Arius who rejected the notion that Christ was one with the transcendent First Cause of creation. The 'Low' Arians on the other hand comprised various shades of opinion from those who ascribed to Christ a rôle at the creation and 'a very considerable share in the conduct of providence' to those who regarded Him as a higher soul which had pre-existed for some time 'before it united to a human body'.⁴⁸ Most of the active Arian Dissenters were 'low' Arians and they regarded themselves as Unitarians.⁴⁹ Richard Price, the most prominent Arian, subscribed to the *Unitarian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and the Practice of Virtue by the Distribution of Books*. Socinians, however, tended to regard themselves alone as 'wholly Unitarian'.⁵⁰

Despite these differences within Rational Dissent, there was amongst them a shared expectation that pure and rational Christianity would ultimately prevail both within and without Dissent. Joseph Priestley regarded it as a 'general law of nature' that truth only requires time to establish itself in the place of error'.⁵¹ The process had taken so long primarily because of the intolerance of the established churches, although he well understood that education and circumstance likewise hindered the progress of truth. It was therefore vitally important that the 'negative' restraints on toleration, understood primarily in terms of the political and social power of the established church, should be relaxed. Dormant laws could be harmful to the Rational Dissenting Interest and impede the advance of truth, for they hampered the operations of free inquiry. Rational Dissenters were especially

⁴⁷ For a discussion of the issues involved here, see D.O. Thomas, *The Honest mind, The thought and work of Richard Price*, [Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1977], 36–38.

⁴⁸ David Jones, *op. cit.*, 189, 190.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 189. Low Arians had 'a considerable number of partizans among the dissenters'.

⁵⁰ David Jones, *op. cit.*, 179; D.W.L., MS. P 7278, *The Principles and views of the Unitarian Society explained and vindicated. By a Member of the Society*, pp. 2, 3; For the above paragraph generally see David Jones, *op. cit.*, 188, 189; C.G. Bolam et al., *The English Presbyterians* [George Allen and Unwin, London 1968], 149; H. Chadwick, *The early church* [Penguin Books, London, 1967], 124, 130; H.L. Short, 'The founding of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association', *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, Supplement to XVI, no. 1, October 1975, 4s.

⁵¹ J. Priestley (repub.), *An history of the sufferings of Mr. Lewis de Marolles and Mr. Isaac le Fevre upon the revocation of the edict of Nantes* (Birmingham, 1788), XIII.

conscious of the allure of the establishment, in part because of the social attraction of the church which inveigled the weaker Dissenting spirits but also because of the combination of latitudinarianism and laxity about doctrine which enabled the heterodox to remain within the comfortable Anglican bosom.⁵² Even moderate liberal Dissenters, in the catholic Doddridgean tradition, who were sympathetic to the idea of an established church and who maintained friendly relations with its clergy, were sensitive to any suggestion that they might conform. When such a suspicion fell on William Enfield, minister at the Octagon Chapel, Norwich, he believed that his reputation might be 'notoriously injured'. The rumour had been recounted by Matthew Nicholson junior and so Enfield wrote forthwith to his father James, the Liverpool merchant, asking him to scotch it and if possible trace it to its source.⁵³ Enfield may have been more than usually sensitive to such a calumny, for at the age of twenty two he accepted the ministry at Benn's Garden Chapel, Liverpool immediately after its previous occupant had conformed. Henderson, a 'shadowy figure', cropped up later in the memoirs of Gilbert Wakefield. The latter taught at Warrington Academy under Enfield, whom he revered, and so Enfield would have known the sequel to Henderson's conformity. Before Wakefield moved to Warrington he was, briefly, a curate at St. Paul's, Liverpool, where Henderson was one of the ministers. At the time, he recalled in his memoirs, the onetime Dissenter had a low character 'as a preacher, nor did he seem in much higher estimation as a man'. His rector suspected him of purloining the sacrament money. With the young curate's assistance he spied on his colleague and detected 'the theft of our sacrilegious grey-beard'. Henderson fortunately died before he could be confronted with his misdemeanours. Wakefield drew his own conclusion which was that, 'It is IMPOSSIBLE . . . that any man, who has been educated in the true principles of dissent from the establishment can afterwards conform with a good conscience'.⁵⁴

⁵² Thomas Belsham, 'Preamble to the Rules of the Unitarian Society agreed upon at a General Meeting, February 9th 1791. Michael Dodson, Esq. in the chair'. Belsham is identified as the author of the preamble in Walter Lloyd, *The story of Protestant Dissent and English Unitarianism* [Philip Green, London, 1899], 200. Belsham was the first secretary of the society.

⁵³ Liverpool Record Office, Nicholson Papers, MS. 920 NIC/9/12/3, Wm. Enfield to Rev. Dr. Clayton, 15 March, 1789. Clayton was a mutual friend of the Nicholsons and Enfield.

⁵⁴ Gilbert Wakefield, *Memoirs of the life of Gilbert Wakefield, B.A.* [London, 1792], 182, 192–195, 208–209; Anne Holt, *Walking together. a study in Liverpool Nonconformity 1688–1938* [George Allen and Unwin, London, 1938], 126–130, 116–117. On Enfield's irenicism, see A. Holt, *A life of Joseph Priestley* (Oxford University Press, 1931), 49–51; and C.B. Jewson, *Jacobin city. A portrait of Norwich, 1788–1802* (Blackie and Son, Glasgow and London, 1975), 137.

But if the Rational Dissenters were concerned about the seduction of the establishment for their brethren who should not in conscience conform, they were doubly concerned about the lax consciences of those within the church who did not really hold with its doctrines. This was naturally a special preoccupation for those who followed their conscience out of the establishment. Theophilus Lindsey who led the way, established the first avowedly Unitarian chapel in England in Essex Street off the Strand in 1774. Unlike other Rational Dissenting places of worship, Essex Street was patronized by the rich and influential as well as by the more lowly. Nevertheless, Lindsey was constantly worried by backsliding amongst his flock. He exhorted them to make a clean break with the establishment. He objected strongly to occasional Unitarianism, especially of those who were fair weather friends in the metropolis and Anglican squires in the backwoods.⁵⁵ John Disney, who followed Lindsey out of the church of England and became his co-pastor in 1783, was equally concerned. He wrote a dialogue to persuade a member of the Church of England who had certain scruples about certain aspects of the Anglican services to think through those scruples and leave the church if he no longer believed its doctrines. A decade earlier his friend, John Jebb, had welcomed a proposal from David Williams for, it appears, the setting up of a chapel in London which would worship according to a rational plan, in the belief that this would encourage others to follow suit.⁵⁶ Another convert from orthodoxy, although of the Dissenting variety, Thomas Belsham, believed that rational Christians had been 'too cautious of publicly acknowledging their principles'. In 1791 he helped to found the *Unitarian Society* in part to combat such 'disgraceful timidity'.⁵⁷ Its weapons were the printed word; rational Christianity would benefit from freedom of enquiry and it was important that its case did not go by default. He was not the first to see the problem. For some thirty years prior to the formation of the society, Joseph Priestley had tried to ensure that the voice of enlightened heterodoxy would be heard. Indeed, no clearer statement of the liberality of sentiment of the Rational Dissenter and of the expectation that

⁵⁵ See G.M. Ditchfield, *Some aspects of Unitarianism and Radicalism* [Cambridge Ph.D., 1968], esp. pp. 102–106. For Lindsey, his friend William Tayleur of Shrewsbury was a model of virtue which he hoped others would follow. He separated from the Church of England for conscientious reasons and held services at home until a local Dissenting minister was persuaded to use a rational liturgy. D.W.L., MS. 12.44, f. 38. T. Lindsey to William Turner, 1 Sept. 1783.

⁵⁶ J. Disney and W. Hopkins, *A friendly dialogue between a common Christian and an Athanasian*; National Library of Wales, MS. 15269 C, f. 5, John Jebb to Revd. David Williams, 26 October 1772. In a letter of 21 Jan. 1783, Lindsey expressed the hope that one of Disney's tracts would excite inquiry into the gospel and teach others to distinguish 'betwixt true religion and the civil establishment of it'. D.W.L., M. 44, f. 37 T. Lindsey to William Turner.

⁵⁷ Thomas Belsham, loc. cit.

Christian truth would eventually triumph can be found than in the preface to *The Theological Repository* which Priestley first published in 1769. He invited contributions from Christians and non-Christians, believers and unbelievers. Sincerely requesting 'the freest objections to natural and revealed religion', he declared that 'nothing that is new shall be rejected, if it be expressed in decent terms',⁵⁸ and he was convinced that Christian Knowledge would survive the most searching investigation and emerge revived. He cited as an example the beneficial effects of the Deist controversy earlier in the century.⁵⁹ It was in the same spirit that Richard Price acknowledged his intellectual debt to David Hume;⁶⁰ for him and his fellow Rational Dissenters, 'All doctrines really sacred must be clear and incapable of being opposed with success'.⁶¹ Their own intellectual inquiries appeared to establish this as a fact rather than as an article of faith.

Toleration by connivance was inadequate for the Rational Dissenters because it inhibited freedom of inquiry and encouraged sloth and laxity. Relaxation of persecution appeared to lead to indifference to truth⁶² and to provide confirmation of Dr. Johnson's opinion that 'there is no other way of ascertaining the truth, but by persecution on the one hand and enduring it on the other'.⁶³ The Rational Dissenters disagreed profoundly with such lofty cynicism and believed, moreover, that they had found in freedom of inquiry an antidote to religious lassitude. This rather than persecution put Christianity to the test from which, they were convinced, it would emerge stronger, purer and more than ever invincible. But the antidote would only be completely efficacious if controversy was conducted in the spirit of candour, for without candour inquiry would never be entirely free. Candour consisted in an openness to conviction, a willingness to accept one's views as mistaken, and honouring those who sought to demonstrate one's errors. In Robert

⁵⁸ *The theological repository consisting of original essays, hints, queries, etc. calculated to promote religious knowledge*. I (London, 1769), xi.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ R. Price, *Observations on the importance of the American Revolution*, loc. cit., p. 205.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁶² See e.g. J. Priestley, *Letters to the author of remarks on several late publications relative to the Dissenters*, In a letter to Dr. Priestley [London, 1770], in which Priestley takes the 'first opportunity' of noting a *new species of Dissenters*, that I was sensible, had been some time springing up among us, consisting of young gentlemen and fine ladies, who have as little of the spirit, as they have of the external appearances of the old Puritans . . . (pp. 4–5).

⁶³ G.B. Hill (ed.), *Boswell's life of Johnson*, (Oxford, 1934), II, 250, cit. F.K. Prochaska, 'English State Trials in the 1790s: a Case Study', *Journal of British Studies*, XIII, no. 1, p. 81, fn. 63.

Robinson's view, the wisest men in history were those who realized and acknowledged their errors.⁶⁴ Although candour involved 'making generous allowance for unavoidable ignorance and involuntary prejudice', it was not, as a defender of the Unitarian society pointed out, to be confused with 'universal doubt and scepticism', by which candour was 'cheaply and safely' purchased.⁶⁵ The writer's main target was those rational christians who were not candid enough to avow their Unitarian principles. This, as we have seen, was a particular concern of the Unitarians, for they never lacked adversaries, whom, being candid, they were bound to honour. Priestley knew that so long as he appeared to be the sole defender of Unitarianism, he could be dismissed as factious.⁶⁶ He concluded that freedom of enquiry required complete or universal toleration. By that the Rational Dissenters meant the separation of church and state, and, although not all would follow the logic of such a view and argue as Priestley did for the disestablishment of the church of England, they all expected rational christianity to prevail in a situation of universal toleration. Nevertheless, there were important variations in their conceptions of christian truth which coloured their attitude to toleration.

At one end of the spectrum there was Joseph Priestley who looked to the day when argument was unnecessary and everyone had arrived at a body of certain religious truths. Truth to him was uniform and progress towards it unilinear. Such progress occurred as toleration and freedom of enquiry developed. 'The discussion', he wrote in his *Letter to . . . Pitt*, 'would in time, produce a permanent and rational uniformity'.⁶⁷ Although he fully understood the limitations to any single person's knowledge of truth and was aware that prejudice could feed on reason, he believed that truth would benefit immensely from controversy.⁶⁸ His enthusiasm was infectious. When John Barton became engaged in a controversy in the *Cumberland Pacquet*

⁶⁴ R. Robinson, *Arcana*, Letter 1, 'Of Candour in Controversy'.

⁶⁵ D.W.L., P7278, *The Principles and views of the Unitarian Society explained and vindicated*, 7.

⁶⁶ Pennsylvania State University, Priestley MSS. Joseph Priestley to Revd. Mr. Cappe, 23 Jan. 1788; in another letter written in the same month Priestley wrote again of the need for 'coadjutors', and he believed that he had found one in William Turner, junior, whom he believed felt 'the value of truth' and was 'zealous for—propagation of it'. *Ibid.*, the same to Turner, 1 Jan 1788. I am indebted to Charles Mann, Chief Rare Books and Special Collections, for providing me with copies of these letters.

⁶⁷ J. Priestley, *A letter to the right honourable William Pitt*, 2nd edn. [London, 1787].

⁶⁸ D.W.L., 1202. J. Priestley to T. Lindsey, 18 Jan. 1770; 'But from the nature of the human mind, when an opinion or prejudice is fixed to a certain degree, everything we meet [wit]h, that has the least relation to it, tends to conform it. I allow you to apply this maxim to me, as much as I do to you in this case; and as I do not think less favourably of you on account of this difference of opinion, I hope you will not think the worse of me for it'. The case concerned toleration for Roman Catholics of which Lindsey at the time disapproved.

over his support for Catholic toleration, he wrote to his friend William Roscoe, 'It is a most pleasing reflection that even envy bigotry and malice are compelled, as it were, to promote the cause they would so gladly overthrow and disgrace'.⁶⁹ Theophilus Lindsey was similarly enthusiastic: controversy could only promote truth. The worst that could befall the cause of Socinianism was neglect from its opponents. The obmutescence of one such opponent, Bishop Hurd, he interpreted as a deliberate ploy.⁷⁰ However, in the heady atmosphere of the late 1780s and early 1790s he came to believe that the strategy of silence would no longer work for the main pre-conditions for the emergence and acceptance of truth had been largely fulfilled, namely, that 'so many obstructions and terrors are removed or diminished, which darkened and overawed the minds of our forefathers' and that 'the scriptures are easy of access'.⁷¹ All that was necessary was to remind honest enquirers of the central importance of the question of the divinity of Christ and the nature of Deity, and that the answers could be found in the Bible in language which would 'everywhere be plain and intelligible to the ordinary plowman'.⁷² The times were propitious for the reception of such advice for, 'Happily a spirit of enquiry is gone forth, upon this momentous subject in many parts of England and Scotland; though it be chiefly confined to the lower and middle classes'.⁷³ This was beyond Priestley's highest expectations. A few years earlier he had still believed that the social and institutional barriers to truth were formidable. In July 1787, he had written to Lindsey, 'If the Establishment were out of the way Unitarianism would have a rapid spread'.⁷⁴ Nine out of the ten of the 'common people' would, he thought, in such circumstances,

⁶⁹ Liverpool Record Office, Roscoe Papers, 218, J. Barton to Wm. Roscoe, 3 June, 1778. Anne Holt, *op. cit.*, p. 156, describes Barton as a Quaker. If so, he was atypical; he had much in common with Rational Dissenters and associated with them. He was an admirer of Priestley and when he was in London in 1787 he sought out his company. *Ibid.*, 244, J. Barton to Wm. Roscoe, 6 Apr. 1787.

⁷⁰ *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, XV no. 4, Oct. 1974, 'Letters from Theophilus Lindsey to Harry Toulmin', T. Lindsey to Rev. Mr. Toulmin, 5 Sept. 1789, 142—143.

⁷¹ T. Lindsey, *A list of the false readings of the scriptures and the mistranslations of the English Bible which contribute to support the great errors concerning Jesus Christ* [London, 1790], iv.

⁷² *Ibid.*, iv—vi, 8.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 10. Lindsey was specially optimistic about the influence of the newly formed Unitarian Society. He wrote, 'I have no doubt of it producing beneficial effects in favour of free inquiry into the Scripture beyond the expectation of almost any of us. Such a phalanx of unitarians, whose names it will exhibit in a few years, will give such countenance to their cause, as will make it even creditable.' Cambridge University Library, Frend Papers, Add. 7886, f. 164, T. Lindsey to W. Frend, 30 Dec. 1790.

⁷⁴ D.W.L., MS. 12.12, Joseph Priestley to Theophilus Lindsey, 14 July 1787.

prefer Unitarianism.⁷⁵ Despite the varying degrees of optimism which he and Lindsey expressed at different times, both they and other Rational Dissenters believed that Unitarianism was not just the true but the natural christianity for ordinary people if they were only allowed to conduct their own religious enquiries. In a situation of complete toleration their view of christianity would prevail and not surprisingly they liked to think of themselves as 'common' Christians.⁷⁶

At the other end of the spectrum there were those like Robert Robinson, for whom the idea of eventual uniformity of opinion made no sense at all. He wrote in his *Arcana*:

The idea of uniformity is neither the idea of a philosopher nor of a christian . . . Make religion what you will; let it be speculation, let it be practice; make it faith, make it fancy; let it be reason, let it be passion; let it be what you will; uniformity is not to be expected. Philosophy is a stranger to it, and christianity disowns it'.⁷⁷

Toleration and freedom of inquiry would not therefore lead to the triumph of a uniform body of truth, for it was not in the nature of God's purpose for all men to think alike. As Count Clermont Tonnerre argued in a speech to the National Assembly, which was translated and used by the Dissenters in their campaign for a repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, 'God, in enduing men with the faculty of being unanimous in morality, has permitted them to make laws respecting it; God, in not letting them be unanimous in religious truths, has resolved to himself undoubtedly the power of being sole legislator in those points'.⁷⁸ Such views were not new. The experiences of the seventeenth century had convinced many Dissenters of the impossibility of religious uniformity. Religious dogmatism had only led to persecution whether Catholic, Anglican, or Presbyterian. The historian of the Puritans, Daniel Neal, had provided weighty authority of the view expressed more flippantly by Voltaire in his *Letters on England* that tolerance of religious

⁷⁵ J. Priestley, *Letters to Dr. Horne* [London, 1787], 61.

⁷⁶ J. Disney & W. Hopkins, *op. cit.*

⁷⁷ Rev. W. Robinson ed., *Select works of the Rev. Robert Robinson of Cambridge* [London, 1861], *Arcana*, Letter 2, 'On Uniformity in Religion', 69, 70. The Revd. David Williams in his Rational Dissenting phase envisaged Athanasians, Arians and Socinians joining 'in one form of worship' in heaven. *The philosopher, in three conversations* (London, 1771), 99—100.

⁷⁸ Translation of a speech spoken by Count Clermont Tonnerre, Christmas Eve last, on the subject of admitting Non-Catholics, Comedians, and Jews, to all the privileges of citizens, according to the Declaration of Rights [London, 1790], 10. See also W. Wood, *op. cit.*, 37.

diversity promoted religious concord.⁷⁹ This argument was revived by the Dissenters later in the century in the campaign for toleration. In an anonymous tract which reviewed the controversy over the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, the writer opposed the argument that 'great danger, and disturbance would arise from a multitude of sects employed by the government' by an exhaustive and somewhat fanciful review of the great variety of sects in England and concluded that 'Perfect uniformity of sentiments can never be obtained; and perfect uniformity of profession can only be compelled at the expence of moral rectitude and religious obligation'.⁸⁰ These views, of course, made toleration doubly important and strengthened the notion that the state should not interfere in religion. Nor were they in any sense meant to support acceptance of the religious *status quo*. From a Rational Dissenting standpoint, greater toleration was bound to lead to a situation in which the *status quo* would be challenged by rational, candid, inquiry. Many, like Rev. John Smith, confidently envisaged a situation in which reason freed from the 'dull uniformity of legal restraint is like a copious stream, brilliant in its prospect, and fruitful in its course'.⁸¹ Whether or not Rational Dissenters desired uniformity, they all looked forward expectantly to the advent of complete toleration. There was thus no disagreement between those like Robinson and those like Priestley about the general desirability of the extension of toleration. Indeed the latter group employed arguments similar to the former. The following passage for example occurs in one of Lindsey's works:

Thus will christianity attain perhaps its most perfect form here below: not in an uniformity, and agreement on all points, among its professors; a thing impossible, though rivers of blood have been shed, and the world's peace disturbed in all ages to accomplish it: but in an uniformity and agreement in this one point, not to look with jealousy or an evil eye upon fellow christians, of whatever denomination, having equal rights and privileges, or using that liberty of judging for himself, which no one can exercise for him; but to embrace him with love and goodwill, and to be ready to do him all kind offices, notwithstanding the widest difference of religious opinion; and to be persuaded, that all who are

⁷⁹ Neal's *The History of the Puritans* appeared in four volumes between 1732 and 1738. See, C. Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and sceptre, transatlantic faiths, ideas, personalities and politics, 1688—1775* (New York, 1962), p. 50 & C. Robbins, *The eighteenth century commonwealthman* (Atheneum, New York, 1968), 239—240; Voltaire, *Letters on England*, trans. L. Tancock [Penguin, London, 1980], 41.

⁸⁰ *Brief state of the controversy respecting the corporation and test acts*, n.d.; n.p.: n.p. (a Johnson advert appears on the last page), p. 14.

⁸¹ Rev. J. Smith, *op. cit.*, 33.

virtuous and sincere, will meet in heaven at last, though here they may seem to take different roads to it.⁸²

Yet, in spite of his apparent endorsement of the impossibility of uniformity, at least in this world, Lindsey believed that toleration, once granted, would lead to a substantial measure of agreement. Indeed, he continued in the paragraph immediately following the above:

And this conduct will in time bring on an uniformity and agreement in all important points, especially in the one great object of divine worship, which is now only retarded by those prejudices and animosities which destroy all calm reflection, and blind and prevent us from perceiving the plainest and most evident truths.⁸³

And so beyond the general agreement amongst Rational Dissenters about the desirability of toleration and their employment of similar arguments in its favour, there lay important differences between them which were reflected in their ideas about the nature and purpose of toleration. Those like Lindsey and Priestley, and here one would add Thomas Belsham, the future leader of the Unitarians and in some ways a caricature of his progenitors,⁸⁴ believed that universal toleration powerfully aided the operations of candour and freedom of inquiry, which in time led to truth. Although they acknowledged large areas of ignorance,⁸⁵ their attention was focussed on the growth of knowledge, on light rather than dark, and they believed that they had progressed farthest along the path of enlightenment. And it was a path which they intended to turn into a highway for the common people. They had little appreciation of or sympathy for religious uncertainty.⁸⁶ Priestley spoke of the state of mind of John Wesley before his conversion as 'little better than that of Pascal'.⁸⁷ Temperamentally optimistic, they worshipped God but followed Christ who provided the pattern for a virtuous life; He was, as Lindsey put it,

⁸² T. Lindsey, *A discourse addressed to the congregation at the chapel in Essex Street, Strand, on resigning the pastoral office among them* [London, 1793], 39, 40.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 40

⁸⁴ H.L. Short, 'The Founding of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association', loc. cit., p. 5s.

⁸⁵ J. Priestley, *Letters to Dr. Horne*, p. 66: 'experimental philosophy tends to make us humble, as it shews in the strongest light the immensity of nature, the unsearchable wisdom of the author of nature, and the narrowness of our comprehension. Other persons *hear* of these truths, but experimental philosophers *feel* them.'

⁸⁶ This does not mean that they did not feel the pangs of doubt, but these they sought to dispel as quickly as possible. See J. Priestley, *Letters to Dr. Horne*, 90.

⁸⁷ J. Priestley, *Letters of John Wesley*, vi.

'for ever a learner'⁸⁸ and some looked forward with Priestley to His Second Coming in a short space of time.⁸⁹ Tolerance for them was a means to truth.

Those Rational Dissenters who did not expect religious uniformity to flow from complete toleration placed a rather different emphasis on tolerance. For Robert Robinson, the right of private judgement was of the very essence of true christianity; another Rational Dissenter, William Wood, described Christianity as 'a law of liberty'; while Richard Price on more than one occasion reminded his readers that Jesus Christ established 'a perfect equality among his followers'.⁹⁰ Priestley and others would no doubt have nodded their heads in agreement with this, but because these Rational Dissenters did not expect uniformity to follow from freedom of enquiry, their religion was one of candour, of individual rectitude, in Price's words, 'a tolerant and catholic religion, not a rage for proselytism, a religion of peace and charity'.⁹¹ It was a religion, which in many ways was an enlightened version of Puritanism, with its emphasis on duty to truth and obedience to conscience. For example, Price objected to religious tests because they encouraged dishonesty. He, too, wanted a complete separation of church and state, that is he wanted to go beyond toleration, which by his definition could 'only take place where there was a civil establishment of a particular mode of religion'.⁹² But if he wanted to go beyond toleration to secure liberty of conscience, he did not want to go beyond tolerance. Only by the introduction of complete freedom of enquiry would tolerance develop. That is what Rev. John Smith meant when he wrote, 'It is only when the mind is enlarged from prejudice [by candid enquiry] that the principles of universal toleration will be found to prevail'.⁹³ Education would play its part by acting as an 'initiation into candour rather than into any systems of faith'.⁹⁴ For such Dissenters the freedom of inquiry which would be facilitated by complete toleration was a

⁸⁸ T. Lindsey, *Vindiciae priestleianae*, 203—204. This was in reply to Dr. Horne's criticism that Priestley left Christ in the interval between His Ascension and His Second Coming 'in a state of pupillage'.

⁸⁹ See e.g. Cambridge University Library, Friend Papers, Add. 7886 f. 167, T. Lindsey to W. Friend, 23 April 1791.

⁹⁰ R. Robinson, *Arcana*, 34; W. Wood, op. cit., 36; R. Price, *Additional observations*, loc. cit., 151; *Observations on the importance of the American Revolution*, loc. cit., 194.

⁹¹ R. Price, *Observations on the importance of the American Revolution*, loc. cit., 199.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 194—195.

⁹³ J. Smith, op. cit., 36.

⁹⁴ R. Price, *Observations on the importance of the American Revolution*, loc. cit., 201.

positive good in itself and tolerance was not simply a means to truth, it was inseparable from Christian truth itself.

There were, furthermore, temperamental differences between the optimistic Unitarians like Priestley and those like Price for whom optimism was interspersed by gloom and doubt.⁹⁵ In the evening of his life, he confessed himself 'puzzled by many difficulties, anxious for more light', though he gained 'full and constant assurance' from one truth, 'that the practice of virtue is the duty and dignity of man, and in all events, the wisest and safest course'.⁹⁶ Sometimes the differences between the more and the less optimistic were more than or other than temperamental. Robert Robinson believed that some characters were too unworthy to be capable of receiving the truth: for the Pilates who ask 'What is truth but never wait for an answer, or the Esau who prefer a meal to a birth right . . . What a waste of goodness would it be to propose truth to them'.⁹⁷ Others were more hesitant about telling the truth to the people in general. Abraham Rees conformed to a tradition going back at least to Origen which advocated the 'useful, pragmatically justifiable lie' over the doctrine of eternal punishments.⁹⁸ According to William Godwin, he believed that if the doctrine was untrue it would be inconvenient to inform the populace.⁹⁹ Dr. Jonathan Aikin did not think it would be a good idea to inform the people that their rulers were irreligious even if this were true.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ The famous euphoric outburst at the end of his *Discourse on love of our country*, can only be understood in context of his puritanical fears for the soul of Britain expressed earlier in the discourse and manifest on other occasions, see. e.g. B. Peach, op. cit., app. 7. R. Price, *A sermon delivered to a congregation of Protestant Dissenters at Hackney*.

⁹⁶ R. Price, *Observations on the importance of the American Revolution*, loc. cit., 206. The importance of education for Price was underscored by his belief that 'there is nothing properly fundamental in religion, besides sincerely desiring to know, and faithfully endeavouring to do the will of God'. *Sermons on various subjects* (London, 1816), Sermons III & IV.

⁹⁷ R. Robinson, *Arcana, Works*, 67.

⁹⁸ D.P. Walker, *The decline of hell; seventeenth century discussions of eternal torment* (Univ. of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1964), 5.

⁹⁹ C. Kegan Paul, *William Godwin: his friends and contemporaries* (London, 1876), 15—16. Godwin reported a conversation in which Rees declared that 'he was perfectly convinced that such a punishment was never the meaning of Jesus Christ, but he should think it censurable in himself to promote the true sense of the New Testament on this point, to the grosser mass of mankind, who if they were acquainted with it would infallibly launch out into the most enormous crimes'.

¹⁰⁰ Liverpool Record Office, Nicholson Papers, NIC 9/7/1. J. Aikin to Rev. Nicholas Clayton, 6 April 1780. Dr. J. Aikin died in December 1780. H.D. Roberts, *Hope Street Church and the allied nonconformity* [Liverpool, 1909], 156.

Most Rational Dissenters were no doubt to some degree ambivalent in their attitude towards the people for they all thought that those in the middle station of life formed the most independent, enlightened, and virtuous part of the community.¹⁰¹ It would appear, however, to be the case that the more doctrinally Unitarian and assertive Rational Dissenters had fewer hesitations about the beneficial effects of free enquiry and public controversy in the minds of humble people than those who were more diffident about doctrine, less assertive in their Unitarianism and, in sum, less optimistic in their outlook. Indeed, it was over the related issue of proselytism that the differences of opinion amongst these dissenters concerning truth, toleration and tolerance can be most clearly seen. Once again the attitudes of Richard Price and Joseph Priestley may be taken as representing the polarities of opinion.

In his public debate with Priestley about the nature of Unitarianism, Price wrote, 'I feel no disposition to be very anxious about bringing you over to my opinion. The rage for proselytism is one of the curses of the world. I wish to make no proselytes except to candour, and charity, and honest enquiry'. That was a viewpoint which Priestley found hard to understand. Given his assumption about the unity of religious truth understood primarily in a doctrinal sense, he believed that it was his duty to make proselytes to that conception of Christianity which appeared to be the most credible and consequently the most likely to convince unbelievers of their unwisdom. He 'professed to write with no other view than to make proselytes, nor indeed', he declared, did he 'see any other rational object in writing at all.'¹⁰² And, indeed, one has only to cast one's eyes over the long and all too daunting list of his writings to realize the truth of that statement. Not only did he aim to convert fellow Dissenters to his views but also Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Methodists, Jews, Deists, and Unbelievers. He was an unflagging and often pugnacious controversialist, but although he admitted that he was 'apt to be too hasty' and that he preferred warmth of tone to the appearance of indifference, he aimed to be candid rather than disputatious.¹⁰³ In the

¹⁰¹ cf. J. Priestley, *Essay on the first principles of government*, 2nd edn., [London, 1771], 16—17, & [J. Aikin], *An address to the dissidents of England on their late defeat* [London, 1790], 18. J. Aikin [M.D.] was the son of Dr. John Aikin.

¹⁰² J. Priestley, *Letters to Dr. Horne*, 91—93. Price's dislike of proselytism may have been influenced by the controversy over this issue in America, where the Anglican *Society for the Promotion of the Gospel* was accused of proselytizing amongst fellow Christians rather than converting Indians and Negroes to Christianity. C. Bridenbaugh, op. cit., 214—215.

¹⁰³ D.W.L., MS. 12, 12, J. Priestley to T. Lindsey, 7 Feb. 1789; J. Priestley, *Letters to the Jews* [Birmingham, 1787], Part II, 53; J. Priestley, *Essay on the first principles of government*, XIV. Priestley's emphasis on candour and sincerity of the brutally honest variety was later elaborated upon by William Godwin in his *Enquiry concerning political justice*. Godwin did not, however, share his taste for public controversy.

interests of candour, he sent copies of his controversial works to his opponents, for he aimed to convert as much by provoking the spirit of candid enquiry as by the influence of his works alone.¹⁰⁴ And he believed that if differences were investigated in this way then truth would soon triumph. He was puzzled to find that Price did not share his convictions and wrote to him:

Your diffidence with respect to conclusions, which you have formed with the greatest care, and after the most deliberate enquiry, I even think excessive; and it is the only thing with respect to which, I cannot say that I wish to resemble you. For I would not lose the satisfaction that arise from a persuasion of having found any valuable truth, nor willingly continue any longer than is necessary in a state of 'doubt', than which nothing is more painful and distressing. Whether I have been to precipitate in forming my own judgement especially to the important question that will be the subject of these letters. The time is fast approaching with respect to both of us, when all uncertainty about it will be at an end; and when the source of error, on which ever side it lies, will be laid open to us; and so as perhaps may be of some use to us in our further progress in the pursuit of truth'.¹⁰⁵

For Priestley candour did not require one to be diffident over asserting truth at which one had arrived by careful enquiry. Furthermore, precisely because he believed that the truth of Christianity lay in right doctrines, his aim was to bring people to the truth so that they could secure their salvation. He urged the Jews, for example, not to reject Christ, for to reject him was to reject *him that sent him*, while to accept Christ would restore them to God's favour forever.¹⁰⁶ His conviction that such beneficent results would be the product of free enquiry helped to make him an early advocate amongst the Rational Dissenters for complete toleration, but though his expectation was that Unitarianism would prevail over other truth systems, his candour led him to acknowledge the merits of other viewpoints and particularly the beneficial affect of all religions on morals. Being heterodox and without the need to defend the historic role of the Christian churches, he was able to make concessions to non-Christian religions, and to accept similarities at which the orthodox might blanch. He informed Rev. Mr. Parkhurst,

You are mistaken if you think that I am ashamed to avow my agreement with the Mahometans, or any other part of the human race, in the

¹⁰⁴ J. Priestley, *Letters to Dr. Horne*, 40; *Letters to the Jews*, 2nd edn. [Birmingham, 1787], part I, 54—55.

¹⁰⁵ J. Priestley, *Letters to Dr. Horne*, 90.

¹⁰⁶ J. Priestley, *Letters to the Jews*, Part II, 52—56.

doctrine of unity, and to worship together with them, *the one God and the Father of all, the maker of heaven and earth*'.¹⁰⁷

Or, again, he sympathized with the Jews for their cruel oppression by 'christians'.¹⁰⁸ Sympathetic or no, most of his opponents were irritated by his persistence and his expectation that they would make concessions to his own point of view. Priestley's myopia on this point was in part a result of his own experience of controversy. It stimulated him to seek an ever more secure basis for his faith, and in consequence it led him further down the heterodox road.¹⁰⁹ Just as controversy led him to cast off outworn truths, he expected it to have similar results on the other participants. Nevertheless, there were times when he talked of candour as being of more value than the 'right decision in any controversy'.¹¹⁰ In so far as he was consistent, he meant that if a controversy were conducted properly then all the evidence on both sides would be laid out for the reader to decide, and the very candour of the debate would itself be a recommendation to the reader for a 'truly christian temper' and 'the love of truth'.¹¹¹

If Priestley's attachment to the frankest free inquiry and candour of a rather vigorous sort in the pursuit of truth, did not serve his ends very well, it did in a sense make him more tolerant and open-minded than those for whom, like Price, tolerance was an end in itself. Priestley's attitude towards the Methodists is particularly instructive. He sees them as fellow labourers 'in a different part of the same extensive field'.¹¹² He hoped, naively, it has to be added, that the Methodists would unite with the Rational Dissenters and with all other Christians on the basis of the great 'articles of our common faith', by which he meant the divine mission of Christ, His working of miracles, His death, Resurrection and promised Second Coming. Meanwhile, Priestley believed that Wesley had performed a splendid service in ministering to the needs of the poor for which, he declared, 'thousands and ten thousands will

¹⁰⁷ J. Priestley, *Letters to Dr. Horne*, 185.

¹⁰⁸ J. Priestley, *Letters to the Jews*, 2—3.

¹⁰⁹ See Alexander Gordon, *Heads of English Unitarian history with appended lectures on Baxter and Priestley* [London, 1895], 117—118.

¹¹⁰ J. Priestley, *A third letter to Dr. Newcome, Bishop of Waterford on the duration of our saviour's ministry* [Birmingham, 1781], P.S. p. 2.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² J. Priestley, *An address to the Methodists*, XX.

hereafter rise up and call him blessed'.¹¹³ There were probably very few Rational Dissenters, of whatever hue, who would agree with such a favourable assessment of Wesley. Richard Price in particular, had had harsh things to say about them, which although later modified, betrayed his deep distrust of enthusiasm. It was hardly compatible with candour, charity and honest enquiry, and was in essence anti-Christian. His attachment to tolerance as an end in itself helps to explain his greater hostility to intolerance and to claims of infallibility and divine inspiration either personal or institutional.¹¹⁴ Thus, despite Priestley's narrower conception of truth, his attitude towards fellow Christians of his day was more tolerant than those like Price who could not, like him, look forward to the day when of necessity all differences would disappear, and who tended to view Christianity largely, if not exclusively, in terms of rational Christianity.

One must not, however, draw these differences too finely. Price like Priestley believed that 'every sect, whatever may be its tenets, has some salvo for the necessity of virtue',¹¹⁵ at the same time both believed that nothing other than 'sound principles of religious knowledge' could provide 'a sufficient foundation of a virtuous and truly respectable conduct in life, or of a good hope in death'.¹¹⁶ Salvation, was perhaps the most important concern of Rational Dissenters. They all looked forward to a better purer state and could all identify with Priestley's aspirations for man, whether or no their expectations were partly millennial or completely other-worldly.¹¹⁷ There was

¹¹³ Ibid., XXIV. It has to be noted, though it is predictable enough, that Priestley having offered a sympathetic appreciation immediately began to outline his disagreements with the Methodists, and to plug his own Unitarian works. He concluded by hoping that the Methodists would add to their zeal 'more knowledge and more charity'. Ibid., XXV—XXX. But it is important to note that Priestley did not wish them to change their proselytizing habits. Indeed, he wanted the Unitarians to follow suit. See T. Belsham, *Memoirs of Theophilus Lindsey* (London, 1812), app. XII, 526, J. Priestley to T. Lindsey, 3 Oct. 1789.

¹¹⁴ I have demonstrated elsewhere that Price was more chary than Priestley in expounding the cause of Catholic Toleration. See my article, 'Joseph Priestley and the cause of universal toleration', *The Price-Priestley Newsletter*, no. 1, 1977, 15.

¹¹⁵ R. Price, *Observations on the importance of the American Revolution*, loc. cit., 195. cf. J. Priestley, *Essay on the first principles of government*, 1st edn. (London, 1768), 110, 'all modes of religion . . . enforce the more essential parts, at least, of that conduct, which the good order of society requires'.

¹¹⁶ J. Priestley, *Institutes of natural and revealed religion* [London, 1772] I, p. iii. cit. Russell E. Richey, 'Joseph Priestley: Worship and Theology (Part I)', *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, XV, no. 2 (Oct.), 1972.

¹¹⁷ For example when Priestley looked forward to the Second Coming, with no little expectation, in his letters to Burke, he spoke of the millennial state as one in which, 'Every man will provide religion for himself, and therefore it will be such as after due enquiry and examination, he shall

thus much to unite Rational Dissenters. Moreover, the differences discussed do not represent a clear divide amongst them, rather they represent attitudes which tended, though not necessarily, to cluster together. One is well aware of, though perhaps not immunized against, the perennial disease of the study of the history of ideas, namely the tendency to create order out of chaos, and coherence out of incoherence. At the risk of over schematization, however, it does not seem entirely fanciful to suggest that the various divisions outlined broadly reflected two overlapping traditions in Rational Dissent, the one catholic and comprehensive in outlook, derived from Presbyterianism and strongly influenced by Richard Baxter, and the other more assertive, sectarian and doctrinal in character with its roots in Independency. And it would seem, too, that certain general conclusions can be drawn from this investigation of truth and toleration amongst Rational Dissenters.

The first general conclusion is that their attitude towards truth made complete toleration a necessity and not a luxury. Their notion of truth was essentially Christian and their Christianity was both liberal and authoritarian. They had the best of all worlds: they 'had all the benefits of infallibility without the absurdity of pretending to it'. The words were intended satirically by Sir Richard Steele, but were gratefully received by Robert Robinson as an accurate statement of their ideas.¹¹⁸ On the one hand they had the assurance that truth lay in the revelation of the Scriptures, and on the other that it could only be discovered by individual, candid rational investigation. Despite their belief that religion was the perfection of reason they were not natural religionists. Human reason, unaided by revelation (Divine Reason) had through history proved inadequate for the understanding of God's nature and purpose, and especially for the understanding of the doctrine of salvation.¹¹⁹

think to be founded on truth, and best calculated to make men good citizens, good friends and good neighbours in this world, as well as to fit them for another'. *Letters to the Rt. Honourable Edmund Burke occasioned by his Reflections on the Revolutions in France* [Birmingham, 1791], 151—152.

¹¹⁸ R. Robinson, *Arcana* (Cambridge, 1774), Letter III, 31.

¹¹⁹ Perhaps for John Jebb alone was human reason unaided able to reveal the same truths as revelation, although natural religion remained for him a pale reflection of Christianity. John Jebb, *The works, theological, medical, political and miscellaneous with memoirs of the life of the author by John Disney* (London, 1787), II 34—35, 137—138. It is important to note that although Priestley was increasingly confident about the ability of unassisted reason to discover divine truth, revelation lay at the core of his religion. As Margaret Canovan has reminded us, his professed aim in his *History of the corruption of Christianity* (1782) 'was not a progressive religion, but a progressive reformation of a corrupted religion'. See James Hoecker, 'Joseph Priestley and the reification of religion', *Price-Priestley Newsletter*, no. 2, 1978, esp. p. 49, 51—53, & M. Canovan, 'The Irony of History: Priestley's Rational Theology', *Price-Priestley Newsletter*, no. 4, 1980, p. 18.

The second conclusion to be drawn is that, although the Rational Dissenters espoused the cause of universal toleration, there were differences, nuances, intellectual, temperamental and perhaps even generational, which may help to explain the varying interpretations of universal toleration (as, for example, whether it necessarily involved disestablishment) and the hesitations and uncertainties about applying it, notably in the case of toleration for Roman Catholics.

Thirdly, whether they conceived of toleration as an end or as the means to an end, freedom of enquiry was vital for all Rational Dissenters. This had two important consequences. It led to their appreciation of intolerance not merely as an overt, hostile, positive force or restraint but as something which could survive in negative, insidious forms long after overt persecution had ceased. This made them especially insistent on the need for the repeal of laws which were by and large dormant. Candid free enquiry required the removal of the stigma from dissent. It also dictated their approach to procuring repeal. For them the appeal to candour involved neither the acceptance of toleration as a favour to be granted nor the normal constraints of the political processes at Westminster. The appeal to candour was not simply *An appeal to the candour, magnanimity and justice of those in power*, to borrow the title of a tract written in 1787 by someone closely associated with the Dissenters' Repeal Committee; it was far more than that. It was an appeal to the literate public. Thus the role of Rational Dissenters in the politics of toleration was analogous to that of the Society for Constitutional Information in the politics of reform in the 1780s. They were impatient with pragmatic politics and they aimed to propagate truth, confident that it would triumph over error.

Fourthly, the fact that most religions in late eighteenth century England enjoyed toleration by connivance explains in part why those forces usually associated with the development of toleration, and which were certainly present at the birth of toleration in England—scepticism, indifference and pragmatism—played little part in the development of toleration in our period.¹²⁰ Indeed, they were often hostile to alterations in the *status quo*. The *politiques* could rest satisfied that the needs of state had been met by the Toleration Act of 1689 and by minor modifications to the laws concerning Dissent in the eighteenth century. At this point in the history of toleration those who were concerned about religious truth in both an enlightened and

¹²⁰ One is not ignoring the role of pragmatism in leading to the Catholic Relief Act of 1791, but pragmatic politicians would have taken a very different view of the possibility of relief if the Dissenters had remained as anti-Catholic as they were at the time of the Gordon Riots. The Dissenters' change of heart was primarily the result of the propagandizing efforts of the Rational Dissenters on the issue of toleration for Catholics.

Christian sense had most to contribute to the development of toleration, and any attempt to schematize the history of toleration will need to take that into account. Furthermore, whatever one feels about the backsliding of politicians it was in the long run surely no bad thing that the Rational Dissenters took on the leading role in the extension of toleration, for in the end problems of religious toleration and tolerance have to be sorted out by those for whom religion is important. That is a truth which the Rational Dissenters at least half-perceived and at any rate their work for universal toleration in the strictest sense and their insistence on candour and freedom of enquiry contributed towards its realization. One is of course not suggesting that they were paragons nor overlooking the fact that in campaigning for the extension of toleration they stirred up intolerance,¹²¹ but one is suggesting that their virtues considerably outweighed their limitations.

Finally, if it is correct to suggest that for some of the Rational Dissenters tolerance was an end in itself, then it may be necessary to re-appraise Professor Preston King's notion that such an allegiance to tolerance 'involves an implied commitment to the surrender of critical judgement together with a collapse into complete intellectual and ethical permissiveness'.¹²² Certainly Rational Dissenters did not believe that their devotion to tolerance implied a commitment to what for them amounted to its very antithesis.

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¹²¹ Catherine Hutton for example argued that Priestley 'was, . . . one of the primary causes of the riots in Birmingham, by rousing the spirit of bigotry and uncharitableness in others'. *A narrative of the riots in Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1875), 24.

¹²² Preston King, *Toleration* (London, 1976), 133.

* This article is a much developed version of a paper given in 1979 at the Fifth International Congress on the Enlightenment in Pisa. For a resumé of that paper see, 'Truth and tolerance in rational dissent in late eighteenth-century England', *Transactions of the Fifth International Congress on the Enlightenment*, 1124—1126.

A NOTABLE FRIENDSHIP: DR. SAMUEL PARR AND DR. JOSEPH PRIESTLEY

H.J. McLachlan

On 12 July 1790 a young minister, Rev'd William Field, was installed in the Unitarian Chapel, High Street, Warwick. The ordination charge was given by Thomas Belsham and Joseph Priestley preached the sermon. Dr. Samuel Parr, schoolmaster and then perpetual curate of Hatton, a neighbour of Field's and drawn to him by their mutual devotion to the classics, was present on this occasion. Parr, a man of liberal outlook, notable for his friendships with Dissenters, was regarded as the whig Johnson. His talk was reputedly inferior to that of his model, but to judge from his writings he could pen a trenchant, if somewhat laborious, prose. His relations with Priestley illustrate this perfectly, but more importantly reveal a stalwart and courageous spirit. His presence at the installation was not only a tribute to his young friend but a mark of respect for the preacher. 'He thought it no disgrace', he declared, 'to go and hear a sensible discourse, delivered by a distinguished preacher, however he might differ from him upon abstruse points of speculation'.¹ The service was followed by a public dinner to which Parr was invited. Over a convivial meal the two doctors for the first time became personally acquainted. So began a notable friendship.

Parr was, of course, familiar with Priestley's writings and scientific achievements. 'The man lives not', he had written, 'who has a more sincere veneration for his talents and his virtues, than I have.'² He particularly admired two sermons of Priestley's: one on 'Habitual Devotion' and the other on 'The Duty of not living to ourselves', both republished in 1830 by the British and Foreign Unitarian Association and still worth reading.³ Of these Parr wrote, 'I confidently affirm that the wisest man cannot read them without being wiser, nor the best man without being better.'

Barely a year after their first happy meeting, the Birmingham riots led to Priestley's flight from Birmingham and his eventual exile in America. But the

¹ William Field, *Memoirs of the life, writings and opinions of the Rev. Samuel Parr*, LL.D., 2 vols. (1829), I, 289.

² Samuel Parr, *Discourse on education* (London, 1786), 15.

³ The first sermon was preached at Wakefield at a meeting of Yorkshire ministers; the second was preached at Manchester, 16 May 1764, before an assembly met to draw up a 'scheme for the relief of widows and children'.

friendship remained unbroken. Letters passed between the two men, and the Churchman, to his credit, refused to be influenced by the prejudice and hatred which the popular outcry against the Dissenter inflamed. At a time when Priestley was pilloried in press and pulpit, one well-known figure at least stood firm and impartial and offered a powerful, even if ponderous, defence:

Let Dr. Priestley be confuted, where he is mistaken. Let him be exposed, where he is superficial. Let him be rebuked, where he is censorious. But let not his attainments be depreciated, because they are numerous, almost without parallel. Let not his talents be ridiculed, because they are superlatively great. Let not his morals be vilified, because they are correct without austerity, and exemplary without ostentation; because they present, even to common observers, the innocence of a hermit and the simplicity of a patriarch; and because a philosophic eye will at once discover in them the deep-fixed root of virtuous principle, and the solid trunk of virtuous habit.⁴

Not many were so outspoken in Priestley's defence as Parr, especially amongst the Establishment. His quite remarkable courage and generosity deserve to be remembered. The year following the riots (1792), Parr again referred to Priestley in a publication intended to cool tempers and promote peace.⁵ Reiterating his admiration of the persecuted Birmingham minister, he aligned himself unequivocally on the side of justice and fair treatment of the injured party:

I have visited him, as I hope to visit him again, because he is an unaffected, unassuming, and very interesting companion. I will not, in consequence of our different opinions, either impute to him the evil which he does not, or depreciate in him the good which he is allowed to do. I will not debase my understanding, or prostitute my honour, by encouraging the clamours which have been raised against him, in vulgar minds, by certain persons, who would have done well to read before they wrote—to understand before they dogmatized—to examine before they condemned. I cannot think his religion insincere, because he worships one Deity in the name of our Saviour; and I know that his virtues, in private life, are acknowledged by his neighbours, admired by his congregation, and regarded almost by the unanimous suffrage of his most powerful and most distinguished antagonists.

⁴ Samuel Parr, *A letter from Irenopolis to the inhabitants of Eleutheropolis* (Birmingham, 1792), 18.

⁵ Samuel Parr, *Sequel to the printed paper lately circulated in Warwickshire* (London, 1792).

And he added, with a finality worthy of the most doughty champion of the oppressed:

Upon every subject of literature which comes within my reach, I will talk, and I will write to him, without reserve; and in proportion as his opinions may appear to me to approach truth, and to recede from it, I shall assent without reluctance, or dissent without dissimulation.⁶

In 1804 after the death of Priestley, his old congregation in Birmingham erected a monument to his memory⁷ and invited Parr to compose the memorial inscription. Wellnigh two hundred years later, one may be amused by the florid eighteenth century language of the epitaph, yet it is hard not to be impressed by the justice and completeness of the panegyric:

This Tablet
Is consecrated to the Memory of the
REV. JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D.
By his affectionate Congregation,
In Testimony
Of their Gratitude for his faithful Attention
To their spiritual Improvement
And for his peculiar Diligence in training up their youth
To rational Piety and genuine Virtue;
Of their Respect for his great and various Talents,
Which were uniformly directed to the noblest Purposes;
And of their Veneration
For the pure, benevolent, and holy Principles,
Which through the trying Vicissitudes of Life,
And in the awful hour of Death,
animated him with the hope of a blessed Immortality.
His discoveries as a Philosopher
Will never cease to be remembered and admired
By the ablest Improvers of Science.
His Firmness as an Advocate of Liberty,
And his Sincerity as an Expounder of the Scriptures,
Endeared him to many
Of his enlightened and unprejudiced Contemporaries.
His Example as a Christian
Will be instructive to the Wise, and interesting to the Good,

⁶ *Ibid.*, 106; and William Field, *op. cit.*, I, 296.

⁷ It now stands in the vestibule of the Unitarian New Meeting at Five Ways, Edgbaston, Birmingham.

Of every Country, and in every Age.
 He was born at Fieldhead, near Leeds, in Yorkshire,
 March 24, A.D. 1733.
 Was chosen a Minister of this Chapel, Dec. 31, 1780.
 Continued in that Office Ten Years and Six Months.
 Embarked for America, April 7, 1794.
 Died at Northumberland, in Pennsylvania, Feb. 6, 1804.⁸

In grateful recognition of this tribute to their old pastor, the Birmingham Unitarians presented Dr. Parr with a facsimile of the Codex Beza Cantabrigiensis comprising the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, a volume which they knew the old classical scholar would deeply appreciate. Attached to the mention of it in the catalogue of Dr. Parr's library, sold by auction in 1828, is this appreciative note:

This beautiful edition of Beza's Text was given me spontaneously and politely by order of the vestry of the Unitarians of Birmingham, soon after I had written an English inscription for Dr. Priestley, whose monument is erected in the Unitarian Chapel. He was an eminently great and truly good man; and Dr. Parr's most respected, most injured and calumniated friend. S.P.⁹

H.J. McLachlan

SHEFFIELD

⁸ There appears to be a discrepancy about the date of Priestley's birth. He was born on 13 March 1733 (O.S.).

⁹ William Field, op. cit., I, 297. In a charity-sermon preached in Birmingham in October 1789, Dr. Parr described Priestley as 'a profound philosopher, a philanthropic citizen, and a pious Christian'. This opinion he formed before he had met Priestley at Warwick, and nearly two years before the fatal riots which destroyed the latter's home, library, laboratory, and meeting house. It is interesting to reflect that the Anglican went out of his way to pay tribute to the Dissenter, in Birmingham of all places. No wonder that many regarded Parr as 'if not actually a Jacobin, something nearly akin'. Warren Derry, Dr. Parr: a portrait of the Whig Dr. Johnson (Oxford, 1966), 131, 138.

GODWIN, HOLCROFT AND THE RIGHTS OF MAN*

M. Philp

In a footnote to his recent article in this Newsletter on William Godwin, Martin Fitzpatrick draws attention to the report that Godwin, along with Thomas Holcroft and Thomas Brand Hollis, helped to bring out Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man, Part One*.¹ The footnote is peripheral to Mr. Fitzpatrick's argument, and nothing I shall argue here is meant to challenge the main substance of his paper. However, what he relegates to a footnote has frequently appeared in the main body of works on Godwin,² Paine³ and Holcroft;⁴ and the story has been used to suggest that Godwin was importantly involved in at least one of the major political events of the 1790s. As such, it lends weight to claims that Godwin was not simply an important literary figure, but was also close to, and an important actor in, the world of political conflict and action. In this paper I shall suggest that the story is simply false. This, on its own, does not discredit Godwin's alleged political status, since other evidence is also used to support these claims, but it does demolish one significant pillar upon which such claims rest. It also allows us to redate an important document from the period, namely Holcroft's note to Godwin referring to the appearance of the *Rights of Man*. Some of the unpicking of this story has been done by Rosen in his Ph.D. thesis on Godwin, written in 1965.⁵ Rosen, however, leaves several gaps in the argument, and he fails to draw all the appropriate conclusions which the evidence allows. Also, since

¹ M. Fitzpatrick, 'William Godwin and the Rational Dissenters', *The Price-Priestley Newsletter*, No. 3, 1979, 4—28, N. 63.

² C. Kegan Paul, *William Godwin: his friends and contemporaries* (London, 1876), I, 69—70; F.K. Brown, *Life of Godwin* (London, 1926), 37; H.N. Brailsford, *Shelley, Godwin and their circle*, 2nd edn. (London, 1951), 48; G. Woodcock, *William Godwin; a biographical study* (London, 1947), 36—7; D. Fleisher, *William Godwin: a study in liberalism* (London, 1951), 20; and, for an incomplete refutation of the story, D. Locke, *A fantasy of reason* (London, 1980), 50—1.

³ S. Edwards, *Rebel: a biography of Thomas Paine* (London, 1974), 142; A. Williamson, *Thomas Paine: his life, work and times* (London, 1973), 125; M.D. Conway, *The life of Thomas Paine* (London, 1892), I, 284; and, for a partial refutation of the story, A. Aldridge, *Man of reason: the life of Thomas Paine* (London, 1963), 135—6.

⁴ E. Colby, *The life of Thomas Holcroft*, (New York, 1925), II, 33.

⁵ F. Rosen, *Progress and democracy: William Godwin's contribution to political philosophy* (Ph.D. thesis, London School of Economics, 1964—5), Appendix B, 273.

* I am grateful to Lord Abinger for permission to quote from the manuscripts deposited in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

his work has been largely ignored by subsequent writers,⁶ there seems ample justification for a re-working of the ground before a wider audience.

The story is that Godwin, Holcroft and Brand Hollis formed a committee to superintend the publication of Paine's *Rights of Man, Part One*, following the delay in its publication consequent on Joseph Johnson's last minute decision to withdraw his imprimatur from the printing and its transfer to the radical bookseller and publisher J.S. Jordan. The book finally appeared not, as advertised in the *Times*, on the 21st of February 1791, but on the 16th of March.⁷ Furthermore, it is generally assumed, indeed taken for granted, that Holcroft's famous note refers to this part of the *Rights of Man* and to these difficulties:

I have got it—If this do not cure my cough it is a damned perverse mule of a cough—The pamphlet—From the row—But mum—We don't sell it—Oh, no—Ears and Eggs—Verbatim, except the addition of a short preface, which, as you have not seen, I send you my copy—Not a single castration (Laud be unto God and J.S. Jordan!) can I discover—Hey for the New Jerusalem! The millennium! And peace and eternal beatitude be unto the soul of Thomas Paine.⁸

The story, if it is to be plausible, relies on Godwin having had some connection with Paine around this time. But it is precisely on this point that it begins to collapse. Kegan Paul suggests that Godwin made Paine's acquaintance at Brand Hollis's home around this time, and there seems to be some superficial evidence for this in Godwin's note in his diary for the 22nd of February 1791: 'Call on Paine'.⁹ However, in the absence of corroborating evidence Godwin's word need not be trusted on this (since at least some of his entries in the diary seem to have been made at a later date and are not always correct),¹⁰ and even if Godwin did call on Paine there is no indication to suggest Paine was at home. But the most critical evidence, which Rosen alone has noticed, is to be found in a draft of an undated letter in the Abinger

⁶ For example, by D. Locke, *A fantasy of reason*, op cit., 51.

⁷ *The Times* for 21.2.1791. *The Morning Chronicle* notes the failure to appear on the 24th of February 1791.

⁸ C. Kegan Paul, *William Godwin* op. cit., 69; and quoted subsequently in numerous biographies and histories of the period.

⁹ Abinger collection, Bodleian Library, Oxford. I shall simply refer to diary entries by date, references to other pieces from the collection will refer to the coding currently used by the library using the prefix m/s.

¹⁰ Cf. Godwin's diary for 31.12.1789; 7.9.1791; and 31.9.1790.

manuscripts. This letter makes the view that Godwin had any contact with Paine prior to November 1791 completely implausible. The full text of the letter is as follows:

Sir, I was yesterday at my own request introduced to you by Mr B Hollis; but, in the hurry and confusion of a numerous meeting, I had not an opportunity of saying something which I have wished to say to you in person. I have wished for an occasion of expressing to you my feeling of the high obligation you have conferred upon Britain and Mankind by your late publication of the *Rights of Man*: I believe few men have a more ardent sense of that obligation than myself and I conceive that it is a duty incumbent upon persons so feeling to come forward with the most direct applause of your efforts. I regard you, sir, as having been the unalterable champion of liberty in America, in England and in France, from the purest views to the happiness and the virtue of mankind. I have devoted my life to these glorious purposes, and am even at this moment employed upon a composition embracing the whole doctrine of politics, in which I shall endeavour to convince my countrymen of the mischief of monarchical government, and of certain other abuses not less injurious to society. I believe that a cordial and unreserved intercourse between men employed in the same great purposes, is of the utmost service to their own minds, and to their cause. I have therefore thought proper to break thorough all ceremony and, if you entertain the same opinion, you will, I am confident, favour me with an interview either at my apartments or at any other place you will please to appoint.

I am, sir, already the ardent friend of your views, your principles and your mind. W.G.¹¹

In Godwin's diary for the 5th November 1791 he notes 'seek Paine's address'; on the 7th of November he notes 'write to Paine'. The delay can be accounted for as the manuscript is a draft and may well have been drawn up the day after meeting Paine, with the final copy being sent on the following Monday (7.11.91). The 'numerous meeting' refers not to one at Brand Hollis's house, but to the Revolutionist's dinner held at the London Tavern on the 4th of November 1791; a dinner which both Godwin and Paine attended, along with three hundred and fifty others.¹² Godwin's reference to a 'composition embracing the whole doctrine of politics', indicates that it was written after he had begun his *Enquiry concerning political justice*, which was only agreed to by Robinson, Godwin's publisher, on the 30th of June 1791,¹³

¹¹ M/s. Dep. b. 227/2.

¹² Cf. Godwin's diary and A. Goodwin, *The friends of liberty* (London, 1979), 187.

¹³ Cf. Godwin's diary.

and was not started until September of that year. It is also obvious from the letter's reference to the *Rights of Man* that it postdates its appearance. Also, from what we know about Godwin, we can be sure that had he played any part in the publication of the *Rights of Man* he would have been unable to resist the temptation to refer to it in his letter. Godwin's strictures on the love of fame seem to reflect an insight into his personality which had little or no corresponding effect upon his behaviour.

The evidence, however, goes even further in discrediting this story, for, despite references in many biographies of Paine to this 'committee' there is much that we know of Paine which undermines its credibility. First, we do not have any record of Paine being in Paris, and thus being absent during the printing of the first part of the *Rights of Man*, until the 8th of April 1791;¹⁴ and even in the 1790s, if news reports are any guide,¹⁵ the trip would not have taken much over a fortnight even at a leisurely pace—and Paine was not a leisurely man.¹⁶ Secondly, Conway records the names of those who were Paine's intimates and advisors during his stay at Clio Rickman's house in the summer of 1791, during which time he wrote *Part Two*.¹⁷ Holcroft, Godwin, and Brand Hollis are all conspicuously absent from the list, even though Brand Hollis tends to be named as Paine's protector by hostile contemporary sources.¹⁸ Thirdly, John Disney, Brand Hollis's biographer, reports that Brand Hollis 'averred that he never saw the *Rights of Man* in manuscript, and consequently could not have any concern in the revision or alteration of that work'.¹⁹ Fourthly, and as Disney also notes:

It is highly improbable from the internal tenor of Paine's writing that he would have been disposed to receive the revisions and alterations of any person, however qualified or disposed to assist him.²⁰

Aldridge, one hundred and fifty years later, concurs with this view, and points out, quite correctly, that there is no evidence in Godwin's diaries to suppose either that a committee existed or that Godwin met Holcroft and Hollis to

¹⁴ M. Conway, *The life of Thomas Paine*, op. cit., I, 284.

¹⁵ The news of the execution of the King of France took four days to reach the pages of the *Times*.

¹⁶ *The Morning Chronicle* for 7.3.1791 reports Paine's presence in London.

¹⁷ M. Conway, *The life of Thomas Paine*, op. cit., I, 321.

¹⁸ F. Oldys, *The life of Thomas Paine* (sic) (London, 1792), 66.

¹⁹ J. Disney, *Memoirs of Thomas Brand Hollis* (London, 1808), 18–19.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

fulfil a particular task.²¹ The only evidence that could be culled from Godwin's diaries to suggest that he was even acquainted with the book before it officially appeared is his comment on the 22nd of February 1791 that 'Paine's pamphlet appears' and on the 2nd of March 1791 that he 'Borrow Paine'. The former can be seen to be made on the basis of newspaper reports. The latter suggest that Holcroft may have passed on to Godwin a copy of the Johnson printing. He would have been unlikely to receive it direct since his contact with Johnson was slight while Holcroft's was not.²² But we should not assume that Holcroft's note refers to this since there is no change made to the contents of the book in the switch from Johnson to Jordan. All Godwin's diaries can support is the claim that he was lent a copy of the Johnson print of the first part.

All this goes to suggest that the committee was probably little more than a figment of the imaginations of writers hostile to the radicals²³—a slur which has been accepted without question by most writers on Godwin, Holcroft and Paine. But, if this is so, what are we to make of Holcroft's cryptic little note?

When the first part of the *Rights of Man* was switched from Johnson to Jordan there seems to have been no doubt that, had he published it, Johnson would have published the whole of the work. Although he was a cautious,²⁴ but canny, publisher Johnson was not known for changing texts. Why then is Holcroft concerned about 'not a single castration'? I think we can recognize that the answer to this question lies in the circumstances surrounding the publication of the *Rights of Man, Part Two*.

The second part of the *Rights of Man* was originally to be printed by Chapman,²⁵ who appears to have been in the pay of Dundas, and who, shortly after these events, printed and possibly wrote a malicious biography of Paine.

²¹ A. Aldridge, *Man of reason*, op. cit., 135.

²² Godwin does not record meeting Johnson until the 13th of November 1791 when he dined with Johnson, Paine and Wollstonecraft. This is his first meeting with Paine following his letter, which accounts for his irritation at Ms. Wollstonecraft's argumentative intervention in their discussions. It is not until a year later that he sees Johnson regularly. Godwin's 'exclusion' from this group accounts for the lateness of his meetings with such figures as Wollstonecraft and Blake, both of whom Johnson published.

²³ As is suggested by Disney, *Memoirs of Thomas Brand Hollis*, op. cit., 19.

²⁴ He prepared for publishing, but did not publish, Blake's *The French Revolution*, cf. J. Bronowski, *William Blake and the age of revolution* (London, 1972), 71.

²⁵ Cf. *State Trials*, ed. T.B. Howell, (London, 1813), XXII, 400–1; and A. Aldridge, *Man of reason*, op. cit., 156–161.

Paine had refused an offer of £1,000 from Chapman for the right to the manuscript which it seems he intended to pass on to Dundas. Paine's refusal led to Chapman refusing to publish and he made difficulties over the return of part of the manuscript. It was finally returned in January 1792 and Jordan again stepped into the breach, this time covered in part against prosecution by a letter from Paine accepting full responsibility for the publishing of the book. The delay allowed Paine to add a short preface, dated 9.2.1792 and a dedication to Lafayette.

This suggests that there was a clear basis for concern amongst radicals about the completeness of the final product. There is also evidence to suggest that after the publication of the *Rights of Man, Part One* most leading radicals had met Paine²⁶ and knew that he was engaged upon an important extension of his work. It is also probable that sections of *Part Two* were circulated in advance as Chapman began printing as early as September 1791. It is thus much more likely that Godwin and Holcroft read this part before publication. Finally, it is evident from even the slightest knowledge of the two parts of the *Rights of Man* that it is the second and not the first which fully deserves Holcroft's 'Hail for the new Jerusalem! The Millenium!'. Holcroft's cryptic little message, then, must be recognized as having been written in the February of 1792—not 1791. And there is no evidence to suggest that Godwin was involved in any way with this publication. His contact with Paine, and with other radicals, Blake, Wollstonecraft, Mackintosh, Horne Tooke, and Joseph Johnson, all occurred later rather than earlier.²⁷ Godwin, perhaps, provides a good example of Hegel's adage on the Owl of Minerva. Although he offers the most systematic elaboration of radical philosophy in the 1790s, he does so only some time after the major explosion of debate, and his practical involvement is also late in the day—and is, at least in this important case, of much less significance than has been generally assumed.

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²⁶ Cf. A. Williamson, *Thomas Paine*, op. cit., 165.

²⁷ Blake does not appear in the diary until July 1794, Mackintosh appears in March 1792; and Wollstonecraft and Johnson are mentioned for the first time in November 1791. Although Horne Tooke's presence is noted at various engagements prior to 1792 Godwin did not actually make his acquaintance until late in 1792 cf, m/s. dep. c. 606.

THE LONDON MINISTERS AND SUBSCRIPTION, 1772–1779

John Stephens

Under the terms of the 1689 Toleration Act Dissenting Ministers could avoid the prosecution to which they were otherwise liable by complying with certain conditions the chief of which was subscription to the doctrinal portion of the Thirty-nine Articles. By 1772 many ministers felt unable to subscribe to the Articles. Some objected in principle to human confessions of faith, others, who shared that objection, had developed Arian or Socinian opinions, which were inconsistent with the Articles. It followed that there was pressure to modify the terms of the 1689 Act, notably from those of unorthodox views; this made the orthodox afraid that the modification of the existing law could lead to a spread of heresy. When therefore in 1772 the General Body of Dissenting Ministers in London petitioned Parliament for a change in the terms of the Act the debate conducted amongst the Dissenters themselves was as lively and a good deal more bitter than that waged in Parliament. In what follows I propose to examine the events in the General Body as the Application to Parliament went on its way.¹

The 1772 petition had been preceded by a similar application on the part of the unorthodox Anglican clergy, the Feathers Tavern Petition. This was rejected in the House of Commons, but, in the course of the debate, Lord North and others had stated, that a similar application on the part of the Dissenting Clergy would not meet with the same objections. Two Dissenting Ministers, Philip Furneaux and Edward Pickard, were listening to the debate and decided to act on North's hint.² Their plan must originally have been to

¹ The Toleration Act excepted Protestant Dissenting Ministers from the penal laws made against Nonconformists on condition that (i) they made the Declaration against Popery, (ii) subscribed to the Thirty-nine Articles, except Articles 20 (first clause), 34, 35, 36, and, in the case of Baptists, 27. Services in Dissenting Meeting Houses were to be held 'with unlocked doors'. Dissenting schoolmasters were not included in the scope of these concessions. For an extended treatment of the law and its application see N.C. Hunt, *Two early political associations* (Oxford, 1961), ch. vii.

² Edward Pickard (1714–78) was educated at academies at Stratford, Bridgnorth, and finally, at Moorfields under John Eames. Minister at Carter Lane from 1746, sole Pastor from 1759. Secretary of the Presbyterian Board, 1764. Took the British side in the American War of Independence. A high Arian rather than a Socinian in theology. See W. Wilson, *Dissenting Churches in London* (London, 1808–14), II, 159; H. McLachlan, *English education under the Test Acts* (Manchester, 1931), 13; W.D. Jeremy, *The Presbyterian fund* (London, 1885), 6, 138; Thomas Belsham, *Memoirs of Theophilus Lindsey*, 2nd edn. (London, 1820), 45–7. Philip Furneaux (1726–83), Independent, studied under David Jennings at Wellclose Square, assistant

organize a petition to Parliament which would presumably have been presented in early 1773.³ With this end in mind Pickard sent out on 27 February 1772 a circular letter which was distributed on the two following days, Tuesday and Wednesday.⁴ This stated that it was the opinion of 'some very worthy gentlemen and hearty well-wishers to the dissenting interest' that an application to Parliament for relief from subscription 'would be highly proper and likely to be successfull',⁵ and concluded by asking all those who approved of the design to meet at the Library in Red Cross Street on Thursday, 5th March, 'to consider of means to pursue this great design' and to choose a Committee for the purpose. It is not certain, as most writers have assumed,⁶ that Pickard was trying to summon the General Body of London Ministers. He must have known that he was not following the procedure laid down for the purpose and it is not even certain that he wrote to all the approved ministers in London.⁷ It seems more likely that the meeting was

at St. Thomas's Presbyterian Congregation, Southwark, 1749, Minister of Independent Congregation, Clapham, 1753, D.D. (Aberdeen), 1767, Member of the Coward Trust and a Trustee of Dr. Williams's Foundation, 1766-78. Author of *Letters to Mr. Justice Blackstone* (1770), *Essay on Toleration* (1771). Cf. Alexander Gordon, s.n. in *D.N.B.*

³ This is made explicit in a letter by John Calder to a Dissenting Minister in Northumberland dated 27 May 1772, printed in J. Nichols, *Illustrations of the literary history of the eighteenth century* (London, 1828), V, 423-6. 'For reasons too tedious to mention, but of which we could not resist the validity, we have been diverted from the first intended mode of application: which was to have been by a Petition, subscribed by us and our Brethren over the Kingdom, and by the advice, and in hopes of the support or at least the acquiescence of Administration, we have adopted the measures that we are now pursuing'. Cf. Andrew Kippis, *A vindication of the Protestant Dissenting Ministers*, 2nd edn. (London, 1773), 89-90.

⁴ Henry Mayo, *Remarks on the postscript to the case of the Dissenting Ministers by Israel Mauduit*, 2nd edn. (London, 1772), 11.

⁵ Text in Thomas Rees, *The Regium Donum* (London, 1834), 56, from *London Magazine* (1774), 433; also printed in *Gentleman's Magazine*, XLII (1772), 128. The *London Chronicle*, 7-10 March 1772 states that North was responsible for the assurance.

⁶ R.B. Barlow, *Citizenship and conscience* (Philadelphia, 1962), 172; T. Rees, op. cit., 36. Rees points out the irregularity of Pickard's summons on p. 39. Samuel Stennet, *A free and dispassionate account on the late application* (London, 1772), 25, does not describe Pickard's meeting as a meeting of the General Body. Andrew Kippis who covers much the same ground as Stennet in *A vindication of the Protestant Dissenting Ministers* (London, 1772) does not discuss the matter.

⁷ 'The Minutes of the General Body', henceforth 'Minutes' (D.W.L., MS. 38. 106), I, 227, meeting of 10 April 1759. If the Committee could not be brought together, seven ministers (3 Presbyterians, 2 Baptists, 2 Independents) could summon the General Body 'by a written summons signed by them all in their respective names'. Henry Mayo states that Pickard did not send a circular to all members of the General Body (*Remarks*, 9).

intended to be a preliminary move to presenting a petition to Parliament in which the General Body would not necessarily have played any part.⁸

Pickard's plan was changed by the events of 3rd March. It was a long standing habit of the Congregational and Baptist ministers in London to meet on Tuesday 'for free conversation' from noon until two at the Amsterdam Coffee House near the Royal Exchange. On this particular Tuesday Pickard's letter was the main topic of conversation and several of the ministers present decided to meet again that evening at the White Hart, Bishopsgate to talk the matter over further.⁹ However, those who arrived there were redirected to the Paul's Head Coffee House in Cateaton Street, where other London ministers had arranged a meeting to discuss the possibility of an application to Parliament.¹⁰

The meeting at the Paul's Head had been arranged by a group that included Samuel Stennet, a Baptist, and Thomas Gibbons, a Congregationalist. They acted as the distributors of the *Regium Donum*, a charity set up in the time of Walpole, to aid poor Dissenting Ministers and their widows.¹¹ In this capacity they had easy access to members of the Administration, so much so that some members of the General Body came to the conclusion that in the course of the applications to Parliament they manipulated the General Body in such a way as least to inconvenience the Government. It is certainly true that they were in

⁸ There was no reason why the General Body should have been involved in a petition to Parliament. Some members were involved in a petition to make the laws relating to Sunday Observance more strict, but this was never discussed in the General Body.

⁹ Mayo, *Remarks*, 12-13. Thomas Gibbons frequently refers to attendance at the Amsterdam Coffee House in his diary from the time he started it in 1758. The ms. of the diary is in the United Reformed Church Library at Memorial Hall, London. Extensive extracts were printed by W.H. Summers in *Congregational Historical Society Transactions*, I (1904), 313-29, 380-397; II (1905), 22-38. I shall refer to the date of the entry in the diary, giving a reference to the printed text as appropriate. Summers has on occasion shortened an entry and made a few trifling errors in transcription. The Amsterdam Coffee House is also mentioned by Samuel Davis in his diary of his visit to England in 1754 as 'where the Congregational and Baptist Ministers meet on Tuesdays'; he notes the attendance not only of Gibbons but of Samuel Price. *The Reverend Samuel Davis abroad . . . 1753-5* (Urbana, 1967), 46.

¹⁰ Cateaton Street was renamed Gresham Street in 1845. B. Lillywhite, *London Coffee Houses* (London, 1963), 440. It was within easy walking distance.

¹¹ For the *Regium Donum* see T. Rees, *The Regium Donum*, and K.R.D. Short, 'The English *Regium Donum*', *English Historical Review*, LXXXIV (1969), 59-75. One trustee, the 'Warrant Trustee', was appointed by the Government; the others formed a self-perpetuating Committee. In 1772 Stennet was the Warrant Trustee: the others were Harris, Pope, Pickard, Gibbons, and (not on the Committee) Francis Spilsbury and William Langford.

a position to exert influence and that a return in kind was expected of them, but there is no evidence of any conspiracy.¹²

At the period in question Gibbons and Stennet were in constant touch with members of the Administration over a petition to Parliament to change the laws relating to Sunday Observance. According to Gibbon's 'Diary' he and Stennet saw George Onslow, a member of the Treasury Board, on both the 24th and 28th of March, on which latter occasion Lord North was present.¹³ Either on these occasions, or, as is more likely, a few days later, Stennet was given assurances about the Government's attitude which significantly changed Pickard's plans. On the evening of the 3rd Gibbons recorded, 'Attended on business at the Paul's Head, Cateaton Street. Met Messrs Pope, Stennet, Spilsbury, Langford and Toller. Afterwards met them & several others on the affair on an Application to Parliament . . . Agreed to summon the General Body'.¹⁴ Gibbons does not appear to have been one of those at the Amsterdam Coffee House that afternoon, but doubtless others of those present were aware of the projected meeting at the White Hart and arranged for those there present to be redirected. Henry Mayo, the most consistent critic of the behaviour of the *Regium Donum* Distributors, states, in his hostile account, that it was they who were responsible for the redirection.¹⁵

The importance of an assurance of Government support for a Bill, was that an application to Parliament could now be made in the 1772 Session. It was

¹² Henry Mayo was the principal exponent of the conspiracy theory of the *Regium Donum*, notably in an article in the *London Magazine* (1774), 545–50. Thomas's Rees book is in large part a refutation of Mayo. Others took up the theory, including Joseph Priestley in *An address to Protestant Dissenters* (London, 1774), 4–5. Others disliked the *Regium Donum* as a matter of principle. Amongst these were David Williams who thought it should be given up (see *A letter to the body of Protestant Dissenters* (London, 1777), 41). Richard Price took the same view. William Morgan states that when Sir Edmund Thomas was standing for Glamorgan he attempted to solicit Price's vote by offering him the distribution of the charity, an offer that was declined. (*Memoirs . . . of . . . Richard Price* (London, 1815), 36–7.) This offer must have been made in 1761 or 1763. L. Namier and J. Brooke, *The House of Commons, 1754–1790* (London, 1964), II, 522.

¹³ Thomas Gibbons, 'Diary', 24 March 1772.

¹⁴ Thomas Gibbons, 'Diary', 3 April 1772. *CHST*, II, 24 leaves out the first sentence.

¹⁵ Mayo, *Remarks*, 13. 'Indeed lest an opposition should be made by the minister who wrote that letter inviting to the Thursday's meeting, and those connected with him, one of the regium donum ministers either alone or with others, went to him the next morning (i.e. Wednesday) and prevailed with him to join them at the meeting in the evening'. Cf. John Fell *Genuine Protestantism* (London, 1773). The fact that the Amsterdam Coffee House gathering did not include Presbyterians gives some support to R. Tudur Jones's suggestion that the initiative then taken originated in doctrinal distrust of Presbyterians; however, there is no evidence of any disputes amongst those supporting the petition having an origin in theological differences. R. Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England, 1662–1962* (London, 1962), 182.

not now necessary to present a petition and seek leave to present a Bill; now that the Government had indicated its willingness not to oppose the introduction of the Bill in the Commons. Hence the original plan of a countrywide petition was abandoned but the need to present a Bill before the end of the Parliamentary Session meant that the London Ministers had to organize the application on their own since there was no time for any effective or systematic consultation with ministers outside the Capital.¹⁶ The General Body was summoned for Wednesday, the 4th March, the day before Pickard's projected meeting. Henry Mayo argued that by bringing the meeting forward a day the *Regium Donum* Distributors were manipulating the situation to their advantage, though it is difficult to imagine what this could have been. It may have been a matter of convenience, possibly of urgency, possibly the need to distinguish between the status of the two meetings. In any event they seem to have acted with impeccable propriety. Pickard, as a Presbyterian, had not been present at the Amsterdam Coffee House; neither had he been present at the meeting at the Paul's Head. Accordingly, he was called on late on Tuesday, told of the new developments, and agreed to attend the General Body on Wednesday.¹⁷

At that meeting Stennet reported what he had heard about the attitude of the Administration and a motion was passed:

Whereas intimation hath been given, that administration appear disposed to take off the subscription required of Protestant Dissenting Ministers by the Toleration Act. And to give relief in the case of Tutors and Schoolmasters—Resolved that *These* are very desirable and important objects.¹⁸

¹⁶ Mayo, *Remarks*, 19. The opponents of the application made much of this lack of consultation. For the Parliamentary procedures involved see P.D.G. Thomas, *The House of Commons in the eighteenth century* (Oxford, 1972), 19, 93.

¹⁷ Thomas Gibbons, 'Diary', 4 March 1772; *CHST*, II, 24. 'The General Body assembled and chose a Committee for the purpose of attending to the Matter after having received an Account from Dr. Stennet of the favourable disposition of the Ministry to the Affair'. This is confirmed by Mayo, 'A reverend gentleman in that connection (i.e. the *Regium Donum*) who is said to receive two shares of the above mentioned bounty, with another of his colleagues went to G . . . e O . . . w, Esq. and . . . fixed a meeting for concerting measures agreeable to themselves'. (*Remarks*, 11) The only surviving accounts for the *Regium Donum* sent by Stennet to Newcastle on 23 July 1765 for the year 1762–3 do not bear this out. (BL. Add. MSS. 32968, f. 206–9.) A sarcastic account, possibly inspired by Mayo, appears in the *London Chronicle*, 5–7 March 1772; this states that the Archbishop and Bishops had been consulted at this stage.

¹⁸ 'Minutes', II, 109. All the members of the Committee can be found in the *Dictionary of National Biography* with the following exceptions: Thomas Toller (1732–95), educated at the Mile End Academy, at Nightingale Lane from 1754, Morning Preacher at Monkwell Street and afternoon preacher at Hoxton Square until the split from Monkwell Street to Silver Street in

A Committee was appointed consisting of Pickard (Chairman), Drs. Amory, Price, Harris, Kippis, and Mr. Pope for the Presbyterians; Drs. Conder, Gibbons, Savage, Furneaux, and Mr. Toller for the Independents; and Drs. Stennet, Jefferies, and Messrs. Thompson and Wallin for the Independents.

So much for the minutes of the meeting. Some of the other evidence suggests that things were much less clear cut. Both Stennet and Kippis state in their accounts that the resolution was passed with only one dissentient vote,¹⁹ usually ascribed to Henry Mayo. Mayo's own account states that when the vote was taken not all the 50 Ministers recorded as present in the Minutes had arrived. This is confirmed by Edward Hitchin who stated that by the time he arrived the vote on the application had already been taken.²⁰ Nevertheless the Minutes show him as present. Other evidence suggests that some ministers abstained.²¹ This seems very likely since those present included six Calvinists,

1774. See Wilson, *Dissenting churches*, III, 214. In *A sermon . . . upon the death of . . . Thomas Toller* (London, 1795), 35. Andrew Kippis comments on the 'warm and active part' he played in the attempts to enlarge upon the scope of the Toleration Act. Joseph Jefferies (1726–84), L.I.D., was educated under Amory at Taunton. He became minister to the Baptists at Pinners' Hall in 1756, and at the time of his death was minister to a Baptist congregation at Bury Street, St. Mary Axe. He became Professor of Civil Law at Gresham College in 1767. *Prot. Diss. Mag.*, VI, 3–5; *Mon. Rep.*, XIII, 752–3; *Gent. Mag.*, LIV (1784), 73. Josiah Thompson. Union Yard from 1746 to 1761. He was then left a legacy and lived in Clapham. In *Dissenting churches* Wilson states, 'he did not officiate very often as a preacher being considered very unpopular, and though his property gave him weight with his denomination, he does not appear to have given general satisfaction in the disposition of it'. (Op. cit., IV, 236).

Some of the Committee members were also Honest Whigs, i.e. Price, Savage, Amory, Jefferies, Furneaux. Cf. Vernon W. Crane, 'The Club of Honest Whigs', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., XXIII (1966), 218–9.

¹⁹ Stennet, *A free and dispassionate account*, 26; Kippis, *A vindication*, 76. Mayo records that the meeting started immediately whereas it was the usual practice of the body to 'allow some time for the members to collect, and compose themselves, before they proceeded to transact business: the consequences of which . . . (were) that some came in after the business was finished, others when it was half gone through, and many after it had begun, so that, I believe, it might be affirmed with the utmost justice, that there were not fifty present, when the first, the most important, resolution, passed'. (*Remarks*, 20.)

²⁰ Edward Hitchin, *Free thoughts on the late application* (London, 1772), 29. 'The rapidity was notorious at the first General Meeting. The Chairman was chosen, Resolutions were made in a very short space of time, and the Committee appointed, with such Speed, that many there were at a Stand what to say, or how to determine.' The single opponent 'would not have been so, had not a necessary appointment made me too late; for to my great concern, upon my arrival, the business was over.'

²¹ John Fell, *Genuine Protestantism* (London, 1773), 55n. 'Some of those forty nine did not vote but were neuter. In (Kippis's) account of the vote of thanks we are told there were only so many

who were later to oppose the petition with remarkable persistence both within and without the General Body. Eventually numbering thirteen, they identified themselves in *Reasons* published in 1773.²² They argued that the petition had its origin in a 'dislike to the Doctrinal Articles of the Church of England' and that the Petitioners were not representative of the great majority of orthodox dissenters.²³ At the meeting of 4th March only one person (Henry Mayo) actually opposed the petition but since it seems inconceivable that these others would have voted for the petition at any stage in its progress, it seems a reasonable assumption that they either abstained or were not present when the vote was taken. This accords perfectly with the

negative hands against it; would it not have been more ingenuous to have told your country brethren and the public how many also were for it? Fourteen or sixteen at the most'. Fell was a minister at Thaxted, an associate of Henry Mayo, who held radical views. In 1787 he became a tutor at Homerton where there was some friction since, 'Many of the chief supporters of the College . . . (were) highly aristocratical, and he a decided and ardent liberal.' William Walford, *Autobiography*, ed. J. Stoughton (London, 1851), 112; McLachlan, *English Education*, 180.

Fell also supported the conspiracy theory of the *Regium Donum*. The last page of *Genuine Protestantism* includes an advertisement for a tract to be called *Achan's golden wedge; or, a royal bounty influence, traced and displayed from . . . 1723 to the present time, with seasonable advice to Lord North and the body of Protestant Dissenting Ministers*, which seems never to have appeared. The parallel with Achan (Joshua vii. 24) is also used by Henry Mayo in the *London Magazine* (1774), 550. Fell and Mayo dined at the Dilly's in 1775 which is presumptive evidence for their association (see J. Boswell, *The Ominous Years 1774–1776* (London, 1963), 96). Internal evidence suggests that he is the 'Minister in the Country' who occasionally contributes to the *London Magazine* (e.g. (1775), 139–140) and also under the pseudonym Probus (e.g. (1775), 346–51). both of these articles share with Fell's known works an obsession both with the *Regium Donum* and with the Essex Dissenting Ministers. Mayo, as a reviewer, consistently praises and agrees with Fell's position in his acknowledged pamphlets.

²² Originally published as a broadsheet *The reasons offered by thirteen Dissenting Ministers against the present application to Parliament* (1773). There are copies in the British Library (215 i 3/111) and Dr. Williams's Library (38.5). It was reprinted in *A collection of the several papers relating to the application made to Parliament in 1772 and 1773* (London, 1773), 11–29, along with the reply it provoked; my references are to this edition. The thirteen ministers were David Muir, John Rogers, Thomas Towle, Samuel Brewer, Edward Hitchin, Thomas Oswald, John Potts, John Trotter, John MacGowan, George Stephens, Joseph Popplewell, Henry Hunter, and John Kello.

They were provoked in part by (Israel Mauduit), *The case of the Dissenting Ministers* (London, 1772) which argued that the intention of the Toleration Act was 'to give the Dissenters a legal right to the Exercise of divine worship in their own manner', and that since many Dissenters could not subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles the intention of the Act had become frustrated. The first two editions stated that it was published 'by desire of the Committee of Ministers appointed for the Application to Parliament', a claim that was later withdrawn. Cf. Edward Hitchin, *Free thoughts*, 8.

²³ The figures from the Thompson Survey of 1773 show that 719 out of a total of 1052 ministers supported the petition. It is unlikely that most of these were unorthodox. *CHST* (1911), 380.

evidence of Hitchin and Mayo. In this case the *maximum* vote for the Petition was 42 and the real figure may well have been less. Of the persons recorded as present only 34 supported the Petition in 1772–3 and it seems reasonable to suppose that others besides the Calvinist group were neutral—David Williams for example. At later meetings when the votes were recorded, there is a consistent correlation between the number of minority votes on matters relating to the application to Parliament and the number of the Mayo-Calvinist group present.

This group of Calvinists, so called for convenience only,²⁴ was politically conservative. The other opposition in the General Body, an even smaller minority, tended to radicalism. At first it consisted only of Henry Mayo,²⁵ who thought that by applying for an alteration in the Toleration Act the Dissenters were allowing themselves to be trifled with: they should instead apply for the repeal of all the penal laws in force against dissenters and not give up until they had done so.²⁶ Mayo moved in radical circles: he dined often at the Dillys, the radical publishers in the Poultry, where he got to know Boswell, who described him as 'liberal'.²⁷ On one occasion there he had a heated argument with Johnson on toleration.²⁸ His involvement in the literary world extended to editing the *London Magazine* in which he not only published Richard Price and Boswell but also commented from time to time on events in the General Body.²⁹ The focal point of these discussions was whether the magistrate has any right to demand a subscription or declaration as a condition of toleration.

²⁴ Both Henry Mayo and Thomas Gibbons, to look no further, were orthodox Calvinists.

²⁵ Henry Mayo (1733–93), Pastor of the Independent Congregation at Nightingale Lane, Wapping from 1762, succeeded Gibbons as a tutor at Homerton in 1785.

²⁶ Henry Mayo, 'Paul', *London Chronicle*, 2–5 April 1774, 322.

²⁷ Boswell for the defence 1769–1774, ed. William K. Wimsatt and Frederick A. Pottle (Yale, 1960), 194.

²⁸ J. Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. Hill and Powell (Oxford, 1934), II, 249–53. The encounter took place on 7 May 1773 and was noted by Johnson in a letter to Mrs. Thrale the following day. S. Johnson, *Letters*, ed. R.W. Chapman (Oxford, 1952), II, 393.

²⁹ Boswell records Mayo's editorship of the *London Magazine* in *The Ominous Years* (London, 1963), 122, entry for 4 April 1775. Pottle in his note on another entry in the journals suggested that Mayo had only taken up the post shortly before and this conjecture is confirmed by internal evidence. (*Boswell for the defence*, 170n.) That Mayo had written articles for the *London Magazine* has been known since George Dyer recorded the fact in *Memoirs of the life and writings of Robert Robinson* (London, 1796), 237n. These articles were reprinted in part as *An address to Protestant Dissenters on the origin and influence of the Regium Donum* (London, 1792), edited by

The development of the theory of toleration in the eighteenth century was conditioned by the seventeenth century assumption that religious orthodoxy is a guarantee of political loyalty. In England after 1689 the idea of a single state church was modified somewhat by recognizing the existence of Protestant Dissenters, who had organizational rather than doctrinal differences with the establishment. Hence the toleration accorded in 1689 was specifically Protestant in character and one of the strands of the arguments used in the 1770s was that the conditions laid down in the Toleration Act should be amended to take different circumstances into account.³⁰ Along with this came the assertion, found in the 1772 *Case*, that the Bible rather than the Thirty-nine Articles is the only possible authority in matters of faith.

At the same time a secular notion of toleration was being evolved. All religious sects should have freedom of worship and the magistrate should only act where there is an overt act which threatens the security either of the state or of some other sect. This was the view put forward by Henry Mayo and John Palmer.³¹ A weaker form of the same view holds that the magistrate can require certain guarantees before tolerating a sect, though this does not amount to an acknowledgement of his authority in matters of doctrine. This

J.T. Rutt. Abraham Rees in his anonymous *Letters concerning the Regium Donum* (London, 1792), 4–5, records that the letters were written by a London Dissenting minister then still living, and adds that they are 'notoriously erroneous, and compiled under the influence of principles and views, or rather of prejudice and passions by no means honourable to the author'. This is undeniably true of the account of the events related to the founding and history of the *Regium Donum* of which Mayo had no first hand knowledge. This is shown in great detail by T. Rees, *The Regium Donum*, 16ff.

It is possible to ascribe other articles in the *London Magazine* to Mayo other than those of 1774 and 1775 where he uses the pseudonym 'Paul'. One such is in 1776, 227–8, a profile of Richard Price which makes a point of referring to his disagreements with other members of the General Body over subscription. Also the book reviews in many cases are clearly by Mayo: from 1774 to 1779 the accounts of books on the subscription issue are clearly by him. The pseudonym 'Paul' also appears in two articles in the *London Chronicle* for 2–5 April and 8–10 March 1774: again the views are identical to those expressed by Mayo in the *London Magazine* and so may safely be ascribed to him.

The two articles by Richard Price, both on the National Debt, appear in the *London Magazine* (1776), 88–93, and (1777), 245–6.

³⁰ Thus the 1772 *Case of the Dissenting Ministers* states that 'the protestant Dissenting Ministers in general admit of no Authority in controversies of Faith but that of the Scriptures. And apprehend that the Act of Toleration itself allows this to be a Protestant Dissenting Principle'. (*A collection*, 5.)

³¹ John Palmer, *Free thoughts on the inconsistency of conforming to any religious test, as a condition of toleration, with the true principle of Protestant Dissent* (London, 1779), 6. This was the argument that Mayo had put to Johnson in 1773.

still leaves him the power to withhold toleration if he thinks that a sect's principles are potentially subversive. In the 1770s and beyond most Dissenters would have argued that this should be so in the case of Roman Catholics.³²

Such a guarantee could be seen in two ways. If one held on to some vestige of the notion that religious behaviour determines political loyalty one could say that the magistrate has a right to a religious guarantee as an indication of secular acceptability. If one denies this assumption one could say that the magistrate should have no guarantee at all and should be left to deal with overt acts affecting the state in an entirely secular fashion. To do anything else would be to give him an authority in religious matters to which he is not entitled and which he might well abuse.³³ This was the view of Mayo, Palmer and, later, Price. It is precisely the tension between these two opinions that lies behind the disagreement in the General Body.

II

In the weeks that followed the Committee assiduously canvassed support. The Bill was introduced into the Commons on 3rd April, barely a month after the General Body had met.³⁴ It received its second reading on the 14th. on the 17th the General Body met again and Pickard reported on the Committee's activities. They had consulted the Dissenting Deputies and also Sir Henry Hoghton, George Onslow, James Dyson and Sir George Savile. Their collective advice was to proceed without delay and to:

secrete (the design) from the public inspection till it first be presented to members of the House of Commons. They are directed to prepare a Bill, and withall to be as speedy as possible, that the Motion might be soon made in the House of Commons, for leave to bring it in. The Reason of this haste was, that the Bill might have time to go through both Houses before the end of the Session.³⁵

³² Only Priestley consistently proclaimed the rights of Roman Catholics to toleration. Martin Fitzpatrick, 'Joseph Priestley and Universal Toleration', *The Price-Priestley Newsletter*, No. 1 (1977), 3-30, documents the attitude of many Dissenters.

³³ Cf. Caleb Fleming, *Religion not the magistrate's province* (London, 1775), 71-2. 'If this will hold good, it should seem evident, that the door is thereby thrown wide open; and any kind of unjust demand, made by the civil magistrate, may as well be submitted to as another'.

³⁴ The Bill completed its third reading on 8 May when it was passed by 75 votes to 9. *The Journals of the House of Commons*, XXXIII, 740.

³⁵ 'Minutes', II, 148.

Pickard's assertion of how busy the Committee had been is borne out by Thomas Gibbons. On 6th March he went to see Onslow in the company of Stennett, Harris, and Toller, who later met the rest of the Committee. On the following day he went to see Sir Harry Hoghton. On the 9th the same group as before went to see Onslow again. On the 10th Gibbons dined with Stennett and Toller. The whole Committee met on the 17th and by the 19th Gibbons was 'employed in the afternoon in transcribing the Bill for the relief of the Dissenters. Wrote over several copies'. More meetings of the Committee followed on the 20th, 23rd and 24th (when they met Onslow), the 26th and the 30th. On 31st March Gibbons, 'Went to Westminster on the errand of procuring the favours of Members of Parliament &c', after which he 'attended the (Amsterdam) Coffee House'. The following day he and Wallin went to see the members for Southwark, Henry Thrale and Sir Joseph Mawbey, after which Gibbons, apparently alone, dined with Stennett.³⁶ Richard Price in the meantime was taking advantage of his recent acquaintance with the Earl of Shelburne. Price had written to Shelburne asking whether Chatham would receive a deputation from the Committee and Chatham sent a sympathetic reply, though it is interesting to note that both Chatham and Shelburne referred to the deputation as being of the Presbyterian denomination.³⁷

The committee's consultations had shown that the Bill was unlikely to be considered by either branch of the legislature without some sort of declaration of belief in the Christian religion being included in it. Pickard informed the General body that,

after as mature a consideration as y^c time would permit prepared the Declaration contained in the printed case: which declaration they persuade themselves is virtually a renunciation of Human Authority in Matters of Faith, & an assertion of our great common principle, The Sufficiency of Scripture & the Right of Private Judgement.³⁸

Accordingly, the Bill was drawn up by the Commons Solicitor and then revised by Michael Dodson. The decision to incorporate a declaration, though it seems to have been acceptable to all the Committee and most of the General Body, did lead to the Committee being extensively criticized in

³⁶ Thomas Gibbons, 'Diary': some of the entries are printed in *CHST*, II, 24-5.

³⁷ Shelburne to Chatham, 18 March 1772; Chatham to Shelburne, 3 April 1772, *Correspondence of William Pitt, Earl of Chatham* (London, 1840), IV, 199-201, 203-5. D.O. Thomas, 'Proposed Protest Concerning Dissenters: Richard Price and the Earl of Chatham', *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, XVI (1976), 49-50.

³⁸ 'Minutes', II, 148. Dodson met the Committee on 4 April 1772 when the Bill was approved unanimously. Rees, *The Regium Donum*, 43n.

certain quarters. In particular it was pointed out that Richard Price's declared views were inconsistent with the position seemingly adopted by the Committee.³⁹

The General Body next met on 12th May when the Bill had reached the Lords, where, thanks largely to the Bishops, it was rejected on the 19th. Even before this divisions of opinion within the Body had deepened. As Secretary, Henry Mayo had written the Minutes of the meeting of 17th April.⁴⁰ At that meeting a vote of thanks to the Committee was proposed and carried. In recording this Mayo seems to have added that a large number of those present did not vote.⁴¹ The minute was rejected and expunged at the next meeting when Mayo resigned as Secretary to be succeeded by Harris, a member of the Application Committee. The neutrals, as has been shown, were an important factor at the original meeting and assuming that he did no more than record this Mayo seems unlikely to have been guilty of deliberate falsification, as some have suggested.

Worse was to follow. In the debate in the Lords, the Bishop of London, Richard Terrick, stated, in the words of the General Body Minutes of 10th June:

That a great & very respectable part of y^e Body of Protestant Dissenting Ministers in and about London, *disapproved* of the late Application to Parliament for taking off the Subscription required of Protestant Dissenting Ministers by the Toleration Act; and *did not wish it success*.⁴²

³⁹ Cf. John Fell, *A fourth letter to the Rev. Mr. Pickard on genuine Protestantism* (London, 1775), 38; (David Williams), *A letter to the body of Protestant Dissenters and the Protestant Dissenting Ministers of all denominations* (London, 1777), 31.

⁴⁰ These incorporated those of the meeting on 4 March when Harris had acted as Secretary.

⁴¹ Mayo gives the following account in his *Remarks*, 28–9: 'On Friday April 17th, a meeting was called to receive the report of the Committee . . . when a motion was made by a gentleman intimately connected with some of the Committee, that thanks should be returned to those gentlemen. The number of ministers who came to the meeting was about seventy; and after a long debate, in which some of the Committee were the chief speakers on behalf of a motion of thanks to themselves, but about *twenty* voted; which, exclusive of the committee (who were fourteen, one being absent) makes the neutrals near half the company.'

The minutes support these assertions. 65 Ministers, including eleven of the Calvinists, were present; the absent committee member was Thompson. The expunging of the minute was done thoroughly, but a part of it can be reconstructed. 'Mr. Spilsbury moved that the thanks of the Body be given to the Committee . . . After a debate the question was put, and . . . accepted. . .'. Rees comes to a similar conclusion (*The Regium Donum*, 53.)

⁴² 'Minutes', II, 115. A motion was passed stating 'that such a method of obstructing this Design is highly censurable'. The vote is given as recorded. Exactly 33 petitioners were present and this doubtless coincides with the majority vote. 50 people were present in all, which leaves 5 votes unaccounted for.

It seems likely that those responsible for this were the Calvinists, who were constantly emphasizing the unrepresentative nature of the application. The blame has usually been put on Henry Mayo though it is not entirely clear how far he would have gone with these sentiments. As was to be expected a motion condemning this behaviour was carried by 33 votes to 6, with 6 abstentions. Five of the Calvinist group were present and it seems safe to assume that their votes, together perhaps with Mayo's, constituted the minority.⁴³ Whatever his views on the Calvinists' attitude to the application it seems likely that Mayo would have thought that the Committee should not be accorded a monopoly of the right to canvass support. The Committee themselves, anxious at the damage caused by these rumours, took space in the daily papers to refute them.⁴⁴ It was then resolved to continue with the application.

By the time the General Body met again in December the situation had changed. The 1772 campaign had been sprung unexpectedly on most of the London Ministers and opposition had hardly had time to organize itself. By the time operations started again opinions had had time to consolidate not

⁴³ They were Samuel Brewer, Edward Hitchin, Joseph Popplewell, Thomas Towle, and John MacGowan. It has been assumed (for example, by Barlow, *Citizenship and conscience*, 179n.) that Mayo alone went to see the Bishop, but this is certainly not so. Theophilus Lindsey writing to William Turner on 23 June 1772 said, 'There was a false brother or two of the independent persuasion, who spying on and enjoying the liberty that was aimed at, went privately to the Bp of London and gave him a false list of 30 ministers, whom they expressed as enemies to the design . . .' (D.W.L., MS. 12.44). It is unfortunate that Herbert McLachlan in *Letters of Theophilus Lindsey* (Manchester, 1920), 53, mistranscribed this letter making it read 'false brother of the independent persuasion'.

⁴⁴ Writing in 1834 Thomas Rees had access to the minutes of the Committee which have since disappeared, and occasionally quotes from them. He records a meeting on 21 May when the following resolution was carried:

Whereas an anonymous paragraph, reflecting on the proceedings of the General Body, has appeared in this day's Daily Public Advertiser, resolved, that the following advertisement be published in all the daily papers.

The Committee of the Protestant Dissenting Ministers for conducting the late application to Parliament have carefully avoided inserting anything in the public papers; but the following paragraph having this day appeared in the Public Advertiser, which they apprehend refers to a Meeting of the General Body of Dissenting Ministers in London.—'We hear from good authority, that at a meeting lately, of near ninety persons, when it was proposed to return thanks to the Committee for soliciting the Dissenters Bill, which has passed the lower House, six were against it, twelve for it: but far the greater part were silent and said nothing one way or the other; a manifest sign that the Bill was not agreeable to the General Body of the Dissenters.—The Committee think it incumbent upon them to declare, that the above paragraph is a gross misrepresentation, and FALSE in almost every particular, and do hereby call upon the author of it to publish his name. Signed by order of the Committee, EDWARD PICKARD. (*The Regium Donum*, 54–5.)

least by means of a pamphlet war in which, over the course of the summer, Kippis, Stennet, Mayo, and others had put forward rival accounts of what had taken place. So it was not surprising that on 23rd December the meeting started with Thomas Oswald, one of the Calvinists, who had not been present at the June meeting, demanding to put the record straight by entering his dissent from the motion to proceed with the application. Through Kippis's intervention he was not allowed to put his question to the meeting,⁴⁵ and this in turn furnished the opposition with another stick with which to beat the Committee.

Pickard then outlined his plans for the forthcoming session, a somewhat muted and defensive performance. He stated that he had had a large number of letters from dissenting ministers in the country expressing their approbation of the Committee's activities and went on to say that a new Bill had been drafted. This allowed a minister to choose between making a declaration of belief in the Holy Scriptures and subscribing as before to the Thirty-nine Articles, a concession to the orthodox which perhaps made the heretical inclinations of some of the Committee even more apparent. Pickard did not explain how those, like Mayo or Fleming, who objected in principle to any declaration would react.⁴⁶

Although stating that the ideal would be to have no Test at all he thought that there was little chance of getting a bill so drafted through Parliament. So it was resolved, 'if upon further advising with our friends, or shall be judged by the majority of the General Body, prudent and proper' the application be renewed in 1773. Of the 71 persons present, 55 voted for the motion and 13 against.⁴⁷ The opposition was totally Calvinist since it was this meeting which led to the publication of the broadsheet *Reasons*, which identifies their views and was signed by them all. This must mean that Mayo, who was also present,

⁴⁵ *Reasons* in *A collection*, 12, states that, 'These reasons were, after great opposition from the friends of the Application, at length permitted to be read to the General Body at their Meeting, on Wednesday the 27th of January last, but met with such a disagreeable Reception, that we find ourselves under an indispensable Necessity of submitting them to the impartial unprejudiced Publick'. Cf. Samuel Wilton, *An apology for the renewal of the application* (London, 1773), 11, 'As the Confirmation of the minutes of the preceding meeting, regularly came under consideration, before any other business was entered upon; it was thought highly improper, and contrary to all rules of order, to pay any attention to your Reasons, before the Question respecting the Confirmation of the Minutes had been put to the Vote'. On the other hand the General Body Minutes make it clear that it was very unusual for the minutes of the preceding meeting to be confirmed unanimously.

⁴⁶ A point made forcibly by the Calvinists. Cf. Edward Hitchin, *Free thoughts*, 37.

⁴⁷ 'Minutes', II, 120-4.

abstained, presumably because he did not want his reasons for opposing the motion to be confounded with theirs.⁴⁸

In the winter signatures were collected throughout the country for a petition to Parliament, though the direction of the application remained in the hands of the London Ministers supposedly on the grounds of the experience they had gained in 1772. This decision was much criticized: the General Body hence conceded the right of country ministers to attend their meetings from 23 December 1772 onwards though without the right to speak or vote. The formal decision to continue with the application was made at the meeting of 27 January 1773 when it was carried by 43 votes to 17. On this occasion the opposition was not entirely Calvinist. John Potts was absent, so the Calvinist block accounts for 12 votes. The others are analysed in the *Reply* to their *Reasons* which, in disputing the claim that 'others of our Brethren divided with us', states that 'Four of them divided against the Application upon an Apprehension of the Inexpediency of it at this Time, and one because he objects to any Declaration of Faith, as a Term of Exemption from penal Laws.'⁴⁹ That final solitary vote is presumably Henry Mayo's⁵⁰ and indicates that the distinction between him and the Calvinists was well known at the time. A Calvinist attempt to delay matters failed when a motion proposed by Hunter to let the Bill lie on the table for a fortnight was not put.

There were rumours of dissension within the Committee and the opposition was anxious to emphasize these. Hitchin in 1772 had written that if the petition in its then form (with the declaration) 'had been laid before the General Body, it would not have been approved; indeed, so much was expressly declared by ONE OF THE COMMITTEE'. Henry Mayo later stated that in 1772 Richard Price disagreed with the form of declaration then suggested. But these allegations were notably unspecific. There was no revolt in the General Body over the introduction of the declaration and there does not appear to have been dissension within the Committee on anything like the scale Mayo suggested. It is true that Price proposed an alternative form of declaration in 1773 but the fact that he remained on the Committee implies that any disagreements with his colleagues were not fundamental.⁵¹

⁴⁸ *A collection*, 12.

⁴⁹ *A collection*, 28-9.

⁵⁰ 63 are listed as being present at the meeting, in fact a very high attendance which does not bear out Fell's contention that absence from the meeting was caused by dislike of the measures taken. See *Genuine Protestantism*, 57.

⁵¹ Edward Hitchin, *Free thoughts*, 31. Henry Mayo states that the Committee 'offered to the legislature, without once consulting their constituents, such a declaration of faith as

At the same time some opposition was orchestrated from some London Ministers outside the General Body who formed a Society meeting at the New York Coffee House in Cornhill. They were orthodox Calvinists who were apprehensive at the spread of Arian and Socinian views in the General Body. Little is known of the Society. Its Chairman was Richard Hutchins, a Baptist, who preached at Rotherhithe from 1760 to 1804.⁵² The Secretary, John Langford, was a particular Baptist: he ministered at Blacksfields Church from 1766 to about 1778, then elsewhere, until his 'imprudent conduct compelled him, at length, to give up preaching'. He was bequeathed considerable property, which he dissipated, and died in poverty in 1790. He was also a minor hymn writer, possibly of Methodist inclinations. Seen from the General Body this was a side issue however: only the survival of the broadsheet testifies to the existence of the Society and there seems to be no contemporary discussion of it.⁵³

When defeat in the House of Lords was added to all this it was to be expected that Pickard should seek some reassurance. At the meeting on 28th April, only the second concerned with the application that year, Pickard stated that the Committee had acted 'with entire unanimity',⁵⁴ and to emphasize the point he and the Committee all resigned and were duly re-

suited themselves (the judicious Dr. Price excepted)', *London Magazine* (1775), 6. Rees reports a form of declaration proposed by Price which it was at one time intended to introduce in the 1773 Bill:

I A.B., declare in the presence of Almighty God, that I am a Christian, and a Protestant Dissenting Minister, and that, as such, I acknowledge Jesus Christ to be my only Lord and Master in religion; and receive the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as containing a revelation of the mind and will of God, and the rule of my faith and practice.' The intention of eliminating the magistrate's authority is here perfectly clear, and much more decisive than the form finally incorporated in the 1773 Bill, 'I A.B. do declare, as in the presence of Almighty God, that I am a Christian and a Protestant: and that, as such, I do receive the revelation of the will of God, contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, as the rule of my faith and practice.' (See *Regium Donum*, 44-5N.)

It seems on the evidence of this declaration that although Price absolutely rejected the right of the magistrate to interfere in matters of doctrine or practice, he still allowed him a residual authority of verifying the credentials of any religion which it was proposed to tolerate.

⁵² 'Minutes', II, 134.

⁵³ Stennet states that 'a happy unanimity' had prevailed amongst the Committee. *A free and dispassionate account*, 33.

⁵⁴ Wilson, *Dissenting churches*, IV, 66-7.

elected.⁵⁵ Otherwise Pickard's speech was predictable. Eight hundred letters had been received signifying concurrence from ministers of every denomination: he thought that the harmony of sentiments 'which prevails among our brethren throughout England and Wales' is the great hope for future success and far outweighs the attempts to 'obstruct the Progress of the Bill by Protests and Petitions from a Set of Men calling themselves Protestant Dissenters [presumably the New York Coffee House Society] (which) . . . ought in charity not to be recorded'.⁵⁶ It was resolved by 44 votes to 11 that the 'great and desirable object' of a new application to Parliament be kept in mind, though the Committee was enjoined to take no action without first consulting the General Body. Perhaps this was a comment on the lack of meetings of the Body to discuss the 1773 application.

The matter was not discussed again until 23 March 1774 by which time the Committee had lost most of its impetus and the Calvinists their enthusiasm for opposition. Indeed Edward Hitchin, one of the most articulate of them, was dead. The bitterness of the past was impossible to sustain once it became clear that there was little chance of anything happening. Mayo and Kello found themselves elected to the General Committee of the Body whilst new recruits to its number included Rochemont Barbauld and Joseph Priestley. The Committee lamely concluded:

1. That it doth not appear at present . . . to be proper to renew the application to Parliament this session.
2. That it is the fixed opinion of this Committee That the great object of the late applications to Parliament, from the Protestant Dissenting Ministers be never given up; but that the Application be renewed the very first convenient opportunity.⁵⁷

It is not clear what the Committee would have regarded as a 'convenient opportunity'—it could only have been taken to mean some further indication of support from the Government. Not surprisingly they were divided on the issue. They had met on 1st December and shortly afterwards Theophilus Lindsey wrote to William Turner:

I am sorry to inform you that a negative has been put upon your application to Parliament this session by the Committee,

⁵⁵ Wilson, *Dissenting churches*, IV, 343-4; J. Julian, *A dictionary of hymnology* (London, 1892), 639. for Methodists registering as Protestant Dissenting Ministers see *Candid thoughts on the late application . . . by an orthodox dissenter* (London, 1772), 20.

⁵⁶ 'Minutes', II, 134.

⁵⁷ 'Minutes', 23 March 1774.

notwithstanding the efforts of Drs. Price, Kippis, Amory, Jefferies, etc. etc. to the contrary. The Court have succeeded too well in hushing you, and think thereby to lay all the business about reformation quiet.⁵⁸

At this point Conder resigned from the Committee possibly as a protest but there seems to be no record of his reasons. The resolution to renew the application at the first favourable opportunity was agreed by a 'very great majority'. As a matter of routine, Mayo, seconded by Kello, moved that the Committee be dissolved, a motion which was, just as routinely, 'carried in the negative'.

Now that there was no possibility of a Bill actually getting through Parliament, the internal wranglings in the General Body came to a head as they discussed the increasingly theoretical question of how any future application should be conducted. On 30th November Palmer failed in an attempt to allow the country ministers to speak and vote. A three hour discussion on this occasion and a later meeting on 7th December achieved nothing, except, on the latter occasion electing Flexman to the Committee in place of Amory, who had died. Another meeting was arranged for 11 January 1775, at which 55 ministers were present compared to 48 and 44 on the two previous occasions. It was decided to empower the Committee 'to renew the Application to Parliament the first convenient opportunity upon the ground of the late Bill, provided it shall appear to them that there is no prospect of success without admitting the Declaration'. This motion was carried by 33 votes to 16.⁵⁹

Happily far more is known about what happened at this debate than any other because Henry Mayo wrote an account of it which he published in the *London Magazine*. The meeting, he says, lasted three days; presumably he counted the November and December meetings as the first two days:

The first two days debate were calm and solid; Dr. Price and Mr. John Palmer distinguished themselves, and did great honour to the cause of religious liberty: they lashed round the miserable circle of their

⁵⁸ Lindsey to Turner, 9 February 1774 (D.W.L. MS. 12.44) which is partly quoted by McLachlan (*Letters of Theophilus Lindsey*, 54) who leaves out the second sentence here quoted. Cf. also Richard Price to Ezra Stiles, 2 November 1774, cited by D.O. Thomas, 'Proposed Protest', 56. Joseph Priestley wrote to Caleb Rotheram on 25 March 1774, 'Dr. Kippis, Dr. Price, and one or two more, made a strong protest against the determination of their brethren' (J.T. Rutt, *Life and correspondence of Joseph Priestley* (London, 1831-2), I, 224). Rutt also cites a letter from Lindsey to Turner, 7 March 1774, 'You do nothing this session. You have been tricked by the disposers of the Regium Donum; and their influence, and that of one or two men in particular about Court'. It is curious that Kippis later became a *Regium Donum* distributor.

⁵⁹ 'Minutes', II, 169.

opponents' occasional arguments and temporary expedients; invention was exhausted, reason fatigued, and experience, it might have been expected, would have given judgement: but predilection and self will were not to be conquered. The leaders of the late application would not face about, nor stop short and do no more. The disgrace of yielding and retreating was too much: they chose to continue in their swamp, and the poor pretence of 'getting what they could' made them continue the fight, for a phantom to themselves, but a real *Trojan* horse to their non-subscribing brethren.

The third and last days debate was very unlike the two former: so that some present concluded, that the preceding calmness was a *finesse* to soothe those who were against a religious subscription; but they adhered to their principles, whether men frowned or smiled: personal complaints and reproaches were uttered by some, but the great pains which they themselves had been at (tho' happily unsuccessful) to prejudice the characters of their brethren who acted on principle, and to inflame their friends against them, were forgotten . . .'.⁶⁰

Mayo then stated that he had asked a 'senior minister' to propose a motion calling for a total repeal of the penal laws existing against Dissenters. He urged:

that the former mode of proceeding was unfavourable to the cause of religious liberty, and the ground had been proved untenable and dangerous; that an application for the repeal of the penal laws against them, would prevent any further debate on the authority of the magistrate *in sacris*, or respecting religious doctrines and opinions; that it plainly appeared to be the *only mode* in which the body of city and country ministers could possibly unite; a mode that would also produce a fair trial of our friends in Parliament, and of the good will of administration towards Protestant Dissenting Ministers, with the assurance of which from two regium donum men, the first minute for the late application was ushered into the body.'

As expected this motion was not discussed and discussion returned to the proviso in the Committee's motion. Pickard merely quoted his circular of 1773 in which he had explained to the country ministers that he saw little prospect of success without incorporating a declaration into the bill. Discussion then turned to the words 'to them' in the resolution, the effect of which was to give the Committee rather than the whole General Body

⁶⁰ Henry Mayo in *London Magazine* (1775), 5-8.

To say that the magistrate is entitled to require a religious declaration and that it is right to give such a declaration could be taken either (i) as an admission of the power of the magistrate to intervene in theological matters, or (ii) as a certification that one's religious position is compatible with the safety of the state. Implicit in both these positions is the assumption that theological and civic virtue are connected, and that in order to maintain the latter the magistrate has a right to take securities for the former; over the years that followed it seems that Price came to doubt whether the state has such a right.

In the 'Proposed Protest' of 1772 Price still apparently believes that a religious declaration can have political consequences. He there argues that 'the maxims of sound policy, as well as the principles of Christianity, require civil governors to protect all good subjects; and to extend Toleration to every mode of faith and worship, that is not inconsistent with the safety of the State'. It is always, let it be noted, the 'good subject' that Price's magistrate is designed to help.⁶⁶ Then he expounds what this means in practical terms:

. . . The body of people concerned in the present Bill are Christians applying to a Christian Legislature, and offering, as a condition of the Toleration they desire, to subscribe a declaration that they receive the holy scriptures as containing a Revelation of the will of God and the rule of their Faith and practice, and at the same time to give by taking the oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy and abjuring Popery all possible Security to the State . . . The Objection that the Declaration just mentioned is not sufficiently explicit, implies the claim of a right to confine Toleration, not only to those who profess themselves Christians, but to such as hold particular doctrines as are thought, by the rulers of every state, to be necessary articles of the Christian Faith; and such a right in civil governments cannot be acknowledged without establishing a principle that will justify almost all the persecutions that have ever ravaged the Christian world.⁶⁷

Hence in 1772, although he denies that the magistrate has the right to impose religious dogma, Price is prepared to admit that such religious

⁶⁶ In *Britain's happiness*, p. 9, Price describes the office of the magistrate, which is (in part) 'to protect and encourage all good subjects of all sects and persuasions'. Cf. *Review*, 180n., 'to protect all good subjects; to preserve the peace among contending sects, and to hinder them from encroaching on one another', (in the first and second editions Price writes 'different parties' instead of 'contending sects').

⁶⁷ D.O. Thomas, 'Proposed protest', 57. For a perhaps oversimplistic account of the antecedents of this view see Russell E. Richey, 'The origins of British Radicalism: the changing Rationale for Dissent', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, VII (1973/4), 179-92.

assertions as the acceptance of the Scriptures as the supreme authority and the abjuration of Popery can have civil consequences, and that it is permissible to give such assurances to the magistrate. Even at this stage he seems to have abandoned any belief he may have had that only Christian principles can act as a guarantee of civic rectitude. He is prepared to tolerate Mohammedans on the ground that 'the Turks tolerate Christians . . . and therefore it would be certainly right in Christians to tolerate Turks'—a consequence of the political practice which Islam then implied.

It is possible that in the 'Proposed Protest' Price is trimming in order to provide something that Chatham and Shelburne could accept, though if that is so it seems strange that although he was prepared to disagree with his colleagues in 1775 and 1779, he did not do so in 1772. It seems more likely that the burgeoning radicalism of the 1770s and the distrust of government power that that entailed made Price increasingly less willing to accept any form of religious test controlled by the state. In *Observations on civil liberty* (1776) he makes it clear that religious liberty is a civil right conceived in civil terms whilst in the introduction to *Two Tracts* (1778) he refers to the constitution of Pennsylvania as being 'dishonoured by a religious test' which was required as a condition of being admitted to the House of Representatives.⁶⁸ The test in this case was an acknowledgement of the authority of the Scriptures. Hence it seems that Price changed his views, but any such assertion must be expressed with caution in view of the fragmentary nature of the evidence. Price himself left no account of his views on subscription: in reconstructing them one can do little more than reproduce the accounts of contemporaries, with the proviso that these reports may not be entirely accurate, and cite passages in Price's works, whilst remaining aware that he is writing about other, often significantly different, circumstances.

III

After the meeting in January 1775 the General Body lapsed into inactivity. The only meeting held every year was the annual general meeting. Its committee assembled once a year but as far as one can judge did not discuss subscription, or indeed, anything else. The initiative for the 1779 Relief Act came from the Government following on the Catholic Relief Act of 1778. The General Body met, possibly in some confusion, on 18 March 1779. Although it was summoned by the Committee set up in 1772 that body was in some disarray. No changes had been made since 1774 when Flexman replaced Amory, who had died, and Wilton had taken the place of Conder, who had

⁶⁸ Richard Price, *Two tracts* (London, 1778), xv.

resigned. Pickard had died in 1778 as had Wilton, whilst Philip Furneaux had been seized by hereditary insanity in 1777 and so remained incapacitated until his death in 1783. Furthermore, at the General Body Meeting on the 18th Savage announced his resignation. They were replaced by Abraham Rees, who filled the Presbyterian vacancy caused by Pickard's death: the other places, all Independent, were filled by Webb, Jennings, and Hill. Kippis replaced Pickard as Chairman and reported:

That some circumstances have lately occurred which have more particularly excited an attention to the subject in various Persons of Public Station & Character. That, as the Committee have been credibly informed, a number of the Bishops lately had it in view to bring in a Bill in *ye* Upper House for enlarging *ye* Toleration Act & went so far as to propose a Copy of a Bill for that Purpose. That, as the Committee have been further informed at a Subsequent Meeting of *ye* Bishops the design of bringing in a Bill themselves in the House of Lords was suspended but that several of the Bench expressed their readiness to concur in any such Bill which might be brought into the House of Commons.⁶⁹

Kippis mentioned a sermon by John Ross, Bishop of Exeter, in which these views were expressed, and referred to various independent expressions of support from people in the House of Commons. He went on:

That some Individuals of the Committee hearing of these Intentions acquainted the Committee with them, who, after the most mature deliberation did not think it proper to take any particular steps in the affair, or to convene the General Body till they had received further information.

As if to confirm the impression of inactivity, Kippis reported that a Committee of the House had been formed to receive a motion for leave to bring in a Bill on 10th March and had decided by 77 votes to 6 to bring in a Bill to be read for the first time on the 19th, the day after the General Body's meeting. This Bill included the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, and the declaration against Popery. Henry Mayo being absent, the vote of thanks to the Committee was unanimous.

The reluctance of the Dissenters to do anything about the Government's offer seems to have been considerable. In December 1778 Theophilus Lindsey had written to Tayleur recording a meeting with Richard Price at dinner 'when I pressed him very much to renew the Dissenters' application to Parliament, as I had heard from several quarters that it would be likely to

⁶⁹ John Ross, *A sermon preached before the Lords* (London, 1779).

succeed. He said he had heard the same: that he had talked with several of the Dissenting clergy about it, but some of them were averse to the application as they were persuaded, if granted, it would only be with a view to give more indulgence to the Papists. I said, and he agreed, that in respect of the freedom of their worship, no one that is a Christian ought to be against it, and this should not hinder them from seeking relief and security in their own case.⁷⁰ Clearly what bothered the Dissenters at this stage was being forced to face up to the fact that it was only political necessity that would gain them greater toleration, and that this was seen by the Government in terms wider than the realization of the principles, largely Protestant principles, that had actuated the petitions of 1772 and 1773.

The General Body met again on 26th April when it was reported that the Bill had been agreed without a division, but that on the second reading a petition from the University of Oxford had been presented by its Chancellor, Lord North, requesting the inclusion of a declaration which was accordingly inserted in the following words:

I AB do solemnly declare in the presence of Almighty God, that I am a Christian and a Protestant, and as such that I believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as commonly received among Protestant Churches, do contain the whole revealed will of God: and that I do receive the same as the Rule of my Doctrine and Practice.

Since it was clear that the Bill would be unlikely to get through without this declaration, a resolution was proposed by Mr. Taylor that:

In case the Bill now depending in Parliament, cannot be obtained without a General Declaration of Faith in the Holy Scriptures, it will not be advisable absolutely to refuse an acceptance of the Bill.

This was carried by 53 votes to 7: since 62 people were present at the meeting there must have been two abstentions. The minority, one can conjecture, would have corresponded to the minority at the similar division in 1775. Two of that number, Kello and Towle, were the last of the Calvinists of 1773: they seem to have become reconciled to the application now that it was not obviously heretical in inspiration. Nine other members of the 1775 minority were present in 1779, including Mayo. It is possible that some of these either abstained or, consistently with their stand in 1775, were content to support the majority. This supposition is given some support by the fact that a motion stating that if the Bill could not be passed without the declaration, it should be

⁷⁰ McLachlan, *Letters of Theophilus Lindsey*, 56; see the letter of 3 January 1779, there reproduced.

modelled 'in such a manner as to render it unexceptionable to all who can subscribe to a general declaration of faith in ye Scriptures' was passed, according to the Minutes, unanimously. Since Mayo would have been unlikely to vote for such a motion, it is possible that he and possibly others had left the meeting by the time this motion was put.

As before there is doubt about Price's attitude. He had voted with the minority in 1775 and quite certainly objected to the terms of the 1779 Act. The evidence of this is contained in two letters of Theophilus Lindsey. In one of them dated 3 June 1779 he tells William Tayleur, 'I am grieved that such excellent, super excellent, persons, as Dr. Price and our friend Jebb, with a few, and but a very (few) others, see this Bill, in such a light, as to think it a betraying of the gospel and of Christian liberty to submit to it.'⁷¹ It may not be an entire coincidence that this was written the day after the last of the meetings of the General Body, at which Price was not present and at which the necessity of the declaration was accepted and the consciences of some doubtless eased by the omission from it of the word 'whole'. By then the Committee had received assurances that there was no intention of disturbing those who would not be relieved by the Bill.

When the bill was passed Kippis sent a circular letter to all Dissenting clergymen. In it he outlines the progress of the legislation through Parliament and reproduces it in its final form together with the oaths of allegiance and supremacy. He also gives advice: he had been assured that the government would not seek to disturb those Dissenting clergy who could not accept the declaration. So he advised a degree of circumspection in those taking advantage of the new provisions. They should not seek to subscribe as 'Bodies of Men' but 'separately and individually as each person shall think proper. By this means no particular notice will be taken of those who decline to qualify, or are restrained from doing so by Principles of Conscience'.⁷² It was this pragmatic approach that distinguished the bulk of the Committee and the General Body as a whole from people such as Price and Mayo. As Samuel Stennet pointed out in a pamphlet published while the Bill was going through Parliament, the problems relating to the acceptability of a declaration were 'questions of *expedience*, not of conscience'. Indeed he put the point most graphically:

. . . I am passing through a narrow-street; a man who is much stronger than myself meets me, and tells me I shall not pass unless I will give him

⁷¹ 'An Unrecorded Letter of Theophilus Lindsey', *The Price Priestley Newsletter*, No. 4 (1980). Cf. D.W.L., MS. 12.44, printed in *Letters of Theophilus Lindsey*, 59.

⁷² Andrew Kippis, circular letter dated July 1779. Copy in D.W.L., shelf mark 38.5.

my name, I tell him he has no right to make such a demand, and beseech him to let me pass peaceably. He still insists he will have my name. I want to be about my business—I comply. Now is my compliance criminal? It is not.⁷³

This provoked a reasonably acid review in the *London Magazine* quite clearly by Henry Mayo. After pointing out that Stennet's pamphlet starts with a denial of the right of the magistrate to require subscription to a religious test and that penal laws to enforce such a requirement are unjust, he concludes 'yet his whole pamphlet is to engage his brethren to subscribe such a text':

It is very clear from his own pen; that the dissenting ministers who qualify under this new act of toleration give up their acknowledged first principles—and that they do it not voluntarily but with reluctance, if not quibbling, merely to be free of penalties and obtain immunities. We think also, that our author and his other conforming associates ought to have been more seriously and deeply affected with the situation of such of their brethren as could not comply or conscientiously receive divine revelation enforced by human authority under the sanction of fines and imprisonment; for if the legislature should enforce the new act, or *informers* go forth among their churches, as the laws must have their course, it will certainly be both the occasion and the cause of great injury to many, and the honest, and most consistent will be the sufferers.⁷⁴

Mayo's views remained those of the minority. The pragmatism of the London Ministers is everywhere apparent. Perhaps that is why such as Caleb Fleming kept away from the original debates on the 1772 and 1773 applications. They and other radical writers attracted little notice. An example is David Williams, for a part of this period a Dissenting minister at Highgate, who attended most of the General Body debates until 1775 and who, on the evidence of his writings, would have abstained in the votes. In 1773 he wrote that 'the whole business of the Dissenters should have been to ask the repeal of the penal laws themselves': to offer a declaration of faith to the magistrate is to abandon one's first principle.⁷⁵ Priestley put forward similarly uncompromising views. A good many ministers fulminated against intolerance and bigotry but very few were prepared to deny absolutely the

⁷³ (Samuel Stennet), *Considerations on the propriety of Protestant Dissenting Ministers acceding to a declaration of their belief in the Holy Scriptures annexed to a bill now depending in Parliament for the farther enlargement of religious liberty* (London, 1779).

⁷⁴ *London Magazine* (1779), 230.

⁷⁵ (David Williams), *Essays on public worship, patriotism, and projects of reformation* (London, 1773), 230.

principle of some degree of state control of religion however much they might argue for changes in the way in which that control was exerted.

In 1814 Walter Wilson commented on the reluctance of Dissenters to involve themselves in politics even where their own interests were affected. It is undoubtedly true that this reluctance, or as Wilson put it 'the unacceptable notion, that the affairs of government should be left to the wicked'⁷⁶ is the important underlying factor in the attitude of the General Body in the 1770s. Along with the reluctance to get involved in politics went a considerable degree of political *naïveté*. There was no doubt that the administration was, to use Mayo's expression, 'trifling' with the Dissenters. North was well aware that he would have to face a general election in late 1774 or early 1775 and that he must not offend, and if possible appear to support, the Dissenting interest. The Government was encouraging the Dissenters' application quite cynically knowing that the King was opposed to it and that the Bishops would kill the Bill in the House of Lords.⁷⁷ In early 1772 only Mayo and Fleming amongst the London Ministers had sufficient political experience to suspect these motives.

Evidence of the political behaviour of late eighteenth century Dissenting ministers is fragmentary and the survival of the minutes of the General Body together with a substantial body of contemporary commentary on the events there recorded is most fortunate. This is particularly so since it provides a corrective to those many writers, who have, in the absence of other information, had to reply on literary evidence with all the possibility of distortion that that implies. In practice this has meant that the extent of radicalism in eighteenth century Dissent has been overstated.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Wilson, *Dissenting churches*, IV, 549.

⁷⁷ Cf. P.D.G. Thomas, *Lord North* (London, 1976), 147–9, for a summary of the political position, and Barlow, *Citizenship and conscience*, 178–9.

⁷⁸ For examples of literary expositions see Anthony Lincoln, *Some political and social ideas of English Dissent, 1763–1800* (Cambridge, 1936), and for a critique see Ursula Henriques, *Religious toleration in England, 1787–1833* (London, 1961), 58–9; Colin Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1977), 206; and the important article by James E. Bradley, 'Whigs and Nonconformists; Slumbering Radicalism in English Politics, 1739–89', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, IX (1975–6), 1–27; and G.M. Ditchfield, 'Repeal, abolition and reform: a study in the interaction of reforming movements in the Parliament of 1790–6' in *Anti-slavery, religion and reform: essays in memory of Roger Anstey*, ed. C. Bolt and S. Drescher (Folkestone, 1980), 101–118.

Most Dissenters were content to accept the toleration the constitution afforded them.⁷⁹ Those who criticized this practice and the acceptance of such material indications of the arrangement as the *Regium Donum*, constituted a definite minority. The good faith of successive administrations had also been shown in the refusal to implement the letter of the law sufficient to give Dissenters the exercise of most of the civic rights they were denied. The more obnoxious acts passed at the end of Queen Anne's reign had been removed from the statute book and the occasional attempt to prosecute a Dissenting schoolmaster was stopped by the Crown. The bulk of the Dissenters were happy to accept this arrangement, happy also to have it put on a more regular basis, but they did not at this period allow their exclusion from rights allowed their conforming brethren act as the excuse for an all out criticism of the political system under which they lived.⁸⁰

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⁷⁹ Cf. Bradley, 'Whigs and Nonconformists', 16–24; Namier and Brooke, *The House of Commons, 1754–1790*, I, 115.

⁸⁰ I should like to acknowledge the permission of the Trustees of Dr. Williams's Library and of the Memorial Hall Library to consult mss. in their possession.

THE BEGINNINGS OF PRIESTLEY'S MATERIALISM

Alan Tapper

The mature materialism of Joseph Priestley's *Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit* of 1777 is based on three main arguments: that Newton's widely-accepted scientific methodology requires the rejection of the 'hypothesis' of the soul; that a dynamic theory of matter breaks down the active/passive dichotomy assumed by many dualists; and that interaction between matter and spirit is impossible. In *Matter and Spirit* it is the first two arguments which are given greatest prominence; but it is the third argument which first brought Priestley to take materialism seriously. It was an argument which had persistently troubled him in his dualist years, but it was not until 1774 in the *Examination* that (as he tells us) he 'first entertained a serious doubt of the truth of the vulgar hypothesis' (III, 202).¹ Underlying this fact is an episode of some complexity. The *Examination* was Priestley's reply to the three Scottish Common Sense philosophers, Thomas Reid, James Beattie and James Oswald, with appendices on Richard Price and James Harris. Reid's *Inquiry into the Human Mind* of 1764 was Priestley's main concern, and the subject of the debate was not the nature of mind but scepticism, realism and the 'Theory of Ideas'.

The 'sceptics' under discussion were Berkeley and Hume. Both Reid and Priestley thought Berkeley and Hume had denied the reality of the external world, and both wished to reinstate external reality. Priestley thought the sceptical challenge could be met without any great difficulty. It was, he held, based on a misunderstanding of the canons of scientific reasoning: the assumption that whatever can not be demonstrated is not worthy of rational belief.

It is quite sufficient if the supposition [of an external world] be the easiest hypothesis for explaining the origin of our ideas. The evidence of it is such that we allow it to be barely possible to doubt of it; but that it is as certain as that two and two make four, we do not pretend (III, 46-7).

¹ All references in the text are to *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley*, 25 volumes in 26, edited by John Towill Rutt (London, 1817-32; reprinted New York, 1972). The full title of the *Examination* is *An Examination of Dr Reid's Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense; Dr Beattie's Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth; and Dr Oswald's Appeal to Common Sense in Behalf of Religion*.

Priestley's realism was 'representative' realism. He took the Lockean Theory of Ideas—the theory that all our perceptions are mediated to us by sensations—to be one of the best established achievements of modern philosophy, and he could see nothing in Berkeley or Hume capable of undermining that achievement.

Reid, by contrast, thought that Berkeley and Hume had brought about an upheaval in philosophy and that order and sanity could only be restored by abolishing the whole tradition of 'ideas'—a tradition which goes back to Democritus and Aristotle. The defence of realism against Humean scepticism required a new conception of the powers and operations of the human mind. The capacity to perceive reality had to be counted as one of the native powers of the mind, and this power is not to be explicated by reference to representative ideas. The Theory of Ideas is, in fact, to be regarded as the principal source of Humean scepticism. Priestley, on the other hand, thought the Theory entirely innocent; on his view, Hume's scepticism stemmed from his theory of causation and causal reasoning. For Reid, Hume's 'destruction' of causal relations is only one casualty in the general 'destruction of worlds' produced by the Theory of Ideas.

Reid appealed to common sense to support his belief in the mind's ability to perceive reality directly. In Priestley's eyes, this appeal is itself a manoeuvre fraught with sceptical implications. It disputed the sufficiency of scientific reasoning to furnish us with a realist world-view, and thereby compelled us to regard as knowledge a lot of mere 'instinctive persuasions, depending upon the arbitrary constitution of our nature' (III, 71). He allows that, if science is to be possible, some propositions must be taken as self-evident and foundational, but he confines self-evidence to analytical propositions—subject and predicate must be 'different names for the same thing' (III, 17). The elementary propositions of mathematics ('twice two is four') fall within this category, but the other sciences—metaphysics, morals, theology, natural science and politics—can produce no comparable 'elementary propositions' which can be accepted as self-evident.² According to Priestley, Reid's relatively circumscribed appeal to common sense inevitably leads his successors, Beattie and Oswald, to enlarge its jurisdiction to include 'the primary truths of religion' and the evidences of Christianity (Oswald) or all truth ('that to us is truth which we *feel* that we must believe', he quotes from Beattie [III, 72]).

² George Campbell was quick to observe that Priestley had failed to supply any criterion for distinguishing acceptable self-evidence, nor had he given any non-mathematical examples of it. Cf. *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (London, 1850), 39.

Only a part of Reid's *Inquiry* consists of assertions based on self-evidence or common sense. That there is no external world is self-evidently false, Reid argues; but that 'ideas' do not exist is not self-evident. Reid's argument against the existence of ideas depends in part on his claim that belief in ideas leads to an 'absurd' denial of external existence: put this way, the argument is designed to give pause to any followers of Hume and Berkeley who value common sense. But against the followers of Locke, his argument has to consist of a demonstration that belief in ideas *does* entail a denial of matter, and this side of Reid is more difficult to reconstruct. Reid believes that this demonstration has already been performed by Berkeley and Hume, and he takes the demonstration, together with the argument from common sense, as constituting a *reductio ad absurdum* of the Theory of Ideas. Priestley's purpose is to show that Reid's 'demonstration' is a failure. The Theory of Ideas is, in his opinion, entirely innocent of the sceptical progeny Reid accused it of fathering. Reid's appeal to common sense is not only dangerous; it is also unnecessary.

The Reid-Priestley debate about ideas has a number of aspects, but it revolves around a central proposition: that sensations and ideas (if ideas exist) do not resemble the qualities of external objects. Reid thinks this is a truth discovered by Berkeley and Hume, which served as the 'innocent mother' when the Theory of Ideas begat the sceptical denial of external reality. Throughout the *Inquiry* Reid also assumed that ideas *must* resemble objects if they are to represent them; for him, then, ideas must be *images* of external things.³ The main point in Priestley's *Examination* is his denial that ideas must resemble what they represent. In arguing thus, he openly concedes that they do not resemble their objects. Reid, he says, has

suffered himself to be misled . . . merely by philosophers happening to call ideas the *images* of external things; as if this was not known to be a figurative expression denoting not that the actual shapes of things were delineated on the brain, or upon the mind, but only that impressions of some kind or other were conveyed to the mind by means of the organs of sense and their corresponding nerves, and that between these impressions and the sensations existing in the mind there is a real and necessary, though at present an unknown connexion (III, 36).

Priestley is defending the Lockean claim that 'ideas' mediate perceptions. Lockean mediation is usually thought of as twofold: 'ideas' both represent their objects and they stand as part of a causal explanation of perception. Perception is to be thought of as the outcome of the causal sequence object—

³ On this aspect of Reid see Selwyn Grave, "The 'Theory of Ideas'" in *Thomas Reid: Critical Interpretations*, eds. Stephen F. Barker and Tom L. Beauchamp (Philadelphia, 1976), 55–61.

(physiological) impression-sensation or idea. In defending ideas, Priestley defends this causal theory, and he seems to assume that by so doing the representation issue is also satisfied. He does, indeed, talk about two aspects of mediation in the first two (of six) 'fallacies' which he sees as 'the principal source of [Reid's] mistakes', but these aspects are both presented in causal rather than representational terms.

- (1) Because he cannot perceive any resemblance between objects and ideas, he concludes that the one cannot produce the other.
- (2) Because he cannot perceive any necessary connexions between sensations and the objects of them, and therefore cannot absolutely demonstrate the reality of external objects, or even of the mind itself, by the doctrine of ideas, he rejects that doctrine altogether, and has recourse to arbitrary instincts (III, 34).

The first point here shows that Priestley thought Reid's denial of likeness between objects and ideas was aimed at refuting the causal rather than the representational aspect of mediation.

The second point highlights a different dimension of the debate about ideas. The *Inquiry* contains a subsidiary attack on the Theory of Ideas which turns not on the issue of resemblance between objects and ideas but on conditions governing causal relations between body and mind. Reid's 'resemblance' argument can be phrased as running: 'no representation without resemblance'. His subsidiary argument claims that we can only speak of causal relations between two entities when we can discern the mechanism of 'necessary connexion' between cause and effect. Priestley quotes Reid: 'We are inspired by the sensation, and we are inspired by the corresponding perception, by means unknown.'⁴ For Reid, we cannot know that objects cause ideas because we do not know of any means by which they do so. Priestley thought this argument fallacious. Priestley and Reid disagree about perception partly because they dispute whether ideas must be images, but also because they dispute whether it is necessary to know the mechanism by which a putative cause produces its effect.

⁴ *The Works of Thomas Reid*, ed. W. Hamilton, 7th ed., 2 Vols (Edinburgh, 1872), I, 188. Reid is certainly occasionalist with regard to physical transactions. In nature, he says, 'we neither perceive the agent nor the power, but the change only . . .' Real efficiency belongs only to the 'metaphysical cause', 'the agent behind the scene', which for him must be supernatural agency. *Ibid.*, II, 523. His denial of physical action on mind is similarly inspired. Reid, however, felt no doubts about the reality of mind's action on matter.

However, while it is easy to distinguish between these two arguments in the *Inquiry*, Priestley's way of handling the arguments blurs the distinction between them, even as he talks about Reid's 'two fallacies'. He reads 'no representation without resemblance' as tantamount to 'no causal relations without resemblance'. In this way the first argument becomes, like the second, a causal argument. And, for Reid, the second argument rests on the assumption that mind and body are so dissimilar that there *could* be no intervening mechanism by means of which they could interact. Both arguments, then, involve the question of resemblance. Priestley contends that both lack of resemblance between cause and effect, and ignorance of mechanisms, is no barrier to knowledge of causation.

The disagreement between Reid and Priestley about mechanisms affects not only their attitude to the causal theory of perception: it is also fundamental to their positions for and against free-will. (Priestley will argue that 'correspondences' show motives to be causally bound to actions, just as objects are bound to ideas.) In the absence (as he thinks) of a well-authenticated mechanism of perception, Reid feels entitled to claim that the 'images' allegedly transmitted by the nerves are mere fictions, of no evidential value. Hartley's theory of nervous 'vibrations' is likewise dismissed as conjectural. He adds that these 'theories' are equally lacking in explanatory force: 'If any man will show how the mind may perceive images in the grain, I will undertake to explain how it may perceive the most distant objects'.⁵ On Priestley's account of causal reasoning, these objections carry no weight. The 'correspondences' between objects and sensations provide evidence of causation which cannot be overruled by gaps in our understanding of the perceptual process.

I know . . . that the eye is the instrument of vision, because without it nothing can be seen . . . I am equally certain that the brain is necessary to all perception because if that be disordered, thinking either entirely ceases, or is proportionably disturbed (III, 38).

The philosopher is entitled to fashion hypotheses about the causal mechanism, and these cannot be dismissed if they 'suit the phenomena' (*ibid.*). It is interesting to note in passing that Reid's rhetoric against ideas—'unphilosophical', 'no foundation in fact or observation', etc.—corresponds closely to Priestley's language against the soul in *Matter and Spirit*. The difference between them is that for Priestley, unlike Reid, not all conjectures are unphilosophical. Priestley is committed to the view that ideas are, but the soul is not, a philosophical conjecture. A philosophical conjecture is one which conforms to the first two of Newton's 'Rules of Reasoning in

⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 157; quoted by Priestley at III, 38.

Philosophy', namely, 'We are to admit no more causes of natural things than such as are both true and sufficient to explain their appearances', and, 'to the same natural effects we must, as far as possible, assign the same causes' (Motte's translation).

Priestley's view of causal reasoning rules out, for him, the possibility of occasionalism or parallelism: we know that mind and body do interact. Reid's different view makes the denial of interaction a possibility. Priestley's two main points against Reid—Reid's first two 'fallacies'—are seen by him as nullifying the force of the *Inquiry*, but his *examination* also mounts a counter-offensive which seeks to drive Reid into the occasionalist camp, or, further still, into idealism. It is from this counter-offensive that Priestley's early materialism largely derives. In a section entitled 'Mr Locke's Doctrine not so favourable to Berkeley's Theory as Dr Reid's', he assembles various passages from the *Inquiry* where Reid approaches occasionalism. In these passages Reid's dualism is so absolute as to make interaction doubtful. Mind and body are so different, Reid says, that 'we can find no handle by which one may lay hold of the other' (III, 48).⁶ And, following Berkeley, he asserts that 'sensations and ideas in our minds can resemble nothing but sensations and ideas in other minds' (ibid.).⁷ Dissimilarity has here become not a contingent fact, discovered by careful attention to the phenomenology of sensations, but a necessity, consequent upon the nature of the mind and matter. Priestley quotes a third passage which goes to the source of Reid's dualism: 'I take it for granted, upon the testimony of common sense, that my mind is a substance . . . and my reason convinces me that it is an unextended and indivisible substance; and hence I infer that there cannot be in it anything that resembles extension' (III, 47).⁸ Reid's dualism, it seems, is based on the traditional contrast between matter's complexity and mind's 'simplicity'. Substances so dissimilar, he is inclined to suggest, are unable to interact; and if Reid himself hesitates to draw this conclusion, Priestley will draw it for him.

Priestley goes on to argue that this 'occasionalism' leads readily to Berkeley's idealism. His reasoning here rests on the principle which underlies the later materialism of *Matter and Spirit*, the principle of simplicity as embodied in Rule I of Newton's 'Rules of Reasoning'. If all our perceptions and thoughts would remain exactly as they are if matter did not exist, then belief in a material world is otiose. If occasionalism is true, then the external world,

⁶ Ibid., 187.

⁷ Ibid., 132.

⁸ Ibid., 210.

can be of no proper use to give us sensations and ideas. It must be [God] himself who impresses our minds with the notices of external things, without any real instrumentality of their own; so that the external world is really a superfluity in the creation (III, 47).

Deny interaction and it follows that 'this external world, which has been the subject of so much controversy, can have no existence', for a wise God would create nothing superfluous.

Priestley's 'counter-offensive' rests not just on the principle of simplicity, but also on the proposition that interaction between dissimilars is impossible. By now it may be beginning to appear that this proposition conflicts with his whole defence of the Theory of Ideas, but this apparent conflict can be examined in a moment. The proposition also forms the basis of Priestley's early materialism, and we can now see how this materialism followed from his encounter with Reid. Priestley was willing to regard Berkeley's idealism as a serious option—he could not dismiss it as contrary to common sense. He tells us that 'when I first entered upon metaphysical inquiries, I thought that either the *material* or *immaterial* part of the universal system was superfluous' (III, 201), and Reid's *Inquiry* seems to have returned him to the same point. Despite the problem of interaction, Priestley could not deny that interactions between mind and matter did occur. It is, for him, more certain that there are causal relations between matter and mind than that the mind is or is not material (III, 154), whereas for Reid the mind's immateriality is the fundamental certainty. The Theory of Ideas itself requires that there is a material world producing ideas in the mind. The causal theory of perception, and the theory of causal reasoning underlying it, are Priestley's primary concerns; to protect them involves rejecting idealism. But beyond this, he thinks that the principle of simplicity can also be enlisted against idealism. The chief defect of Berkeley's scheme is that it supposes a multitude of divine interpositions which, while not impossible, is not 'consonant to the course of nature in other respects' (III, 23). The view that ideas are caused by their objects 'is recommended by the same simplicity that recommends every other philosophical theory, and needs no other evidence whatever'. It 'exhibits particular appearances as arising from general laws, which is agreeable to everything else we observe (ibid.)'. Realism is, then, a superior scientific theory.

Far from the Theory of Ideas leading to Berkeley's 'scepticism' (as Reid thought), the Theory on Priestley's view, entails the falsity of idealism, and, further, Reid's denial of the Theory leads to idealism. But having thus tried to turn the tables on Reid, Priestley's own opinions also underwent a reversal. The problem of interaction between dissimilars was so great that if it was not alleviated, idealism would retain a measure of appeal. Interaction seemed impossible, and idealism seemed incompatible with the realism assumed by

the Theory of Ideas. Priestley, then, had no alternative but to declare himself a materialist. No problem is presented by interaction between brain and body.

Two other difficulties did immediately present themselves: if the mind is the brain, are ideas also material? And, are there any *a priori* objections to identifying the mind with the brain? On the first point, Priestley took Hartley as his authority; on the second, Locke. He suggests that ideas no more resemble their objects than the stroke of a plectrum resembles the sound it produces. If Reid wishes to deny that objects cause ideas, then he must also deny that the stroke produces the sound.

The transferring of this comparison to the doctrine of ideas is very easy. If, as Dr Hartley supposes, the nerves and brain be a vibrating substance, the analogy will hold very nearly; all sensations and ideas being vibrations in that substance, and all that is properly unknown in the business being the simple power in the mind to perceive, or be affected by, those vibrations. And if, as Locke and others suppose, matter itself may be indued with that sentient power, even that difficulty, as far as the present problem is concerned, is removed (III, 36-7).

The points were to present more difficulty than Priestley realized: he was to equivocate later about whether ideas are merely brain-processes; and he was to be troubled by the question of how matter might think.

It remains to return to the apparent contradiction running through the *Examination*, both sides of which contribute to the formation of Priestley's materialism. In the defence of ideas he comments that 'it is impossible to say *how* [the nerves and brain] act upon the mind, or the mind upon them'—but, he adds, this is no ground for denying that they *do* interact. To reason thus would end in utter scepticism; by such sceptical reasoning 'we may deny every principle in nature' (III, 36). The implication is that science frequently makes progress despite an ignorance of mechanisms. And yet, when we come to the counter-attack on Reid, he asks, to reinforce the problem of interaction, 'how can any thing act upon another but by means of some common property?' (III, 47). The implication here is that the absence of a mechanism makes causal relations between matter and spirit impossible.

Priestley says no more than this, and his commentators have not pursued the matter. However, the 'contradiction' is only apparent. Priestley can be paraphrased as follows: Where we know *a priori* that there can be no mechanisms (as in the case of matter and spirit), there causation can be safely denied. Where we are simply ignorant of any mechanism, there knowledge of causation is a possibility. The difficulty in Priestley's case lies not at the level of these principles of causal reasoning, but at the point where he claims, while

still trying to be neutral about the nature of mind, that 'correspondences' show that objects do cause ideas.

Clearly, if objects are, and ideas are not material, then (for him) objects cannot cause ideas. He is not entitled to adopt even a temporary stance of neutrality towards the ontological question. He wants to claim we can know that objects cause ideas without knowing how they do so, but his own principles require him to show that a mechanism is at least possible in the case, and only materialism (or idealism) can guarantee this. It is not only his counter-attack on Reid that requires him to adopt materialism; his defence of the Theory of Ideas also requires it. The fact that he seems unaware of this suggests no more than that the *Examination* records his transition to materialism.

One other difficulty remains. It is a basic point in Priestley's defence of ideas that, *contra* Reid, ideas need not resemble their objects. However, his newly-adopted materialism holds that objects and ideas are not ontologically dissimilar. One is left to conclude that the dissimilarity is of a different kind, presumably qualitative or configurational dissimilarity. It is true that Reid argues (in what we have termed his subsidiary attack on ideas⁹) from an ontological dissimilarity between objects and ideas to the conclusion that ideas cannot resemble or represent objects in any way, but we can presume that for Priestley ontological dissimilarity is not the only kind of dissimilarity.

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⁹ See *ibid.*

JEREMY BENTHAM ON RICHARD PRICE

Yoshio Nagai

The following passages are to be found in the Bentham MSS. at the Library of University College, London, Box 153a, folder 6, sheets 228–234, the cover of which reads as follows: 'Subject: Poor Relief, Poor Plan; Entitled: Independent Poor—partial Relief; Probable date: 1796'. The latter part of them, which is entitled 'Note', reappears in two pages of Portfolio No. 149, Folder No. 30, pp. 331–332, with slight differences from the 1796 document; it is not in Bentham's hand. These two pages are numbered 5 and 6, but pages 1–4 are missing. The contents of this folder which is labelled 'Miscellaneous' are various, and the probable date of their composition is presumed to be 'chiefly c. 1831'.

If these two probable dates, that is, 1796 and 1831, are not far removed from the actual ones, these two manuscripts show that Bentham's views on Richard Price did not change over thirty-five years. The phrases in parenthesis were added as alternative wordings above the original sentences.

These passages were first written in the period when Bentham was concentrating mainly on the pauper problem, and it has been said that a three year period, including the year 1796, marks 'a certain deviation from the main direction of Bentham's economic studies'.* They make it clear how Price was viewed by a leader of the intellectuals of the next generation, but Bentham was also saying something about himself. At this date he thought of himself as a 'reformer or improver', but adds that he was, in general, more of a 'Puffer' than a 'Croaker'. These passages should, therefore, be of interest to Bentham scholars as well as to Price scholars.

Dr. John Dinwiddy and Miss Claire H. Gobbi of the Bentham Project, University College, London, kindly collated and revised my text and corrected errors in it. It was thanks to their kind assistance that many illegible words became readable, and I am most indebted to them.

I owe special thanks to the Librarians of University College, London, especially to those of the Manuscript and Rare Books Department, who kindly let me have access to Bentham's manuscripts.

* William Stark, *Introduction to the economic writings of Jeremy Bentham*, II, 7.

The Croaker and the Carper

The Croaker is a sort of man, who overlooking (shutting his eyes against) the circumstances of felicity observable in a society, fixes his eyes (holds up to view) exclusively on the circumstances of infelicity, those which are correlative to and inseparable from the several circumstances of preponderant felicity not excepted. In the best bargain that you ever made in the pecuniary line you must have been something out of pocket: that something is the part, and the only part of the bargain which the Croaker will choose to entertain you with: if you make cent per cent, there must still have been a disbursement on your part: this disbursement your Croaker will place to the account either of misfortune and extravagance, saying nothing (neither saying anything) nor choosing to hear any thing of the receipt.

If an inventory were given of the several circumstances of disadvantage inseparably attendant on the several circumstances of advantage constituting (-tutive of) the felicity of a prosperous society, this inventory would be (if compleat) a compleat catalogue of the different Croaking Songs, as they may be termed, which constitute the (literary) (operatical) stock of the Frogs who croak on the theatre of political economy. This exhibition of such inventory placed in this point of view, may be attended with considerable advantage (productive of some use) in the way of public (general) comfort and satisfaction: for when (once) a clear line of distinction is drawn between just regret on the one hand and croaking on the other, Croakers may become ashamed of their notes (songs), and if their (man's) own disorder be incurable, he may at least be induced by shame to abstain from disturbing others with his complaints.

Carping includes *croaking*: and every croaker either is already or, is apt to improve and ripen into a carper. The Croaker who is not a Carper if such a man there be, is the man who is infested with melancholy without anger: the Carper is the man whose melancholy has turned sower, and sharpened into anger. The Croaker broods over evils, without considering human action, or at least without considering the action of any human being in particular, as the cause. The Carper looks out for some human being (or set of human beings) in particular as the instrument, and considers his measures (agency) as the cause of every defalcation that can be found to take place (seen to be made) from the collective mass of general (national) prosperity: that is the governing body of the country, and in particular that pre-eminent person who under some such name as that of the minister is considered as being at the head of it.

The Puffer is the reverse (opposite) to and antagonist of the Carper. As (by) the Carper places as well every circumstance of positive (preponderant) infelicity as every draw back from the effect of a circumstance of felicity (is placed) to the account of the Minister in the way of blame, so (by) the Puffer

places to the same account every circumstance of prosperity that can be enumerated, whether in the respective production of those several circumstances it were or were not possible that the measures of the Minister should have had any the smallest share.

If the weather have been bad for the last year (twelve months), or what is much the same thing in other words if corn has been dear for the last year, the Carper throws upon the Minister the blame of it: if the weather has been good, or that is if corn has been cheap (that is if the weather has been favourable) during the same period, the Puffer gives the Minister the praise of it.

Humility (and the other modification of benevolence) and mildness join in confining a man within the pale (to the class) of Croakers: Pride, irascibility, and the several modifications of the malevolent affection draw him up into the class of Carpers.

Marks of simple croaking are almost confined to books and pamphlets: Carping in all its armoury fills up the whole measures (pervades the whole texture) of an Opposition newspaper. The frequency or rather perpetuity of (provocation and) irritation keeps his (the malignant) passions worked up to the highest pitch. The grand (arch) and universal grievance, the great cause of every thing that happens amiss (the great cause of cloudy wether and bad seasons and taxes) is that his idol is out of place: and as this cause is in a state of perpetual existence (continually exists), and every incident that occurs serves to put the carper in mind of it hence the discharges of bile are as copious and as incessant as the flowing of the Thames.

Tho carping at this or that object has been the business of my whole life (for every would be reformer or improver is por tanto as far as he goes a Carper) yet as to the sum of things, or to the point of view in which I have never ceased to regard the sum of things, I have always had more of the Puffer in me than the Carper (lent more towards the puffing-side): that is if a name taken from the habit of exaggeration must be taken and the endeavours I have always used to rank myself in the class of impartial estimators should be denied.

Note¹

The late Dr. Price of a mild temper (strict probity) and amiable (gentle) manners in private life, but sowered by a particular cast (leaven) of theology, was originally but a Croaker, though one of the most determined and

¹ In Bentham MSS. 153a this word is in pencil.

conspicuous of that tribe. Every thing (according to the observations and calculations of this mathematician) was running down the road to ruin, always with infinite and always with infinitely accelerated velocity. In the main he confined himself to croaking: the misery was always extreme, but² (and though the blame was in the same ratio yet) the cause of it was rather in the wretched nature of fallen man, than in any particular individual of the fallen race. The tendency of his writings (vague confused and superficial politics) was rather to make a man out of humour with himself and with every body around him (in general), than with the King or the Minister or any such person in particular. But in the exultation produced by the bright (really flattering) prospects that accompanied the first opening of the French Revolution, he emerged from the Class of Croakers, and took his seat in the class of Carpers, and Carpers of the first order, when he began talking of "cashiering" and proposed to transfer the process (operation) from *Officers* to "*Kings*".

On the other side it was observed that his³ (the size of his wig was commented) upon, and as rational a refutation as many I have seen of many of his writings was contained in the appellation of Dr. Big-wig.

Tho' croaking may exist without carping, yet wherever the croaker is manifest (stands confessed), a disposition (a propensity) to carping, and to (a sort of)⁴ carping of the most furious (violent) order is always to be suspected (apprehended). Having laid down in sober sadness (of every one)⁵ what Swift and Arbuthnot had advanced in pleasantry (in relation to Christians)⁶ that every person (man)⁷ consists of two persons whose life is spent in playing at (one continued game of) Leap-Frog⁸, and having given such a definition of liberty as excludes from the possession of it every human being that ever existed, and having given us to understand that all men not possessed of liberty according to that definition of it are slaves, it follows that all Englishmen are slaves. But when a man finds himself a slave, especially a

² Bentham MSS. 149/331-2 lack this word.

³ Bentham MSS. 149/331-2 read as follows; On the other side the size of his wig was commented upon . . . (There is a gap here in original MS 153a.)

⁴ Bentham MSS. 149/331-2 lack these three words.

⁵ Bentham MSS. 149/331-2 lack these three words.

⁶ In Bentham MSS. 149/331-2 these four words were added in brackets.

⁷ In Bentham MSS. 153a this word is in pencil.

⁸ 'leap-frog' in Bentham MSS. 149/331-2.

slave without any default of his, the best thing he can do, and the sooner the better as is plainly enough insinuated is to (start up) shake off his chains, and if any other man attempts to stop him beat his brains out.

NAGOYA UNIVERSITY

George Cadogan Morgan at Oxford

Dr. D.A. Rees of Jesus College, Oxford sends the following extract from the volume of Tutorage Lists for Jesus College for the years 1731 to 1774.¹ This extract, which throws further light on the length of Morgan's stay at Oxford,² is from the list of payments made to tutors under the joint heading, Thomas and Nicholl:

Mr George Cadogan Morgan	
St Thos 71	00-15-00
L.D.	00-15-00
Mid ^{sr} Q ^r - ½Q ^r	00-10-00

Dr Rees adds the following notes. The two tutors were Edward Thomas (of Glamorgan) who was a Fellow from 1762 to 1778, and Ilyd Nicholl (also of Glamorgan) who was a Fellow from 1765 to 1780. They both signed at the foot of the list as having received their money on 26 May 1772. The interpretation of the document seems to be that two payments of 15s were made, one for the quarter ending on St. Thomas's Day, 1771, viz. 21st Dec., and the other for the quarter ending on Lady Day, 1772, viz. 25th Mar., and that a further payment of 10s. was made for part of the quarter ending at Midsummer. Since Morgan was not charged for the whole of this quarter, and since his name does not reappear in the lists, it would seem as though he ceased to be a student at Jesus College at some point in the Midsummer quarter of 1772.

¹ The ms. of this document is now at the Bodleian Library (MS. D.D. Jesus College, b 105).

² See D.O. Thomas, 'George Cadogan Morgan', *The Price Priestley Newsletter*, No. 3 (1979), 54.
ENLIGHTENMENT AND DISSENT Number 1, 1982

**RICHARD PRICE: A SKETCH OF PROPOSALS FOR DISCHARGING
THE PUBLIC DEBTS, SECURING PUBLIC LIBERTY, AND
PRESERVING THE STATE**

D.O. Thomas

Source:

The ms. of this document is in the Shelburne Papers, vol. 117, fos. 43–63, at the William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan. I wish to thank Mr. John C. Dann, Director of the William L. Clements Library, for his kindness in giving me permission to publish it.

Date of Composition:

Internal evidence indicates that this paper was written in 1774.¹ In the concluding footnote Price writes, 'In seven years nineteen millions 4 per cent Consolidated will sink to three per cent'; in *Additional observations* he lists 'Consolidated 4 per cent annuities' under Bank Annuities and notes that, 'these annuities fall to three per cent in January, 1781'.² If we can assume that he was referring to the same stock in both instances we can conclude that this paper was written in 1774. This conjecture is strengthened by comparing another passage from *Additional observations* in which Price refers to 'four millions and a half raised in 1758, by creating a capital of four millions and a half bearing 3 per cent with an annuity of half per cent annexed for 24 years'³ with the following passage from 'A Sketch', 'In eight years four millions and a half 3½ per cent Annuities will sink also to 3 per cent'. When Price wrote this paper 1782 was eight years away.

If this contention holds good then Shelburne's letter to Price dated 26 December 1774 can be read as an acknowledgement of the receipt of this paper and as a comment on Price's proposals for safe-guarding the integrity of the Sinking Fund. Shelburne wrote,

I have read with attention however the last paper, which you were so good to give me, and intend to read it 3 or 4 times more before I have the

¹ In *Shelburne and reform* Professor John Norris gives 1781 as the year in which this paper was written (op. cit., (London, 1961), 106).

² *Additional observations* (London, 1774), 120.

³ *Ibid.*, 101.

pleasure of seeing you. In the mean time there is only one particular observation which occurs (sic) to me. Is it not to be wished that nothing should be left to the discretion of the Commissioners, and that they could be made merely ministerial. It's a vast object to secure the gradual diminution of our Debts, but it will lessen the excellence of this measure, if it admits of that intolerable evil, Stockjobbing.⁴

In the course of his paper Price refers to Arthur Young's criticism of the view propounded by Locke, Decker, and Mirabeau that the burden of taxation falls ultimately upon the land. This criticism appeared in Young's *Political arithmetic*⁵ which was listed under new publications in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in June 1774.⁶ It would appear, therefore, that it was in the latter half of 1774 that Price composed this paper.

Price and Shelburne:

According to William Morgan, Price and Shelburne first met in 1769.⁷ Their meeting was a consequence of Shelburne's reading Price's *Four dissertations* not long after the death of his first wife. Shelburne found consolation in reading the dissertations 'On Providence' and 'On the Reasons for expecting that Virtuous Men shall meet after Death in a State of Happiness' and asked Mrs. Montagu to arrange an interview, which eventually took place at Price's home at Newington Green. Morgan was in error in dating this first meeting in 1769, an error which unfortunately led Shelburne's biographer, Lord Fitzmaurice, to dismiss the account as untrue on the grounds that Lady Shelburne's death did not occur until January 1771.⁸ But if we amend the date of the first meeting to May 1771, a date for which there is independent evidence,⁹ then the rest of Morgan's story can still stand. However this may have been, Price soon entered the 'Bowood Group', the informal gathering of intellectuals and professional men who met at

⁴ MS. American Philosophical Society. See also *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 2nd ser. 1903, vol. xvii (Boston, 1903), 273.

⁵ Arthur Young, *Political arithmetic containing observations on the present state of Great Britain; and the principles of her policy in the encouragement of agriculture* (London, 1774), 209–66.

⁶ Op. cit., vol. XLIV (1774), 277.

⁷ William Morgan, *Memoirs of the life of the Rev. Richard Price, D.D. F.R.S.* (London, 1815), 31, 32.

⁸ Lord Fitzmaurice, *Life of William, Earl of Shelburne*, 2nd edn. (London, 1912), I, 431–2.

⁹ See R.P. to Mrs. Montagu, 22 Mar. 1771, MS. Huntington Library, San Marino, California; and R.P. to the Earl of Shelburne, 22 May 1771, MS. Bowood.

Shelburne's estate at Bowood in Wiltshire or at his house in Berkeley Square and advised him on a wide range of subjects. In some ways this circle was an eighteenth century form of 'think tank' which kept Shelburne abreast of developments in the professions, at the bar, in the armed forces, in the Church, and which kept him well informed as to current opinion on economic and financial matters. This group included Issac Barré, John Dunning (later Lord Ashburton), Joseph Priestley, Jonathan Shipley, Bishop of St. Asaph, and, at later periods, Samuel Romilly and Jeremy Bentham. Price prepared several papers for Shelburne—on toleration and the extension of legal recognition of the freedom of worship,¹⁰ on the relations between Britain and America,¹¹ on the Regency crisis,¹² but mainly on financial matters, particularly on the most efficacious way of raising government loans, and on his favourite project, the revival of Sinking Fund procedures for the redemption of the National Debt. His 'A Sketch' is one of these. Shelburne helped Price by supplying him with information from official statistics, both when he was in opposition and during the short period when he was in office, and by being his patron—the third and subsequent editions of *Observations on reversionary payments* were dedicated to him. Both at Bowood and at Berkeley Square Price had more opportunities to meet the famous and the learned than might otherwise have fallen to his lot: it was through Shelburne, for example, that he had access to Chatham, and it was at Shelburne's house that he first met the Abbé André Morellet when the latter visited England in the summer of 1772.¹³ Morellet became interested in Price's views on economics, finance and population, concerned himself in securing a translation into French of Price's *Observations on reversionary payments*—a project that does not, however, seem to have come to fruition¹⁴—and sent Price, through Shelburne, a copy of his *Réfutation de l'ouvrage qui a pour titre: 'Dialogue sur le commerce des bleds'* in which he criticized the work of the Abbé Galiani.¹⁵ A copy of Morellet's work remained in Price's library until it was sold in 1798.

¹⁰ D.O. Thomas, 'Proposed Protest concerning Dissenters: Richard Price and the Earl of Chatham', *T.U.H.S.*, vol. XVI, No. 2 (Oct. 1976), 49–62.

¹¹ Richard Price, 'Rough Draft of a petition on American Affairs', Shelburne Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, vol. 88, fos. 36–44.

¹² D.O. Thomas, 'Richard Price's Journal', *The National Library of Wales Journal*, vol. XXI, No. 4 (Winter, 1980), 400.

¹³ Carl B. Cone, *Torchbearer of freedom* (Lexington, 1952), 58.

¹⁴ *Lettres de l'Abbé Morellet à Lord Shelburne, 1772–1803*, ed. Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice (Paris, 1898), 24.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

Price's argument and sources:

From the beginning of his involvement with the problems of national finance Price's attention was dominated by the fear of national bankruptcy. He was so profoundly convinced that a great disaster lay ahead if vigorous measures were not taken to avert it, that he felt it his duty to warn the public of the dangers. He devoted a chapter to the need for reform and to advocating the reinvigoration of Sinking Fund procedures in *Observations on reversionary payments* (1771) and this was followed by a whole pamphlet on the topic, *An appeal to the public on the subject of the National Debt* (1772). In these works he was mainly concerned with the history of the Sinking Fund, the various abuses to which it had been subjected since its inception, and detailed recommendations for its revitalization. In 'A Sketch', however, his purpose is rather different: here he is concerned with the merits of two alternative programmes for reforming the system of taxation and raising the substantial surplus of revenue that would be required for successful Sinking Fund operations. The first of these schemes, in theory excellent, elegant and intellectually exciting, though not, he confessed, practical in the situation to which he addressed himself, was the introduction of a single tax system. Whatever form it took—whether an income tax, a poll tax, or a window tax—it would have a great deal to commend it. By simplifying a chaotic jumble it would reduce the cost of collecting taxes, thereby making the whole system less onerous and facilitating a more equitable distribution of the burdens. By abolishing customs and excise it would liberalize internal and external trade and make Britain a free port. Above all, by reducing the number of Revenue Officers it would reduce the 'influence' available to the Crown and thereby make a significant contribution to the preservation of public liberty.

Price's references to 'the Oeconomical writers in France' raise the question whether he was directly influenced by the Physiocrats in the advice he gave to Shelburne. The correspondences between his ideas and those of Quesnay, Mirabeau and Dupont de Nemours, in particular his approval of the single tax system and of the attempts to liberalize internal and external trade, his admiration for the simple rural life, far removed from the sophistication and the corruption of urban centres, and, above all, his deep-seated conviction that the forms of liberty could only be defended by reducing the numbers of those in the employment of the Crown, seem to indicate that he may have derived some of his ideas from them. There is, however, very little evidence to show that at this stage in his career Price was directly acquainted with the works of the Physiocrats. While there is plenty of evidence that he was steeped in the works of British economists, including those of Davenant, Locke, Decker, Steuart, and Young, the references to works on economic and financial matters by French authors published before 1774 are meagre. The catalogue

of Price's library—although as Richard Brinkley has shown¹⁶ this document does not provide conclusive evidence of what was or was not in his possession—tends as far as it can be relied upon to confirm this impression. While it established that Price possessed works by Decker, Joshua Gee, Michael Combrune, Bishop Fleetwood, Timothy Cunningham, Steuart, Davenant, and Young, the only works by French authors on economic and financial matters listed in it are J.C.A. Helvétius, *Idée generale de l'oeconomie animale* (Paris, 1722), C. de Ferrare du Tot, *Réflexions politiques sur les finances* (La Haye, 1738), a work listed as *Observations oeconomiques de Berne* (1766),¹⁷ and a copy of Morellet's refutation of the Abbé Galiani which, as I have noted, was a gift from the author. Although Price would have learnt a great deal from conversations with the Abbé Morellet—and it has to be remembered that Shelburne himself had conceded that Morellet had 'liberalized' his ideas¹⁸—perhaps it is not too fanciful to suggest that all the main ideas that Price puts forward in this paper had been formed in reading British authors—in particular the works of Locke and Davenant, Decker and Steuart, and even a prominent critic of the Physiocrats, Arthur Young—and that what he heard and read about the Physiocrats came in the main to lend an added weight to established beliefs.

Although he could have wished that the single tax system was practical in the situation for which he prescribed, Price realized that the Government would have to fall back on other expedients for realizing the substantial annual surplus that the operation of the Sinking Fund required. His chief recommendation was that amicable relations should be restored between the Mother Country and the American colonies by returning to the policies that obtained before the passing of the Stamp Act. This would enable considerable reductions to be made in the expenditure on the armed forces. Further economies could be achieved by the abolition of sinecures and pensions, and additions to the revenue could be secured by heavy taxation of luxuries. Here Price was anticipating the ideas that he was to elaborate in greater detail in *Observations on the nature of civil liberty* (1776) and in *Additional observations* (1777).

¹⁶ R. Brinkley, 'The Library of Richard Price', *The Price Priestley Newsletter*, No. 4 (1980), 4–15.

¹⁷ Probably *Essais sur l'esprit de la législation favorable à l'agriculture à la population, au commerce, aux arts, aux métiers . . .* (By J. Bertrand, B. Carrard, G. Seigneux de Correvoon and A. Pagan), reprinted from the *Mémoires et observations* for 1765 (Paris, 1766).

¹⁸ Fitzmaurice, I, 430.

Editorial conventions:

The text of Price's manuscript has been very lightly edited, mainly with a view to removing Price's inconsistencies in spelling and punctuation, and to make the text more readable. In compositions of this kind Price made lavish use of dashes: most of these have been replaced by stops. He also used abbreviations with superscripts, e.g. L^d for Lord: these have been extended, and his use of other abbreviations has been standardized. His representations of figures has also been regularized. Like many of his contemporaries Price was both prolific and eccentric in the use of capitals, and his use of different forms of 's' presents problems. Except where the sense clearly indicates that a capital is required, 's' is reproduced in the lower case. Otherwise, with but a few exceptions, Price's capitals are retained. Price appended a series of notes to the text which he indicated with a letter of the alphabet in lower case: these are reproduced where he placed them. The notes indicated by a figure in arabic are the editor's.

**A Sketch of Proposals for Discharging the Public Debts,
Securing Public Liberty, and Preserving the State**

[Price's prefatory note: The following imperfect sketch is humbly submitted to Lord Shelburne's perusal. It was undertaken from a regard to his desires; but it is not what he wishes for. The Author is indeed grown almost weary of this subject; and must leave all he has written upon it to be either followed or neglected just as time and events shall determine. R.P.]

It is wrong ever to despair of the state. Tho' we are far sunk into distress, tho' Luxury has undermined the foundations of public liberty and virtue, and the efforts of Patriotism are become little more than a scramble for places to gratify factious ambition, or to supply wants contracted by dissipation and extravagance, yet it may be hoped, that there are measures still practicable which may reinstate and save us. A Minister wise, honest and great, wanting nothing for himself, rich by frugality and simplicity of Life, superior to the indulgencies of luxury and the pomp of greatness, and ambitious only to serve his Country—such a minister may arise, and, by shewing himself the friend of the people, may introduce himself gradually into their confidence, and gain an ascendant in the state like to that which Lord Chatham once enjoyed. It is by *such a minister* that the measures necessary for our preservation must be carried into execution.

The first thing necessary to be done will be to put the kingdom into the way of being eased of that load of debts and taxes under which it is struggling, and which, if suffered to continue and to increase, cannot but some time or other

overwhelm our trade and our liberties. In order to this, it is necessary to provide a proper *surplus* in the National Revenue.¹⁹

There are two methods of doing this. One of them supposes the present system set aside, and a new one establish'd in its room. The other takes things as they are, and requires only certain new regulations and improvements in the present system of Taxation. The first, therefore, can scarcely be considered as practicable; but yet it is in theory so excellent, that I cannot help wasting a little time in giving an account of it.

It is well known what a monstrous Jumble, perplexing Trade and endangering public liberty, our present customs and excise are. These must be abolish'd, and the whole Revenue rais'd by *one* tax.^(a) This tax might be:

First, a pound rate (like the land tax) on all incomes. The income of the kingdom arising from land, labour, trade, employments, the Funds, etc. can scarcely be less than a hundred millions per ann. *One tenth*, therefore, of every one's income would raise the necessary revenue. But it is commonly reckoned that as the Revenue is now raised, one half of the price of all that is consumed in the kingdom is derived from the taxes. Let it be supposed to be no more than a fifth or a seventh and an amazing saving will arise.

Secondly, *A Poll Tax*. The number of persons above the age of 16 in the united kingdoms is probably about four millions. The sum of £2:10s per ann. from each of these would raise ten millions; and there is scarcely a person so poor that it would not be his interest to contribute the greatest part of this sum in order to be saved all the taxes on his beer, salt, leather, tea, bread, etc.

(a) A plan similar to that which will be here proposed has been for many years recommended with great zeal by the Oeconomical writers in *France*;²⁰ and it is said that the French Court is now entering upon measures for carrying it into execution.

¹⁹ In any assessment of Price's financial schemes it is very important to bear in mind this emphasis upon the need to secure a surplus of revenue over expenditure, especially as Price sometimes gives the impression that the nation's finances could be restored 'by borrowing only'. See R. Price, *Postscript to the state of the public debts* (London, 1784), 13–14; D.O. Thomas, *The honest mind* (Oxford, 1977), 238.

²⁰ Price does not name the writers he refers to as 'the Oeconomical writers in France', but he probably had the Physiocrats, Quesnay, Mirabeau, and Dupont de Nemours in mind. Mirabeau, for example, in *L'Ami des hommes* advocated the abolition of taxes on consumption in favour of a tax on the *net produit* of land.

Thirdly, *A tax upon Houses*. This is the tax proposed by *Sir Mathew Decker*.²¹ But it would be best to lay it jointly upon houses, windows, servants,²² etc., in order to proportion it to the different circumstances of different persons. There are at least ten millions^(b) of windows in the united kingdoms. Eight millions of these might, one with another, very well pay £1 per window; and this together with a rate upon houses varying from 10s to £100 according to the rank of the Housekeeper,^(c) his carriages, horses, servants, etc. would produce more than ten millions.

The advantages that would arise from such a reduction of all the taxes to one general and simple tax are more than can be easily enumerated.

First, it would, as I have already hinted, remove the confusion, embarrassment and distress arising from the multiplicity of our present taxes. In particular, it would exterminate that dreadful Chaos, the Custom-House.

Secondly, it would save far the greatest part of the present expences of collecting the Revenue.²⁴ These expences are near £700,000 per ann. Such a tax as has been proposed, would be collected at as little expence as the land Tax, and therefore above half a million per ann. would be gained by the public.

^(b) The number of houses charged to the window tax in *England* was in 1766—6,828,007.²³ No houses having less than seven windows were then charged.

^(c) The present tax upon Houses and windows produces between £300,000 and £400,000 per ann., and this increased and attended with the regulations here proposed might be substituted for all the taxes.

²¹ *Sir Matthew Decker, Serious considerations on the several high duties which the nation in general (as well as its trade in particular) labours under: with a proposal for preventing the running of goods, discharging the trader from any search, and raising all the publick supplies by one single tax* (London, 1743), 15. But although he was in favour of a tax on houses, Decker was averse to the window tax which he criticized in another essay entitled, *An essay on the causes of the decline of the foreign trade, consequently of the value of the lands of Britain, and on the means to restore both*, 2nd edn. (London, 1750). Decker argued that the houses of mechanics may have as many windows as a nobleman's seat, that houses in the modern Italian taste have fewer windows than older houses, and that a tax upon windows was in favour of the idle who shut out the light, while it penalized the industrious who could not work without it. (Op. cit., 6.)

²² Later in his career Price was to object to Pitt's introduction of a tax on female servants on the grounds that it would lay heavy burdens on large families. See *Richard Price to the Marquis of Lansdowne*, 2 June 1785. MS. Bowood.

²³ Price made an error here. In *An appeal*, 4th edn. (London, 1774), he gives the number of inhabited houses in charge as 678,915, and the number of uninhabitable chargeable as 25,628, giving a total of 704,543. (Op. cit., 86.)

²⁴ See *Decker, Serious considerations*, 31.

Thirdly, it would have no effect in raising the prices of any of the articles of consumption. When a tax is laid on any commodity, those who deal in it, and whose subsistence depends on the profits they make by it, are under a necessity of drawing back the tax (and also the interest of the money which they are obliged to advance upon the tax) by raising the price of the commodity; and this is commonly done beyond the^(d) proportion of the tax. The purchasers, likewise, of that commodity, finding its price advanced, are necessarily led to endeavour to reimburse themselves, by raising the prices of the commodities in which they deal. The Shoemaker finding his leather advanced by a tax, will demand more for the shoes which he makes; and if he finds his salt, his tea, and his beer likewise advanced, he will be led to put a still higher price upon shoes; and the *Farmer* finding his shoes, his beer, his tea, etc. advanced, will be led to demand more for corn; and the Shoemaker again, finding corn also advanced will be led to make a still further addition to the price of shoes.

Thus do taxes upon consumption, in their natural course operate, nor is it easy to say how far they spread. It has been reckoned, as I have before observed, that by operating in these ways, they increase the expences of living *one half*. But this, I believe, is a high degree of exaggeration. Let us suppose that, one with another, they are only a fifth of the price of the articles taxed; and that they add a *tenth* more (that is half their gross amount) by spreading and accumulating in the manner just described. Half the gross amount of the taxes is nearly five millions and a half; and this, therefore, will be the sum they will draw annually from the public over and above their neat amount and the charges of management. The method of taxation now proposed would, I have said, produce no such effect, and all this money would be saved.

When all are taxed *equally* in their *persons*, or their *incomes*, and will have less to spend, and therefore *less* must be given for every article of consumption. *Sellers* might indeed demand more for the commodities in which they deal, in order to draw back the sums taken from their incomes; but *Buyers* having equal sums taken from *them* would resist the demand with as much force as *Sellers* could make it. Nor would it be possible that an advance should take place unless it could be possible that *all* should spend more at the same time that all will have less to spend. Taxation draws money from the circle of traffic into a new channel, and provides new uses for it; and,

^(d) The Price of Porter was raised from 3d to 3½ per quart, that is a sixth of the price, on laying an additional tax upon it in 1760 of 3d per barrel. But this additional tax was really only a tenth or an eleventh of its price.

consequently, must leave so much the less in old channels^(e) and for other uses. This would produce its full effect in the circumstances now supposed, whereas taxes on consumption, not affecting the incomes of any except the dealers in the Articles taxed, their effect must be to increase prices in the manner that has been explained.

Fourthly, this mode of taxation would be more equitable than any other. In distant parts of the country there are many occupiers of land who, finding almost all they want supplied by their farms and going little to market, pay few or none of the taxes. These would be all obliged to contribute their proper share. But my chief reason for making the present observation is, that taxes on consumption when blended, as they are at present, with partial taxes on incomes, occasion a very unreasonable and oppressive *inequality*. For the affect of them must be to oblige some to pay double taxes. This is the case with every Landowner in this Kingdom. He is taxed in common with all others in his consumption, and he is further taxed in his income. It deserves particularly to be added that the taxes on consumption themselves fall more on Landowners than others. For those who subsist by traffic can drawback the increase of expence arising from the taxes by asking higher prices; but Landowners, and, in general, all who live on stated rents or salaries, have this out of their power.

Mr. Locke²⁵ and Sir Mathew Decker²⁶ and the *French* writers²⁷ have laid great stress on this observation; and it seems in the main a just observation,

^(e) For this reason the tendency of taxation, as such, is to sink all prices in proportion to its amount. The contrary effect arising from taxes and consumption is a forced and unnatural effect, producing embarrassment and distress. When a tax is laid on a commodity the dealer in it is, I have said, under a necessity of raising its price, it becomes easy to do this exorbitantly.

I cannot help adding on this occasion that prices in a kingdom (setting aside the effect of taxes on consumption) are in proportion, not merely to the quantity of money, but to the quantity of money taken jointly with the uses for it. Money is the measure of values, but if there are either more things to be valued, or the same things come oftener to be alienated, the quantity of money must increase in order to keep the prices the same. Consequently, tho' the money of a Kingdom should be doubled, yet if at the same time luxury, dissipation, and traffic are doubled, prices will remain the same.

This observation gives, perhaps, the reason why prices have not increased in this Kingdom in proportion to the prodigious increase of money and taxes in it; meaning by *money* not *coin* only, but all paper or whatever else passes in payment and circulates for any time as an equivalent to coin.

²⁵ See *Some considerations of the consequences of lowering the interest and raising the value of money*, Works (London, 1823), V, 55 and 60.

²⁶ Decker quoted Locke's *Some considerations* with approval. *An essay on the causes of the decline of the foreign trade*, 38, 49. See also Charles Davenant, Works (London, 1771), I, 77, 269.

²⁷ See, for example, the extracts from Quesnay's writings in R.L. Meek, *The economics of physiocracy* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1963), particularly pp. 193-202.

tho' it will not bear all the stress they have laid upon it, as, perhaps, Sir James Steuart²⁸ and Mr. Young²⁹ have shewn.

Fifthly, all the weight now thrown upon our Trade and Manufactures by our taxes would be taken off, and the Kingdom made a free Port.³⁰

Sixthly, all difficulty in finding out *Ways* and *Means* in war, would be removed. For in these circumstances no more would at any time be necessary than adding a quarter, a third or a half to the general tax; by which means, a war would require only a *present* exertion, without enfeebling the Kingdom afterwards, or leaving behind it any burdens. At present every war brings on burdens which remain till a new war brings on more burdens, which likewise remain till yet more are brought on. It is evident in what this must end. But farther, by this mode of taxation a sufficient surplus for gradually discharging the national debt might be easily obtained. And the national debt being discharged, the general tax would be reduced to *half*; and could never afterwards, even in *war*, be much more than it had been in *Peace*. In short, four or five millions per ann. would be immediately saved to the Kingdom; and consequently, even before the extinction of the public debt, the nation would not be more burdened in *War*, than it is now in *Peace*.

Seventhly, the nation would see and feel its taxes more; and therefore would be more attentive to the application of public money, and keep a more watchful eye over the conduct and the managers of its affairs.

But, eighthly, the main point is, that the cause of liberty would be essentially favoured, and the constitution restored, by delivering the Kingdom from that army of Revenue Officers^(f) now so hostile to it, by

^(f) Sir Mathew Decker proposes that they should have their salaries granted for life.³¹

²⁸ See Sir James Steuart, *An inquiry into the principles of political economy*, ed. A.S. Skinner (Edinburgh and London, 1966), II, 683.

²⁹ In *Political arithmetic* Arthur Young attacked the thesis advanced by Locke, Decker and the French 'oeconomical writers' that taxes on consumption are ultimately taxes on land. (Op. cit., 211.)

³⁰ Cf. Sir Matthew Decker, *An essay on the causes of the decline of the foreign trade*, 78, and *Serious considerations*, 31.

³¹ *Serious considerations*, 30.

abolishing the excise laws, and the destruction of that unbounded influence which the present taxes give to the Crown.³²

If there be any time when the establishment of such a plan as this can be an object of hope, it must be after a convulsion that shall overturn all government, destroy artificial wealth, and the means of corruption, reduce the Kingdom to poverty and simplicity, and set it upon new and free ground. Such a convulsion this Kingdom has in view, and must feel sooner or latter (sic), if vigorous measures are not enter'd into for preventing it.

I am next to consider what measures of this kind are *practicable*. I have observed that a proper *surplus* in the national revenue must first be secured. It is plain that without this nothing can be done. I have pointed out one method of obtaining it, that would at the same time redress all grievances, and place the Kingdom above all danger. The second method mentioned at the beginning of these observations is, by new regulations and improvements in the *present* system of our finances and policy.

At present the *surplus* of the Revenue can be scarcely reckoned to be more than about £400,000 per ann., and even this is so precarious that it may soon fall to nothing. The grand sources of the Revenue are our manufactures and trade. In order, therefore, to gain a surplus, these must be promoted; and at the same time the public expence reduced in such instances as admit of it. With these views what appears to me above all things necessary is the restoration of peace with our *American* colonies by undoing what has been lately done against them, and a return to that plan of policy which had been pursued with so much advantage before the Stamp Act. By these means, the trade with them would be recover'd, and their affections once more gained. This is all we have reason to wish for. In this way a greater Revenue might be drawn from them than in any other. To attempt maintaining the authority of our government over them any further than trade is concerned, is contending for an extension of power to us worse than unprofitable, and to them in the highest degree dangerous. Make them believe that their property, their charters, and their internal legislation shall for the future be secure against any interference from this country and the happiest effects will soon follow. The exclusive trade with them and their increasing numbers will support our poor, fill our Exchequer, and keep us up with all our burdens upon us. The expence also we are now at in supporting troops and fleets among them would be saved; for there is no doubt but that they would either undertake their own

³² Arthur Young thought that Mirabeau, Du Pont and other French writers advocated the abolition of all taxes on consumption in favour of a simple land tax 'rather for the sake of getting rid of farmers of the revenue and other great abuses, than from any positive conviction of the excellence of the plan'. *Political arithmetic*, 236.

defence, or repay us any money we could spend in protecting them. It is clear to see that from hence would arise a saving in the Revenue of the last consequence.

May I add that the greatest part of our most formidable standing army might be disbanded, and the expence of the Navy reduced without weakening the national security; many superfluous places and pensions abolished; all the money saved now spent in governing by influence or corruption; the pay of the great officers of state lessen'd, and taxes laid on several articles of luxury which would necessarily be useful in whatever way they operated. Why in particular, might not Celibacy, Horses, Livery, Servants, etc. be taxed?³³ By such means a surplus of a million and a half per ann. might be procured without materially altering the present system; or occasioning any alarm. In truth, a wise minister (or a Patriot King) who could convince the nation that he was so disinterested and public spirited as to be in earnest for measures of this kind, would soon make himself so popular as to be capable of doing anything.

The next step after securing the surplus I have mentioned, will be to secure the inviolable application of it to the gradual discharge of the public debts. This is indeed the greatest difficulty of all. The History of the Sinking Fund proves, with melancholy evidence, that the House of Commons (influenced as it now is) cannot be trusted; and that the force of laws is in this instance too weak. In such circumstances what can be proposed? The same power that *does* may always *undo*. There are, however, ways in which diversions of the *Sinking Fund* may be better guarded against. A new law express'd in stronger language than that which establish'd the present Sinking Fund; declaring the reason for constituting a *new Fund*, and reprobating all former alienations, specifying the manner and the result of the operations of the new Fund thro' its whole duration; and directing particularly, that, should any deficiencies ever arise, or any emergencies occasion extraordinary expences, they shall be supplied by new loans^(g) or temporary taxes, and never from this Fund. Such a law as this, I say might be enacted, in consequence of which, alienations for current services would be set up to public view as rocks to be avoided; and therefore, become less practicable. But what I should most rely upon for this purpose would be the establishment of a particular *Commission* for superintending the Sinking Fund, and applying it to its proper use. This

(g) I have demonstrated in my Pamphlet on the national debt that it is better to borrow at *any rate of interest*, than ever to *alienate*.³⁴

³³ Cf. *Observations on reversionary payments*, 3rd edn. xxxvii-xxviii.

³⁴ *An appeal*, 4th edn., iii.

Commission might consist of the *Premier* himself for the time being, a few of the great Officers of State, the Governors of the *Bank*, *South Sea House*, etc. The law might order that a fixed sum (suppose a million) should be issued annually out of the Exchequer, to these Commissioners to be applied under their management to the payment of the national debt; that they should act in this trust under particular pains and penalties, and lay before Parliament every year an account of their proceedings and disbursements; but, more especially, that they should be allowed 1 or ½ per cent for all the debts they shall discharge.^(h)

This would form a check on the *House of Commons*,³⁶ and engage some of the first persons in and out of Parliament in the defence of the new Fund, by connecting their interest with it and making it an advantage to themselves in proportion to the skill, the diligence, and the effect with which they managed and improved it.

^(h) Such a deduction as this would have little effect on the operations of the Fund. Reckoning interest at 4 per cent, the Fund a million per ann., and the deduction 1 per cent; in eighteen years the pay of the Commissioners would increase from £10,000 to £20,000 per ann. supposing no alienations. But at the end of this period, the Fund would be also doubled; and only a hundredth part less, than it would have been had there been no deductions.

I have mentioned a *surplus* of a million per ann. because this is the surplus mentioned in the Preface to my book on Annuities.³⁵ A surplus of a million and a half per ann. would without doubt be of unspeakably greater service. It is some encouragement in this instance that time itself will in a few years produce savings to the amount of near £400,000 per ann. In seven years nineteen millions 4 per cent Consolidated Annuities will sink to 3 per cent. In eight years four millions and a half 3½ per cent Annuities will sink to 3 per cent.

In about eighteen years, likewise, £136,453 long Annuities granted in *King William's time*, and the greatest part of about £80,000 per ann. life Annuities will become extinct. From hence will arise a saving in eight years of £212,500 per ann. and in eighteen years of near £400,000 per ann. which added to the Fund would prove a great help to it.

I cannot help observing with respect to the long Annuities granted in *King William's time*, that for this sum there had been already paid to the Annuitants above ten millions; and that before the annuities become extinct, there will be near thirteen millions paid, that is, above seven times the sum borrowed.

What an extravagant method was this of gaining money? And yet it is nothing to the extravagance of raising money by *perpetual* Annuities, without putting them into some fixed course of redemption. For in the one case, time *at last* necessarily annihilates the debt; in the other case it remains a standing burden never to be taken off while there is any strength to bear it.

³⁵ *Observations on reversionary payments*, xxxii–xxxiii.

³⁶ Cf., *ibid.*, xxv.

I have shewn as well as I am able in the Preface to the third edition of my *Treatise on Annuities*³⁷ how such a Fund would operate; what its effects would be in given periods, and what management might be used to cause it to produce the greatest possible effect in the least time. In particular, I think I have there shewn that, independently of its effects in discharging the public debts, it would be the greatest public benefit, by preserving the Kingdom from danger, and carrying through difficulties that must otherwise bring on general ruin.

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³⁷ *Ibid.*, xxi–xxix.

David Williams, *Incidents in my own life which have been thought of some importance*, edited with an account of his published writing by Peter France, University of Sussex Library, 1980, pp. 131.

In an age when most academic publications fall into simple, well-defined categories, Peter France's edition of David Williams's *Incidents* is something of a curio. It is not a complete autobiography, it is rather too slight for that; it is not a monograph on David Williams, it is too haphazard for that; and it is not a bibliography of his works, the bibliographical information is too incomplete for that. But it is a little of all three. The work is therefore both charming and frustrating.

The core of the book is the first complete publication of David Williams's *Incidents*, the manuscript of which is in Cardiff Central Library. Extracts from the manuscript had been published by the late David Williams, Professor of Welsh History at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, and by Sir Marchant Williams. But these were no substitute for the whole thing, which Dr. France has now made available to us, and which he has provided with useful scholarly notes. Anyone interested in David Williams will find the work invaluable, for here is information about his religious ideas and his scheme for rational liturgical worship, about his educational ideas and activities, about his involvement with the French Revolution and about his founding the *Literary Fund*, subsequently the *Royal Literary Fund*, for indigent but worthy authors. Williams actually wrote *Incidents* in sections devoted to these various topics and so one can easily draw from it information relating to one's own interest in him. Not that that would be especially desirable, for as Dr. France has pointed out interest in Williams has been fragmentary and he is deserving of rather more undivided attention. Indeed, one of the few attempts to view his life and work as of a piece was made as long ago as 1900 by Alexander Gordon in the Dictionary of National Biography. Yet Williams, himself, in his *Incidents* does not present the whole man, either in terms of his philosophy or of his life. Perhaps he intended to in the closing section which is incomplete; more likely, he did not feel the need. His many books presumably were readily available, and so too was a biography written by Thomas Morris in 1792. Dr. France has attempted to supply the deficiency and to stimulate interest in Williams the whole man, by providing a brief summary of his claims to fame and of the interest shown in him, by providing additional biographical information, and by providing introductions to and resumés of all his published works. He has done this in a highly competent way, although I would carp at a few details such as the description of the Feathers Tavern anti-subscription movement as the dissenters' campaign (p. 90), and the suggestion that Williams met Godwin frequently in the early years of the French Revolution (p. 4). The former was of course an Anglican campaign, and the latter is disproved by Godwin's autobiographical notes in which he records being introduced to Williams in 1792 and *occasional*

meetings with him and others in the period leading up to the publication of *Political Justice* in February 1793. His recollections are confirmed by his diary where the first entry mentioning Williams is on 9 September 1792. Strangely, Dr. France actually quotes the relevant part of the autobiographical notes on p. 77. However, Dr. France has put together much essential biographical information and has provided Williams enthusiasts with an excellent short guide to all his works.

Now to the frustrations. Despite his concern to present the broad perspective on Williams's achievements, Dr. France appears to have submitted subconsciously to all the faults of previous commentators in that the information which he has provided is bitty and somewhat disjointed. There is biographical information in the introduction and in an additional biographical section. Also, his decision to provide resumés of all of Williams's work has led to a good deal of repetition, for as he concedes most of his ideas were set out in his first (anonymous) work of 1771, *The Philosopher, in Three Conversations*. Moreover, this chosen format inhibits the development of any sustained critical analysis. Curiously, Dr. France does not supply the full bibliographical information on Williams's works, notably their place of publication and the number of editions, and their location in libraries with major Williams holdings. He could properly argue that such information is already available in Professor David Williams's bibliography published in the *National Library of Wales Journal* for 1957-58, but that surely is also an argument for eschewing the bibliographical approach. Indeed, it is difficult to understand why, after so much labour, Dr. France has not written a lengthy critical introduction to *Incidents* in the manner of Jack Lindsay's to Priestley's *Autobiography*, or even why he has not chosen to write a monograph on Williams. Perhaps it is on the way. There is certainly more to say about Williams than is said here. For example, one would like to know more about his relationship with political and religious reformers in the late eighteenth century, and about his influence in propagating ideas concerning universal toleration and in helping to create the 'infidel' tradition.

Yet in any future study of David Williams's work, Dr. France's edition of *Incidents* will be an essential work of reference. Besides that, it is a handsomely produced volume and a most enjoyable read, and it is to be hoped that it will stimulate a revival of interest in Williams.

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