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# Enlightenment and Dissent

No. 14 1995



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## Editorial

Since we last went to press we have received the sad news of the death of Carl B Cone, formerly Professor of History at the University of Kentucky: his passing is a grievous loss to eighteenth century studies and, in particular, to the historians of dissent and to the readers of this journal. Professor Cone started his university career as a student at the University of Iowa, and after taking his PhD there taught successively at Alleghany College and at the State University of Louisiana before moving to the University of Kentucky in 1947.

While he was at Kentucky he produced his *magnum opus*, the large two-volume biography of Edmund Burke, entitled *Burke and the nature of politics*, the first volume of which, *The age of the American Revolution*, appeared in 1957, and the second, *The age of the French Revolution*, came out in 1964. This achievement confirmed his high reputation as a scrupulously careful, fair-minded and penetrating scholar.

While, in the course of his studies on Burke, Cone was waiting for the Wentworth Woodhouse papers to become available at Sheffield Central Library, he turned his attention to Burke's adversary, Richard Price. The fruit of these studies was *Torchbearer of freedom: the influence of Richard Price on eighteenth century thought*. This work was a much fuller biography of Price than that of Roland Thomas, the modern pioneer of studies in the life and work of Price. Cone was able to make use of materials in American sources, particularly on the American Revolution and on the American Constitution, that were not available to Thomas. What is remarkable about Cone's writing is his skill in making the best possible use of every scrap of information and in weaving it into a pattern that brings the subject to life in an insightful and sympathetic way. For this reason Cone's book is worth re-reading time and again, not only for the freshness of his portrait of Price, but also for the example it gives to the historian of how materials, even the most unpromising, can be made to yield an illuminating story.

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

## MARY HAYS : FINDING A 'VOICE' IN DISSENT

Marilyn L Brooks

I maintain, and, [...] ever will maintain, that there is, there can be, but *one moral standard of excellence for mankind*, whether male or female, and that the licentious distinctions made by the domineering party, in the spirit of tyranny, selfishness, and sensuality, are at the foundation of the heaviest evils that have afflicted, degraded, and corrupted society: and I found my argument upon nature, equity, philosophy, and the Christian religion.<sup>1</sup>

Mary Hays (1759-1843) was a novelist, radical feminist, one-time devotee of sensibility and enthusiastic supporter of social and moral progress but she is only now becoming recognized as a subverter of what she considered to be an unfriendly and ruthlessly uncompromisingly rational philosophy, that of William Godwin. However, it was Dissent which provided her with a 'voice' to articulate a confident rebuttal of it.

Hays's literary career began with the publication of *Cursory Remarks on an Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public Worship* (1792).<sup>2</sup> In the following year she published *Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous* with the encouragement of her Dissenting friend Hugh Worthington.<sup>3</sup> In 1795 Her new mentor/friend, William Godwin, suggested a 'plan' to Hays of writing down her experiences in fictional form and in 1796 her first novel *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* was published,<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Queens, Illustrated and Celebrated* (London, 1821), vi.

<sup>2</sup> (London, 1792).

<sup>3</sup> (London, 1793, repr. New York, 1974).

<sup>4</sup> 2 vols (London, 1796, repr. London, 1987).

ostensibly as a 'philosophical delineation of the errors of passion, of the mischiefs of yeilding [sic] to the illusions of the imagination'.<sup>5</sup> It is a novel which makes both a determined claim for female sexual expression and constitutes a direct attack on Godwin's principles in his *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its influence on Modern Morals and Happiness* (1793).<sup>6</sup> This was followed in 1799 by *The Victim of Prejudice* which sought to delineate 'the mischiefs which have ensued from the too-great stress laid on the reputation for chastity in woman',<sup>7</sup> and which traced the inevitable decline of a seduced woman and her daughter. *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (1798), which was published anonymously, has been attributed, convincingly, to Hays.<sup>8</sup> During the early part of the nineteenth century she wrote a series of instructional books for children,<sup>9</sup> as well as *Female Biography; or, Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women, of all Ages and Countries* (1803), for which she became celebrated, and *Memoirs of Queens, Illustrated and Celebrated* (1821) which was written 'in the cause, and for the honour and advantage, of my sex'.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Letter to William Godwin, 6 February 1796. The letters are housed in the Pforzheimer Collection of New York Public Library and are also contained as an appendix to my thesis 'A Critical Study of the Writings of Mary Hays, With an Edition of her Unpublished Letters to William Godwin' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> 2 vols (London, 1793). This article can only touch upon this and for a full discussion of this interrogation see my thesis, chapter four.

<sup>7</sup> 2 vols (London, 1799), n.p.

<sup>8</sup> (London, 1798: repr. New York, 1974).

<sup>9</sup> *Harry Clinton; or, a Tale of Youth* (London, 1804); *Historical Dialogues for Young Persons* (London, 1806); *The Brothers; or, Consequences. A Story of what happens every day, addressed to that most useful Part of the Community, the Labouring Poor* (London, 1815); *Family Annals; or, The Sisters* (London, 1817).

<sup>10</sup> (London, 1821), v.

Hays's writings emerged out of a very particular environment and as a response to specific influences and challenges. From the 1790s she became acquainted with a number of influential literary and radical figures such as Thomas Holcroft, Elizabeth Inchbald, Eliza Fenwick, Robert Southey, Charles Lamb, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge and, in particular, with William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. Identified as 'evidently a Wollstonecraftian' she was soon classified both as a 'flippant' 'unsex'd female' and as an 'inflammatory' Jacobin.<sup>11</sup> However, her contribution to radical politics has tended to be obscured by the proximity of her more famous friends: Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin. But I would argue that Mary Hays made a major contribution to radical feminism specifically through her insistence that 'sexual distinctions' be added to the agenda of Jacobinism in general, and Godwin's theories of political justice in particular.

Hays used Dissent in the same way that she used sensibility and the sensational philosophy of Claude-Adrien Helvétius (1715-71)<sup>12</sup> to provide herself with a ready-made 'voice' out of which to articulate her central concerns with female dependence and later to authenticate her confrontation with the uncompromisingly rational philosophy of William Godwin. Moreover, Dissent enabled Hays to celebrate her sense of uniqueness or 'difference' which had already found root in her engagement with sensibility.<sup>13</sup> Sensibility

<sup>11</sup> Richard Polwhele, *The Unsex'd Females: A Poem, Addressed to the Author of The Pursuits of Literature* (London, 1798), 20-21.

<sup>12</sup> The influence of Helvétius on British thinking has been well documented. See especially Mordecai Grossman, *The Philosophy of Helvétius with Special Emphasis on the Educational Implications of Sensationalism* (New York, 1926); Kingsley Martin, *French Liberal Thought in the Eighteenth Century: A Study of Political Ideas from Bayle to Condorcet* (London, 1954); Ian Cumming, *Helvétius: His Life and Place in the History of Educational Thought* (London, 1955).

<sup>13</sup> I am using the term 'difference' in an ordinary rather than a specifically Lacanian sense. The proximity of 'rational sensibility' to

promoted a sense of non-conformity through its emphasis on exclusivity and refinement of response. A letter written when Hays was nineteen clearly makes a distinction between herself and 'others' or 'them', a distinction which would be fuelled both by sensibility and by Dissent:

The giddy, the gay, the inconsiderate, the unfeeling - they are happy; while those whose souls are replete with sensibility, whose sentiments are refined, and those who are formed tremblingly susceptible of every softer emotion, - they drink deep of the cup of misfortune ....<sup>14</sup>

Dissent would go on to reinforce Hays's confident belief in the reliability of her own experience and in her ability to examine and interpret this experience.

Dissent, like sensibility, also incorporated a tendency to elevate suffering and both might be said to provide ready access to a kind of martyrdom. Suggestively, Hays claimed to have been attracted initially to the Unitarian, William Frend, not only for his 'magnanimous' principles and conduct but also because he had been 'persecuted for those principles, and had become a sufferer by that conduct!'.<sup>15</sup> Within the terms of sensibility the actuality of suffering and, more significantly, the capacity to suffer, was a reliable indicator of a potential for improvement or what Helvétius called 'genius', a notion which was to sustain Hays throughout her life and which seemed to be embedded within the consequences, if not the principles, of Dissent. My argument is that it was the model

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Dissent has also been suggested by Anthony Lincoln in *Some Political and Social Ideas of English Dissent 1763 - 1800* (New York, 1971), 64.

<sup>14</sup> Letter to John Eccles, 1 August 1779. See *The Love-Letters of Mary Hays (1779 - 1780)* ed. by A F. Wedd (London, 1925), 28-9.

<sup>15</sup> Letter to William Godwin, 6 June 1796. Hays is referring to William Frend's banishment from the University of Cambridge after the publication of *Peace and Union* (1793).

of Dissent which provided Hays with a means of articulating problems inherent in the daily life of women and which simultaneously enabled her to celebrate her sense of individual centrality. Dissent, then, was a stepping stone to autonomy which had already been laid by sensibility and would be continued by the philosophy of Helvétius.

Mary Hays was introduced to Dissenting ideas under the ministry of Michael Brown who was incumbent, from about 1778 to at least 1814, at Blacksfields' Particular Baptist Chapel, which was built about 1754 in Gainsford Street, Bermondsey, where Hays lived with her widowed mother and several siblings. Like other Dissenting families the parish church, in this case St John's Bermondsey, was used for the registration of marriages. Hays's youthful letters to her first love, John Eccles, who was also attending the same chapel, demonstrate the extent to which they had thrown themselves unequivocally into the cult of sensibility. After the traumatic but 'sensibly' satisfying death of Eccles, Hays was 'rescued' by the Dissenting minister, Robert Robinson (1735-1790) of Stone Yard Baptist Chapel, Cambridge and by whom she was visited in London in the early 1780s. A few months before her death, Hays confessed to Henry Crabb Robinson that 'this great and good man was the awakening of my mind, and the preserver of my life by [lifting] me by the energies of his genius from the morbid effects of a deep-rooted grief. Never was eloquence so touching as his'.<sup>16</sup> It is probable that Robert Robinson was the inspiration for the portrayal of Melville in Letter IV, *Letter to Mrs ----- with a Sketch of the Family of Sempronia* and in Letter V, *History of Melville and Serena* in *Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous* (1792) where he ultimately emerges as a Christian whose faith is based on 'firm and rational convictions'.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Letter to Henry Crabb Robinson, April 1842. Dr Williams's Library.

<sup>17</sup> See *Letters and Essays*, 31-66.

If Dissent was a strong incentive to the nurturing of individualism, Hays certainly thrived on its atmosphere of freedom, equality and debate. Her correspondence with leading Dissenting ministers, such as Hugh Worthington, John Disney and Theophilus Lindsey, reveals that she not only attended church meetings but that she was also active in debate, being unafraid to implement the Unitarian principle of contradiction or difference of opinion, discussing topics as diverse as materialism and the significance of the death of Christ.<sup>18</sup> Hugh Worthington referred to her possession of 'that love of truth, and desire of discharging duty, which will not only ever be welcome to communicate at Salters' Hall, but ought to be welcomed into any Church on earth which pretends to the name of Christian'.<sup>19</sup> He sought her opinion on 'the subject of Christ's death' praising the 'precision' of her distinctions and requesting her critical response to further reading provided by him. John Disney similarly thought she would be 'much pleased' with *The Memoirs of Thomas Hollis* and the second part of Dr Priestley's *Appeal*.<sup>20</sup> Worthington goes on to move easily from discussion of the Reverend Mr Draper's 'pulpit abilities' to Mary having 'done wonders in geometry, both as to extent and as to dispatch', mathematics being both a 'delight' and a 'great relief to the mind'. In this way, Dissent offered Hays an opportunity to engage in stimulating and radical issues which were at odds with the more usual female accomplishments which were being propounded by conventional conduct-books whose major task was to deny such pretensions.

As well as her local Baptist chapel, Hays attended Salters' Hall between 1791 and 1794, which was under the ministry of Hugh Worthington and she was also a regular attender at Essex

<sup>18</sup> See especially letters from Hugh Worthington, 15 November 1791; 17 January 1794; and from John Disney, 7 February 1793. Dr Williams's Library.

<sup>19</sup> Hugh Worthington to Hays, 16 June 1791. Dr Williams's Library.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

Street Chapel (which has been described as 'a hot-bed of radicalism' where 'sermons were under surveillance'<sup>21</sup>) during 1793-1795 when it was under the ministry of Theophilus Lindsey and John Disney, for whom Hays is thought to have written sermons. Although I have not found evidence for this claim, it is possible that she might have been one of the 'two greatly esteemed friends' who had helped with the revision of Disney's papers before their publication<sup>22</sup> or the 'very judicious friend who gave 'care and attention' to the preparation of the subsequent two volumes.<sup>23</sup> The correspondence with these central figures of Dissent reveals her as a woman whose views are not only tolerated but sought, Worthington assuring her of his readiness to assist her enquiries 'after truth in general' and concluding that 'I wish all to think for themselves, and esteem the circumstances of making them *my* Disciples a very small matter compared with them being the Disciples of *Goodness*'.<sup>24</sup> Her connection with Richard Price and her proximity to Stoke Newington makes it probable that she attended Newington Green Unitarian chapel although, unlike Wollstonecraft, her name does not appear in the Church rolls. Hays was also a frequent guest at the Worthington and Disney homes and also enjoyed the company of Joseph Priestley at her mother's home in Gainsford Street. Whilst residing at Hot Wells, Bristol in 1814 she attended John Estlin's services at Lewins Mead Unitarian Chapel to which she became a subscriber and 'an attendant when the weather permits!'.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *A Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals* ed. by Joseph O. Baylen and Norbert J. Gossman, 2 vols (Sussex, 1979), I, 125.

<sup>22</sup> See John Disney, *Sermons* (London, 1793), v.

<sup>23</sup> See John Disney, *Sermons* (London, 1816), xii.

<sup>24</sup> Letter from Hugh Worthington to Mary and Elizabeth Hays, 15 November 1791. Dr Williams's Library.

<sup>25</sup> Letter to Henry Crabb Robinson, 26 November 1814. Dr Williams's Library.

Recent studies, such as those by Ruth Watts, reveal how Dissenting attitudes to women would be conducive to greater equality and opportunity.<sup>26</sup> Dissent exalted individual experience to the extent that recognition of the uniqueness of this experience might become the key to self-worth and a celebration of one's individuality, or one's 'difference'. Now the individual woman could gain confidence in the knowledge that she was accountable only to God, and this important accountability was to be mediated through individual conscience alone. A consequent self-confidence could arise out of Dissent's democratic doctrines and its spiritual egalitarianism. Once equal before God it becomes easier to be equal before man, especially as this entailed a belief in the independence so craved by women such as Hays. Moreover, Dissent offered an opportunity to express this independence.

Such relativity of response might usefully be extended to include gender and, as Ruth Watts has shown, Dissent produced an atmosphere conducive to female progress and encouraged a change in perceptions of women's capabilities. Certainly Hays seems to have seized upon Dissent's opportunity for female involvement despite its neglect of formal female education. A positive factor is its sensationalist insistence that differences could be accounted for environmentally and educationally so that the 'natural' inferiority of women's position could be questioned and removed. Importantly, Dissent sanctioned difference as a legitimate inroad into discussion

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<sup>26</sup> For a fuller discussion of Dissent's encouragement of female education see Ruth Watts, 'The Unitarian Contribution to the Development of Female Education 1790 - 1850' in *History of Education*, 9 (1980), 173-86; 'The unitarian contribution to education in England from the late eighteenth century to 1853' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leicester, 1987); 'Knowledge is Power - Unitarians, gender and education in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', *Gender and Education*, 1, No 1 (1989), 35-50.

of any form of experience. Hays's later engagement with Helvétian philosophy would, similarly, provide some justification for female 'difference' or inferiority, based as his thinking was, on circumstance and environment. In fact, this difference was, for Helvétius and then Hays, an indicator of 'genius' and so the would-be radical had a duty to cultivate it. Similarly, Dissent's comforting atmosphere of debate, freedom of thought and expression of it, also coincided with Helvétian principles:

Discussion and controversy, when managed with temper have ever appeared to me, not only a favourable method of exercising the ingenuity and sharpening the faculties of the disputants, but likewise, of promoting a spirit of liberal curiosity and enquiry. The sincere disciple after *truth* should take nothing for granted, nor hold anything as sacred; but should [...] be *licentious* in his investigations.<sup>27</sup>

Both Dissent and Helvétian philosophy offered a consolatory rationale of error, which Hays went on in this 'Defence of Helvétius' to claim to be 'the result of the independent researches of the unfettered individual' which is 'short-lived' and frequently affords 'the clue of truth'. On the other hand, prejudice or opinions taken upon trust from others, is usually 'fierce, obstinate, and intolerant'.

Whereas sensibility's stress on the uniqueness of the subject, which could be authenticated through self-scrutiny and reflection, had become suspect by the 1770s, Dissent continued to provide a

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<sup>27</sup> *The Monthly Magazine*, 3, 1797, 26-28 (p. 26). During 1796 and 1797 *The Monthly Magazine* ran a series of articles on Helvétius to which Hays contributed several pieces including this 'Defence of Helvétius'. She variously signed herself M.H. (hence she was believed to be a man), A Woman, or Mary Hays.

respectable means for continuing this self-absorption. I would argue that Hays seized the opportunity to reaffirm her sense of being set apart from what she later termed those who follow 'the beaten track',<sup>28</sup> and that she found in Dissent a means of justifying individualistic behaviour. Hays's adopted stance of Dissent enabled her to reconcile herself to a life of non-conformity; later, her deliberate choice of Helvétian philosophy enlarged this into a celebratory affirmation of it. Both choices led to her perception of her inferiority as being socially constructed and, hence, excusable. Both gave her the power to challenge this inferiority. Her early correspondence demonstrates the ease with which she considered Dissent to accentuate the individual's preoccupation with self, a preoccupation which Hays seemed to take for granted within her continuing engagement with religious and philosophical subjects.

An ambiguous attraction of Dissent was that it both ensured, and made respectable, 'outsider' status so that the Dissenter might be said to court trouble, if not martyrdom, because s/he must 'follow the direction of his conscience; must step out boldly no matter whither he be led'.<sup>29</sup> If Dissent inevitably conveyed non-conformity, female Dissent took this a big step further by challenging preconceptions of femininity or, what Hays termed 'sexual distinctions'.<sup>30</sup> Hays was to find a similar justification for stepping out 'boldly' in Helvétius who also insisted that those animated by 'an ardent and constant desire of glory, pierce into the

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<sup>28</sup> *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, I, p. 178.

<sup>29</sup> Anthony Lincoln, *Some Political and Social Ideas of English Dissent 1763 - 1800* (New York, 1971), 11. See also 'Godwin and Rational Dissent' in Mark Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* (London, 1986), 15-37.

<sup>30</sup> See for instance her discussion of female chastity as a gendered construction in *The Monthly Magazine*, 3 (1797), 193-95.

thickest part of the forest, pass the dangerous bogs'.<sup>31</sup> Throughout her life, Hays would accentuate her projection of herself as erroneous but potentially trustworthy; as a failure but as potentially successful. By so doing she would find a justification for her attempts at progress, even if these attempts were based on an alternative to radical principles such as Godwin's 'justice'. Such a person of potential 'genius' could be expected to lead a somewhat bohemian existence outside the pale of social behaviour and restriction, in the same way that sensibility might be said to nurture rejection of conformity. She argued that 'strong feelings and strong energies' necessitated 'eccentricities of conduct'.<sup>32</sup>

Dissent's incorporation of sensationalism and association of ideas into its culture made it a particularly attractive vehicle for exploring female desires and abilities and could, simultaneously, be used to provide an explanation for their inferior position.<sup>33</sup> Error or 'prejudice' was to be the fault of social education and was not indicative of 'natural' inferiority or of 'evil' and this circumstantial cause became one of the bedrocks of later Godwinian thinking. However, Godwin refused to concede that erroneous behaviour might have an especially gendered bias which, Hays argued, the education of women ensured. For Hays it did not take a very big step to include 'sexual distinctions' within the compass of associations and shaping circumstances. In her writings, as well as in her daily life, Hays elevated the idea of 'necessity' which she used in order to argue that, until attitudes to women were changed, female inferiority based on error, would remain. She based her belief on what she considered to be the powerful chain of cause and

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<sup>31</sup> *A Treatise on Man, His Intellectual Faculties and his Education*, trans. by W. Hooper, 2 vols (London, 1777), 263-64. This is the edition Hays knew and used.

<sup>32</sup> Letter to William Godwin, 28 July 1795.

<sup>33</sup> For fuller discussion of associationism see Watts, 'The Unitarian contribution to education in England from the late eighteenth century to 1853', chapter two.

effect, the implications of which she was exploring in her correspondence with Godwin by comparing the use of such terms in his *Political Justice* with those of antecedent and consequent.<sup>34</sup> Hays found this liberating, as women might also reach 'virtue' and even perfectibility through the removal of obstacles to them including female education.

It was out of this atmosphere of free discussion and with the encouragement of friends such as John Disney and Hugh Worthington that Hays nervously launched into publication. In this article I am concentrating on Hays's early writings which were written directly under the influence of Dissent and some of its influential ministers, and during a period when Hays had begun to find for herself an audible voice which offered her the first means to be taken seriously as a woman and, importantly, as a woman writer.

Hays first entered into publication as 'Eusebia' with *Cursory Remarks on an Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public Worship* (1792)<sup>35</sup> which was written as a direct response to Gilbert Wakefield's *Enquiry and Propriety of Public or Social Worship* of the previous year whilst he was a tutor at Hackney College.<sup>36</sup> With this pamphlet she entered into what was known as the 'Wakefieldian controversy'.<sup>37</sup> Wakefield's 'attack' was deliberately argumentative in its objections to the form of worship and the practices of Dissent which he argued to be mere

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<sup>34</sup> I think it is probable that Godwin may have changed his terms as a result of their energetic discussion of their usage in their letters. The first edition refers to cause and effect whereas the second and third refer to antecedent and consequent. See letter from Hays to Godwin, 16 December 1795 in the appendix to my thesis.

<sup>35</sup> (London, 1792).

<sup>36</sup> (London, 1791).

<sup>37</sup> *Letters and Essays*, 1.

'ceremonies' which were 'absurd and contemptible'.<sup>38</sup> He went on to declare them to be 'anti-Christian' and 'opposite to the true spirit of the gospel'.<sup>39</sup> Not surprisingly, his deliberately provocative *Enquiry* caused uproar in Dissenting circles and it produced published responses from several including John Disney,<sup>40</sup> and Anna Laetitia Barbauld,<sup>41</sup> but it was Hays's reply which caught the notice of the critics and the public. Although she began apologetically, excusing her efforts as 'a woman, young, unlearned, unacquainted with any language but her own',<sup>42</sup> Hays quickly gained confidence through the knowledge that she was contributing to 'an age of controversy and all who love truth must rejoice in seeing the spirit of freedom and enquiry universally disseminated' (p. 19). This atmosphere would enable her to challenge the validity of gendered concepts such as the basis of female virtue in her later novels.

Hays took Anna Laetitia Barbauld's references to the important role of 'early habit and association' in worship far further by making human frailty into a central feature of the attack against Wakefield's objections, and by harnessing sensationalism to her argument:

When through the medium of the senses, repeated impressions have been made on the brain, good or evil habits acquire an ascendancy not easily to be eradicated; words must first be taught, and ideas will afterwards cling to them (p.11).

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<sup>38</sup> *Enquiry*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, 22.

<sup>40</sup> *A Defence of Public or Social Worship: A Sermon* (London., 1792).

<sup>41</sup> *Remarks on G Wakefield's Enquiry into the expediency and propriety of public or social worship* (London, 1792).

<sup>42</sup> *Cursory Remarks*, 3. Subsequent references will be placed in parenthesis in the text.

What Hays focused on in her reply was the power of early associations to 'create' the individual. Public worship, then, was beneficial because 'the bulk of mankind, engrossed by the inferior concerns of attaining worldly riches, honours, and pleasure, are still in the infancy of knowledge, and incapable of entering into the spirit of a religion entirely spiritual and intellectual' (p.5). Whilst agreeing that 'all religious establishments are irrational, and anti-Christian' she argued for retaining the 'simplicity of the apostolic spirit' which recognized and accepted the weaknesses of the congregation and supplied necessary pastoral support to minimize them. Whilst prayers could not inform God 'they may be links in the great chain of causes and effects, and by giving rise to pure and pious sentiments, be ultimately productive of consequences the most beneficial' (p.10). Such external stimuli as public prayers are necessary because mankind has mental limitations and is not yet ready to adopt the conditions which will make him/her free to worship unaided and to 'penetrate to the source of things, and become true philosophers, without any danger of mistake or hazard' (p.20). Hays found that her later engagement with Helvétian philosophy similarly dictated that we cannot become 'true philosophers' until environmental conditions enabled us to become 'true philosophers'. This paradoxical impasse was at the root of all Hays's pessimism towards female contribution to radical progress, in that social requirements of women needed to be changed before the need for such a change could be recognized and implemented.

In this first publication Hays is more concerned with a present reality of error and compromise than with an utopian future which she considers to be a 'miserable consolation' (p.26). Until such a time, even a 'mechanical devotion' or a 'mere performance' may have a restraining effect upon the conduct' (pp.10-11). Because 'the world is not yet ripe for a religion purely mental and contemplative' external sense-based stimuli are necessary to encourage devotion, as the 'majority, by giving up all exterior means of generating devotional affections, would soon cease to give

themselves any concern on the subject, and breaking loose from what at present affords a wholesome restraint, become mere profligates or worldlings' (p.13). This preoccupation with devotional association would find fuller expression in Hays's later argument that female inferiority was constructed out of an array of erroneous associations in early age and she would call upon this Dissenting argument to excuse it. The pamphlet ends in a typical female apology:

I feel as if I had ventured beyond my depth; I am unequal to the management of controversial weapons, and have perhaps, though influenced by the purist motives, displayed in the preceding remarks my weakness only, and incapacity for the discussion (p.21).

Despite any such 'weakness', Hays had confidence enough to refer, in her second edition, to Wakefield's 'softening' in his new edition which, she claimed, had been made 'less equivocal'. This edition (which contained a specious reference to Hays's own rejoinder) showed a change in his attitude to social worship. He was now 'granting almost all that can be asked, or is practised by the generality of rational Dissenters' (p.25).

*Cursory Remarks* was well received and brought Hays to the attention of an influential range of Dissenters including the Unitarian William Frend who wrote, to Hays as Eusebia, through her minister Michael Brown, that he was particularly keen to meet 'a Lady who entertains the highest esteem for the writings of revelation and examines them with that freedom of candor described by Eusebia in the first page of her elegant pamphlet' and complimenting her on her 'sentiments unsophisticated by scholastical learning'.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, Hays's preoccupation with

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<sup>43</sup> Letter from William Frend to Eusebia, 16 April 1792. Dr Williams's Library.

'candour' was to give both reason to regret beginning their relationship.<sup>44</sup>

Her next publication, *Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous* (1793), was dedicated to The Rev. John Disney 'as an unaffected tribute of esteem, for distinguished worth and genuine liberality of mind'. By this time Hays had gained a substantial confidence resulting no doubt from her literary success but ostensibly from her belief that she was again contributing to 'truth and virtue':

It is in the cause of what the writer conceives to be truth and virtue, that she has taken up the pen: every endeavour towards meliorating the human mind - how weak, or imperfect so ever - must be acceptable in the sight of that Being whose nature is pure benevolence, and "no effort will be lost".<sup>45</sup>

Importantly, a major and new departure is demonstrated in her claim to have sought to 'rescue the female mind from those prejudices, by which it has been systematically weakened, and which have been the canker of genuine virtue; for purity of heart can only be the result of knowledge and reflection' (vi). This need for 'purity of heart' would not only fulfil Dissent's expectations but would also contribute to an improvement in women's position as Hays was trying to guide this into individual conscience and individual choice as a corollary of 'active' virtue. Rules of conduct (as opposed to principles) might be prejudicial in the way that Dissent saw received ideas as prejudices and therefore as questionable. Hence she hoped that

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<sup>44</sup> See Frida Knight, *University rebel: the life of William Frend (1757 - 1841)* (London, 1971). For a different perspective on the relationship see my thesis, chapters one and four.

<sup>45</sup> *Letters and Essays*, ix. Subsequent references will be placed in parenthesis in the text.

if by seeing some common truth placed in an interesting point of view, any young minds should be incited to mental, or moral improvement, the end for which this little work was designed will be answered; and the author will have the satisfaction of reflecting that she has not entirely wasted the Master's talent. (viii-ix)

However, in reality, the 'Master's talent' is directed more to concerns of social and female improvement, albeit within a morally directed framework, as the following essay titles suggest: 'the Meliorating and Beneficial Effects of Pulpit Elocution', 'Thoughts on Civil Liberty', 'On the Influence of Authority and Custom on the Female Mind and Manners', 'Remarks on Conversation and Friendship', 'On Reading Romances', 'Materialism and Necessity', 'A Fragment, in the Manner of the old Romances', and so on.

The first letter continues the 'Wakefieldian controversy', again echoing her earlier claim that 'every impression reaches the brain through the medium of the senses, and from repetition, and association, flows down into the actions and conduct' (p.6). But she continues by moving on to an argument she would later use against William Godwin:

No orator can affect his audience, who does not feel himself; tame cold declamation, upon a subject in which the speaker is not interested, will never awaken the sensibility of the hearers. People of any taste can easily distinguish between frothy ebullitions of the head, delivered with theatrical affectation, and the energetic language of seriousness and integrity. How are we to judge of causes, but from their effects? (p.7)

and she refers to the oratory of Robert Robinson in support of her claim, concluding that 'most of the happiness of life perhaps consists in agreeable illusions' (p.9). As a final, but more confidently expressed, rejoinder to Wakefield, she agrees that

'Priestcraft ... is a creature of the state' and that 'hierarchy' is wrong, but she refuses to reject her belief that different forms based on the gospels 'are a glorious proof of religious liberty' (p.10). Having confronted what she saw as non-recognition of human frailty, the second letter immediately introduces a discussion on female inferiority which she conflates with her more general argument against religious tyranny by quoting George Dyer's claim that 'modes of education, and the customs of society are degrading to the female character, and the tyranny of custom is sometimes worse than the tyranny of government' (p.11). Moreover, just as 'women have no claims to expect either pension or place, they are less in the vortex of influence' so 'they are also more unsophisticated by education, having neither system, test, or subscription imposed upon them' (pp.11-12). Here Hays is acknowledging the difficulty for women to proclaim themselves as non-conformists because they are denied non-conformity's penalties by virtue of their gender.

Theophilus Lindsey applauded Hays on her abilities regarding the complex issues of materialism and necessity complimenting her on her ability to 'strip of its horrid form ... the scarecrow doctrine of Necessity' so as 'to familiarise and make it easy, and [...] to vindicate its truth, to those that will read and make use of their understandings'.<sup>46</sup> The *Monthly Review* was less sanguine claiming that her observations were 'slight and general: such as will scarcely afford the inquirer after truth much information and satisfaction. They are, in short, nothing more than a faint echo from the Priestleyan school, in which Miss Hays appears to be a devoted disciple'.<sup>47</sup> Hugh Worthington considered that *Letters and Essays* had 'great excellence' and 'if some would censure, many will

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<sup>46</sup> Letter from Theophilus Lindsey to Hays, 15 April 1793. Dr Williams's Library.

<sup>47</sup> *Monthly Review*, 13 (1794), 472-73 (p. 472).

applaud it',<sup>48</sup> and the encouraging support of her Dissenting friends protected her from 'the malignity of the criticisms' of, for instance, *The English Review* whose reviewer was dismissed as 'some narrow-hearted bigot, who is a sworn enemy to Mrs Wollstonecraft and her disciples'.<sup>49</sup> It is apparent that the major criticism made by this reviewer is directed towards Hays's gender:

we despise dogmas that originate in affected wisdom, and we are disgusted by flippancy and frivolousness that betray all the conceit of an half-educated female - such are the crude effusions of Mary Hays. Female philosophers while pretending to superior powers carry with them (such is the goodness of providence) a mental imbecility which *damns* them to fame. And soon it will appear that to be a skilful housewife just as well accords with the female character as to be a quibbling necessarian - that to be clever as an economist is not less creditable than to be wise as a republican - that to instruct her family in those good old maxims by which her "whiskered sire and mothers mild" had regulated their conduct may be as amiable in a woman as to give lessons to the world at large on princely domination and popular resistance - and that even to manage the needle with dexterity (though there should be no sewing in the other world) may be as rational a mode of preparing herself for an hereafter as to weave the web of sophistry in attempting to disprove the existence of an immortal soul.<sup>50</sup>

Of course, these are the very gendered objections that Dissent's examination of 'prejudices' brought into question. The

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<sup>48</sup> Letter from Hugh Worthington to Hays, 9 December 1792. Dr Williams's Library.

<sup>49</sup> Undated letter from Mr Evans to Hays. See Wedd, *Love-Letters*, 222-23.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.* Mr Evans quotes at length from the review.

reviewer has conflated freedom of expression and female threat. In contrast, the more liberal *Analytical Review* praised the author's 'ventures beyond the boundaries which the tyranny of example and custom has prescribed to female writers', and her ability to carry the reader 'out of the flowery path of fiction into the sober walks of reason and lead them to inquiry and reflection on various subjects of political, metaphysical, and theological speculation'.<sup>51</sup> Theophilus Lindsey considered the publication to contain 'traces of just thought and well-digested reading on a variety of subjects, and of a lively correct imagination' and in particular he liked its 'metaphysics and divinity: but most of all, what appears in every page, the enlightened mind, turned to virtue and to God, and ardent to inspire others with the same sentiments and engage in the same pursuits'.<sup>52</sup>

Dissent, then, provided Hays with a means of formulating what were to become the major concerns of her mature life. At the same time, it stimulated her into articulating these concerns in her later novels *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and *The Victim of Prejudice*. But it was Dissent's preoccupation with one's individual consciousness which also enabled Hays to turn a sense of personal failure into one of success in that it was Dissent which suggested to Hays that her past 'errors', which she almost enthusiastically acclaimed, could become celebratory also. Her mistakes (as, indeed, those of her fictional heroine, Emma Courtney), could contribute to the spread of 'truth' by acting as warnings to others of what to avoid. She considered her life to be a demonstration of the dangers attendant on refusing to walk 'the beaten track'. Simultaneously, this willingness to concede wrong-doing is both an acknowledgement of personal involvement and of transferring responsibility for right-doing on to others. A letter to Godwin

<sup>51</sup> *Analytical Review*, 16 (1793), 464-5.

<sup>52</sup> Letter from Theophilus Lindsey to Hays, 15 April 1793. Dr Williams's Library.

demonstrates Hays's acknowledgement of a need for both confession and correction as she almost gloats over her personal failings which Godwin as her 'monitor' and 'mind's physician'<sup>53</sup> had a duty to correct:

I was thinking, while dressing, after you left me the last time you call'd, how many faults you had discovered in me, and led me to discover in myself, in the course of our short acquaintance. I am almost afraid to enumerate them - Bigotry, obstinacy, selfishness, ambition, indolence, sophistry, presumption, vanity, and inconsistency. I fear lest you should be discouraged from the arduous task of attempting my reformation.<sup>54</sup>

Hays was very clear in her own mind about her relationship with Godwin during which she transferred her dependence on her Dissenting ministers to him, acknowledging that she wrote 'confessions' to him, confessions which inevitably placed a considerable onus on the confessor as well as the confessee.<sup>55</sup> This public sharing of personal ignominy produced her first novel, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, whose Dissenting/Jacobin heroine felt it to be beneficial to 'unfold the errors' of her mind before her adopted son so that 'the experiments which have been made upon it may be beneficial to yours!'.<sup>56</sup>

Throughout her writings Hays insisted that the pernicious effects of 'sexual distinctions' be exposed as such and that their removal be seen as a matter of radical urgency. Her letters to Godwin forced him to confront the inadequacy of his radical position to accommodate the most debilitating circumstance for women: that of gender. This addition of gender, which found root in

<sup>53</sup> Hays to William Godwin, January 1796. Pforzheimer Collection.

<sup>54</sup> Hays to William Godwin, 5 November 1795. Pforzheimer Collection.

<sup>55</sup> See Hays to William Godwin, 4 April 1796. Pforzheimer Collection.

<sup>56</sup> II, 217-18.

her Dissenting origins, was, within radical politics, to become a major condemnation of the latter's failure to discuss the 'connecting links of the chain' in anything other than male terms.<sup>57</sup> Dissent fuelled her awareness of this, and her early training in debate, and belief in a duty to convey truth, gave her the confidence to voice it.

Mary Hays remained true to her Dissenting principles despite her growing dissatisfaction with political agitation and her less liberal toleration towards religious expression. In a letter to Henry Crabb Robinson in 1804 she admitted that 'I still write [...] but I aim at nothing striking or original, I aspire not to fame, yet I flatter myself I shall have done something towards enlightening and liberalizing the rising generation, more especially those of my own sex.'<sup>58</sup> This enlightenment and especially the articulation of it began when Mary Hays found her 'voice' in Dissent.

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<sup>57</sup> *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, Preface. n.p.

<sup>58</sup> Letter to Henry Crabb Robinson, 10 September 1804, Dr Williams's Library.

## SIR WILLIAM JONES'S 'THE PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT' (1782) IN ITS RELATION TO WALES

Caryl Davies

'The Principles of Government' was a short pamphlet of a political nature that was published anonymously in 1782. Its author was soon revealed to be Sir William Jones (1746-1794), renowned in his time and even better known in ours, as an Orientalist, a linguist and linguistician, rather than as a writer of political pamphlets. In 1783, quite soon after 'The Principles of Government' was published, he went to India as a judge, and set about the study of Sanskrit, in order to read the ancient legal (and literary) works of the populations of that richly varied land. In Calcutta in 1786 he suggested that the ancient language of India bore a close resemblance to Greek and Latin, Persian and even 'the Gothick and the Celtick', not only in vocabulary, but also in morphology and syntax. The enunciation of the notion, not completely new, that these languages had 'sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no long exists' initiated a new understanding of the origin and relation of languages, and Sir William Jones is famed above all as the father of comparative linguistics.<sup>1</sup>

William Jones went to India in 1783 to administer British justice to the populations of that immense subcontinent, and his career as a jurist and his fame as a linguist go hand-in-hand. Indeed, his celebrated and far-reaching remark of 1786 in remote Bengal seems to form the apogee of his double-edged training, as a man of law and as a scholar of Oriental languages and literature. When he sailed for India, Jones had two new acquisitions, a knighthood, and a bride. His departure for the Orient seems to

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<sup>1</sup> In the third 'Anniversary Discourse' to the Asiatic Society of Bengal, February 1786. See *The Works of Sir William Jones*, 13 vols. (London, 1807), iii, 34.

have been somewhat precipitate, after many years of hoping and waiting for an appointment to the bench of judges in Calcutta, which depended to a great degree on the patronage of great men in Parliament. And it may be that the publication of his pamphlet, 'The Principles of Government' had something to do with the rather undue haste with which Sir William and Lady Jones set off for India.

This pamphlet was composed in France (and in French, according to Jones's report to a friend) in 1782, when he was on a visit to meet Benjamin Franklin, possibly in connection with unofficial negotiations to bring about the speedy end of the war with the infant United States of America, a conclusion to hostilities which had certainly been very close to Jones's heart for several years.<sup>2</sup> It was written in the form of a Socratic dialogue, and when he translated it and it was first published, it had as a title: 'The Principles of Government, in a Dialogue between a Scholar and a Peasant', a title which was later superseded by the version: 'A Dialogue between a Gentleman and a Farmer', perhaps to avoid the perjorative connotations of 'peasant' in English.<sup>3</sup> But that was after William Jones had left these shores for India, never to return. This short pamphlet of scarcely more than four pages appears innocuous enough to a reader at the end of the twentieth century, but it played an important part in the prolonged struggle to establish democratic principles in early nineteenth century Britain.

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<sup>2</sup> See *The Letters of Sir William Jones*, ed. Garland Cannon, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1970), ii, 577-78, and note 2; On the possibility of Jones's involvement in peace negotiations, see Garland Cannon, *The Life and mind of Oriental Jones: Sir William Jones, the father of modern linguistics* (Cambridge, 1990), 174-75. Samuel Parr, *Bibliotheca Parriana: A Catalogue of the Library of the Late Reverend and Learned Samuel Parr, LL.D.* (London, 1827), 441.

<sup>3</sup> Garland H. Cannon, 'Freedom of the Press and Sir William Jones', *Journalism Quarterly*, xxxiii (1956), 181.

An examination of 'The Principles of Government' may fall into four parts. First, the development of its author's thinking from an orthodox supporter of the constitutional settlement established by the Glorious Revolution of 1688/9 to a much more radical point of view. Secondly, the publication of the dialogue itself, and the furore it produced. Thirdly, its subsequent recycling in popular dramatic form and in a different language, and finally its resurrection much later, to take its place in an almost revolutionary milieu, in another time and place.

In all four of these phases of its career, 'The Principles of Government' had quite a close relationship with Wales. William Jones claimed to be 'half a Welchman'.<sup>4</sup> The half of him that was Welsh sprang from the soil of Anglesey. His father, whose namesake he was, was born on Ynys Môn in 1674 or 75, but left as a young man to go to London, and thence to sea. He took up a position as tutor in the household of the Earl of Macclesfield, at Shirburn in Oxfordshire, and married a Londoner, Mary Nix. He died when William, his third child, was three, in 1749, leaving his library to Lord Macclesfield.<sup>5</sup> So the younger William was brought up by his mother, whom he loved and respected greatly. His letters show that he considered himself, by and large, to be an Englishman, and when he speaks of 'my language' he means English. But it is very noticeable too that any contact with Wales brought out the Welshman in him, and he always expresses affection for the Principality, and interest in its affairs.

Jones made his claim to be 'half a Welchman' in a letter to his one-time pupil, Viscount Althorp, written on the second of March

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<sup>4</sup> *Letters*, i, 81. Hereafter references will be in the text. S N Mukherjee in *Sir William Jones: A study in eighteenth-century British attitudes in India* (Cambridge, 1968), 17, makes little of Jones's interest in his Welsh ancestry. For an opposite point of view, see my 'Sir William Jones: Hanner Cymro', *Y Traethodydd* (Gorffennaf, 1995), 156-169.

<sup>5</sup> *Life and Mind*, 1-3.

1771. Like his father before him, the young William Jones had accepted a post as tutor in an aristocratic household, that of the first Earl Spencer at Althorp and Wimbledon. His letter in 1771 was in reply to one that his pupil, George John, had written to him from school at Harrow on 1 March. William Jones says in reply: 'I see you do not forget that I am half a Welchman, as you write to me on St. David's day ... and your letter came to me just as I was eating my Welch rabbit, alias, toasted cheese, for my supper.' (i.81-82) This is very little evidence of a life-long commitment to Wales, and no large claim can be made for William Jones as a Welshman on the basis of these words alone. But it is the first intimation in his letters of his consciousness of his Welsh heritage, which was strengthened, it would seem, by every new contact with Wales.

The household in which Jones found himself at Althorp was not one devoted to hunting and shooting exclusively: it boasted a good library, though it was in the time of his pupil, the second Earl Spencer, that it acquired the Caxtons and other fifteenth-century books which were sold in 1892 to Mrs John Rylands of Manchester. The Spencers were a family of Whiggish affiliations, and Jones's pupil's sister, Georgiana, later married into the Cavendish dynasty and became Duchess of Devonshire. The Devonshires too at this period had impeccable Whiggish credentials. The letters written in the late sixties, when Jones was in his twenties, show that he too was already politically aware. In the winter of 1767-68 there was a general election, in which John Spencer, Jones's employer, was involved.<sup>6</sup> That winter, too, saw the return of John Wilkes from exile, and the riots in London in the name of 'Wilkes and Liberty'.

Jones's reaction to Wilkes and his radical point of view was not entirely a sympathetic one at this time, as may be seen from a

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<sup>6</sup> *Life and Mind*, 13.

letter he wrote to Charles Reviczky, a Hungarian-born bibliophile and Orientalist, who sold his fine classical library to Earl Spencer. In this letter, Jones refers to 'the uproar of seditious people' in town, and the letter in general gives an intimation of the disturbed state of affairs in London at that time. (i.12) 'If I were not completely devoted to the truth' he writes, 'and averse to any sort of pretence, I would be very grieved and upset because you see our city in grave trouble with these crises and disturbances, and the world-renowned liberty of the English people changed into unbridled licence (I might almost say monstrosity).' 'No legislator', he goes on to claim 'not even Plato or Aristotle, could have conceived a better constitution' than that of Britain since the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688. (i.10) It was the balance between the separate powers within the state that had won Jones's esteem, where the authority of the king was 'not diminished by the influence of the aristocracy, nor the freedom of the people by the power of the more prominent citizens'. However, the 'common people' had been 'spurred on' where they needed constraint, and he cannot prevent himself 'from violently disapproving of that villain Wilkes - a man, it is true, of energy and intelligence, but a trouble-maker and a sort of firebrand to light the flames of sedition'.

This letter to Reviczky is particularly interesting: it begins with a discussion of a Persian poem, then proceeds to an analysis of the state, which later Jones relates to the game of chess. 'When I consider our state, I think I am watching a game of our favourite hobby, chess. For we have a king, whose position we earnestly defend, but whose power can very quickly be *checked*. Knights of the realm, bishops and others have the appearance of the aristocracy, who look after military and civic affairs; but the special power lies with the poor pawns, the common people, whose unity and close support for one another assures victory. But if they become separated and their effectiveness is squandered, the loss involves all men. All of this obeys strict laws, just as in chess.' Jones was twenty-two when he wrote these words, and he describes his own position as that of a spectator, watching two players

merely for interest. But were he to take part in politics, he is convinced he would strive 'to that end, that a state so superbly constituted should be preserved intact.' (i.12)

William Jones's initial political position, then, was loyalty to the British constitution after 1688, with its checks and balances. But he also realized that the real power lay with the people, who depended on being united for any strength they might have. His sympathy for 'the poor pawns' in the game of politics, the common people, was strengthened, I believe, by his experiences on the circuit in South Wales when he commenced his 'forensic' journeys there in the spring of 1775, visiting the county towns of Cardigan, Carmarthen and Haverfordwest.

On 14 April 1775, he wrote to Althorp from 'the famous town of Cardigan', giving a fascinating account of his journey so far, coming by way of Coalbrookdale, where he gives the incipient Industrial Revolution the tone and colour of the Augustan Age, comparing the iron-works after dark with 'Vulcan's forges in the caverns of Aetna'. (i.186-87) He began his 'legal campaign' at Carmarthen, and explains how 'a Welch court exhibits in miniature all the practice of Westminster-hall', with a court of chancery and of common law, trying both civil and criminal causes. (i.189-190) At Haverfordwest he had 'the unpleasant task' as he describes it to his young friend 'of being advocate for four men accused of murder'. He was successful: 'they were all acquitted; but I suspect one of them to be guilty. The story is long and very horrid', he adds, 'you shall hear it, among my other Welch stories, when we meet'. (i.190)

After the summer circuit ended in September 1775, Jones's Welsh stories included an account of a journey through North Wales that he made as an early example of a traveller in the picturesque mode. This letter, which makes delightful reading, is relevant here, perhaps only for the remark which Jones makes, in passing, on seeing 'a prospect of the isle of Anglesea, the ancient

Mona', which reminds him at once of his own family connections. His words are significant: 'where my ancestors presided over a free but uncivilized people'. (i.199) Whether or not Jones was aware of his lineage on his father's side is unknown, and he would doubtless have had to trace it back for many generations before he encountered the 'princes and chieftains' his editor perceives among his ancestors. His remark reveals that he was typical of many Englishmen of his time in holding an idealized notion of the Welsh as a free, though somewhat savage people: a typical 'Anglo-Saxon attitude'.

During 1779 and the early eighties Jones made three visits to France, where he met Benjamin Franklin and various figures associated with the *Encyclopédie* and the pre-Revolutionary period in that country - Turgot and Marmontel, for instance. (i.305-306) In August 1779, however, he was in the West country, having pleasurably concluded the circuit in South Wales for the year, looking back over the five Welsh counties he had just left, and greeting Dorset as 'less my native soil than the country I have left'. (i.309) He was bound for Weymouth and the newly-fashionable pastime of sea-bathing.

By this time Jones's letters reveal a tone of disillusionment with the state of the country at large. A few weeks later, he writes: 'our country gentlemen are *in general* either so ignorant, so prejudiced, or so corrupt, that Liberty, manly, rational, intelligible Liberty, will never be much benefited by them'. (i.318) Both Houses of Parliament he describes as 'totally depraved', and he holds out no hope for the country except through its young men, if they would only form, not a party, but '*an union*, founded on the solid basis of good sense, liberty, law, and general happiness'. (319) In this letter, too, he lets slip his idea that if ambassadors are the servants of kings, kings are the servants of their people. (320)

Early in 1780, Edmund Burke, who had been for many years an acquaintance of Jones's, attacked the problem of governmental

expense and extravagance in a speech in the House of Commons which was subsequently published with the title: 'A Plan for the Better Security of the Independence of Parliament, and the Economical Reformation of the Civil and Other Establishments'. Jones was in broad agreement with Burke's aims and suggestions, but one of his proposals for economy involved abolishing the Welsh judicature entirely, and centralizing everything in London. This suggestion seems really to have shocked the Welsh part of William Jones. Writing to Althorp in February, a few days after Burke's speech was made, he wrote: 'I grieve that his extensive plan begins with the bill for abolishing the Welch judicature, because I am persuaded that his idea is wrong, and that he neither does nor can foresee the inconveniences of his alteration.' (i.346)

As one who had travelled the Welsh circuit many times, Jones was experienced enough to realize the great difficulties that would be encountered by seekers after justice in Wales, if Burke's plan were to come to fruition. He could also, of course, see the advantages to an ambitious man at law like himself of concentrating everything in London, as he is honest enough to admit. But his scruples were stronger than his ambition, and he writes: 'As a circuiter, I should be interested in the promotion of his plan, because I shall have the same business in a more conspicuous scene; but I know so well the expense of instituting suits in Westminster Hall for the principality, and the convenience of watering the borders of my countrymen with the fountain of justice brought to their own doors, that I hope the Welch men will petition against the bill, and [he adds, significantly], if they please, they may employ me to support their petition at the bar of the House.' (i.346) Nowhere does Jones identify himself more thoroughly with Welsh people, and those of 'the common sort' - 'my countrymen' as he calls them here - than on the occasion of the publication of Burke's bill.

He returned to the subject in his letter of March 12 (i.351) and again on March 26 (354). In the former, he appeals to Althorp,

just embarking upon a Parliamentary career, to attend to the reformation of the criminal laws, 'some of which are very sanguinary', when order has been restored to 'the distracted affairs of the nation'. This appeal was elicited by a case at Worcester in which his susceptibilities as a human being seem to have got the better of his devotion to the law. 'At that place', he writes to Althorp, 'a girl was hanged for strangling her bastard: she had been seduced on a solemn promise of marriage. How much more deserving of death [he exclaims] was her seducer!' He seems to empathize completely with the poor girl's emotions: 'how powerful must the sense of shame be, that can so far prevail over the strong affections of a mother! and how unnatural (for the truth must not be concealed) are our manners, which annex the idea of shame to the increase of the human species!' A similar case occurred at Haverfordwest during the spring circuit of 1781 (ii.467), and on the same day Jones was successful in saving a client from falling into the clutches of the press-gang on coming out of court. The practice of 'pressing' young men into service in the navy or the army was another obnoxiously unjust custom which constantly met with William Jones's disapproval.

Writing from Haverfordwest on March 26, Jones joins Althorp in praising the wit and rhetoric of Burke's forensic style, but once again he deplores the effect the bill will have on what he calls 'my three counties' in South-West Wales. He himself, he says again, is persuaded that 'the expense of obtaining justice to the poor suitors of this country will be considerably augmented; so considerably, that many of them will bear injuries with patience rather than seek redress at such a charge. Ought not this to be considered? Ought a few thousands to be saved to the revenue, by a plan, which will either distress the yeomanry and peasantry of Wales or deter them from applying at all for justice? How many industrious tenants will then be greater slaves than they are even now to the tyrannical agents and stewards of indolent gentlemen?'. (i.354) Although Jones submits his ideas to Althorp as 'hints for discussion' (as a good tutor), these rhetorical questions do not give the impression

here of his being a devil's advocate - and the last sentence in particular suggests that his years on the circuit had induced in him a particular sympathy for those 'slaves...to the tyrannical agents and stewards of indolent gentlemen' that constituted the yeomanry and peasantry of Wales.

In 1782, Jones became a member of the Society for Constitutional Information. He was still a loyal believer in the constitution, although his interpretation of it was becoming more and more radical, and it was natural that he should belong to this society whose aim was to propagate information, by publishing works of a political nature that other publishers avoided, and distributing them at large, often gratis. Its members favoured universal [male] suffrage, annual parliaments and the ballot. It published a political poem of Jones's, the Ode: 'Althorp, what makes a state?' in 1783, composed on his way to the spring circuit of 1781, 'in my chaise between Abergavenny and Brecon', and written down 'in the mountains of Trecastle'. (ii. 463-64) In August of the preceding year it had published the even more influential 'Principles of Government'.

Writing to its secretary to accept the honour of being elected one of its members, Jones stated his opinion that: 'Care must be taken, lest, by reducing the Regal power to its just level, we raise the Aristocratical to a dangerous height; since it is from the People alone that we can deduce the obligation of our laws and the authority of magistrates. On the people depend the welfare, the security, and the permanence of every legal government; in the People must reside all substantial power; and to the People must all those, in whose ability and knowledge we ... confide, be always accountable for the due exercise of that power, with which they are for a time intrusted'. (ii.534)

Jones's confidence in 'the People' is also made clear by the circumstances of his composing 'The Principles of Government' in Paris. It was written to defend his contention that the basic

principles underlying government could be understood and stated by the simplest uneducated person, the peasant or farmer of the title. (ii. 608) In the Socratic manner, viz. by a series of well-framed questions, he brings his protagonist to articulate for himself a number of political principles. The peasant who is approached by a scholar at the beginning of the dialogue to sign a petition (to Parliament) is a member of a village club, and it is by questioning him about the nature of this club that the scholar gets him to make some astounding statements about what a state ought to be. First, the club is formed not out of compulsion, but from choice, and its president is elected by the members from meeting to meeting: 'The master for each night is chosen by all the company present the week before.'<sup>7</sup> The peasant is asked whether it is this elected president who makes the laws that bind them. The answer is contemptuous: 'He make laws! He bind us! No; we have all agreed to a set of equal rules, which are signed by every new comer...' When asked what would happen if the president were to abuse his power and try to assume perpetual control over them, or if some few members were to usurp the right of all to formulate rules, the peasant is adamant that they would be pursued and expelled, for 'we should be the majority with justice on our side'.<sup>(4)</sup>

The analogy of this village club and 'Friendly Society' (for one of its purposes was to hold a 'box' into which its members put a sum of money every time they met), with the state is soon made clear. The scholar asks: 'Did it never occur to you that every state or nation was only a great *club*?', and gets the innocent reply: 'Nothing ever occurred to me on the subject; for I never thought

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<sup>7</sup> *The Principles of Government, in a Dialogue between a Scholar and a Peasant. Written by a Member of the Society for Constitutional Information.* Printed and Distributed gratis by the Society for Constitutional Information, 1782. Page references in the text. The pamphlet is reproduced by Michael J Franklin, *Sir William Jones: selected poetical and prose works* (Cardiff, 1995), 393-402.

about it.'(4) Now he is forced to think about it, to think about the purpose of the state, viz. the security and happiness of its members, and about the best way this can be achieved. The poor countryman has no freehold worth forty shillings or more a year, and 'nothing in the world but my cattle, implements of husbandry, and household goods, together with my farm, for which I pay a fixed rent to the "squire"'. So he has no right to elect a representative to Parliament. (5) He is overawed when he realizes the power of Parliament and even more so when his questioner informs him that he is not alone, that 'six men in seven, who inhabit this kingdom, have, like you, no votes; and the petition which I desired you to sign, has nothing for its object but the restoration of you all to the right of chusing those lawmakers, by whom your money or your lives may be taken from you. Attend, while I read it distinctly'. 'Give me your pen', breaks in the peasant, 'I never wrote my name, ill as it may be written, with greater eagerness'. (6)

Before the short dialogue ends, the peasant is inveigled into saying in so many words that if the king were to usurp the office of the legislature, he should be resisted, if need be by force, 'or the state would cease to be the state'.(6) He is persuaded too that he should be prepared for this contingency through getting hold of weapons and learning how to use them. 'I will contribute no more to the club' he decides, 'and purchase a firelock with my savings'. (6) The scholar urges him to master the use of these firearms, by drilling every morning: 'I say every *morning*; because if you exercise *too late in the evening*, you may fall into some of the legal snares, which have been spread for you by those gentlemen, who would rather secure game for their table, than liberty for the nation.' (7) He is suggesting that they may fall foul of the game-laws, whose enforcement during this period increased the hardships of country life for the rural poor.<sup>8</sup> Before the dialogue ends,

<sup>8</sup> William Blackstone (1723-80), a jurist admired by Jones, discusses the game-laws in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 4 vols

William Jones makes one more ironical reference to the 'indolent gentry' whose kind he had come upon in the course of his work on the circuit in Wales. When the peasant suggests that the whole village might arm itself in this way, the scholar suggests that they might 'easily be supplied, if the gentry of the nation would spare a little from their vices and luxury'. Thus having been obliged to enunciate for himself 'the principles of government', the peasant concludes, somewhat in the manner of Molière's Monsieur Jourdain: 'Good morning, Sir! You have made me wiser and better than I was yesterday; and yet, methinks, I had some knowledge in my own mind of this great subject, and have been a politician all my life without perceiving it.'

The pamphlet was originally published, anonymously, by the Society for Constitutional Information in August, 1782, in London. Now the scene shifts back to Wales, to north-eastern Wales and the diocese of St Asaph. There the bishop was Jonathan Shipley, soon to become William Jones's father-in-law, and the Dean was William Shipley, his son. This fact and the mode of life of these ecclesiastical gentlemen reflect the state of affairs within the Church of England in the late eighteenth century. Nepotism and absenteeism were rife, and it is to be believed that the Shipleys, father and son, spent many months away from Llanelwy. They did, however, hold views that were distinctly libertarian and egalitarian in some respects, upholding the cause of the American colonies in the war, and in the case of the Bishop, opposing sanctions against

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(Oxford, 1761-69), ii, 14, 403, 410-19; iv, 74-75, 408-409. He considered the current law to be 'unreasonable', and the crime of poaching to be of a 'questionable nature'. See also Douglas Hay, 'Poaching and the Game Laws on Cannock Chase', in Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh and E P Thompson eds., *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth, 1975), 189-253; Teresa Michals, "'That Sole Despotic Dominion": Slaves, Wives and Game in Blackstone's *Commentaries*', in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, xxvii (1993-94), 195-216.

Boston in retaliation for the 'tea-party' - the only member of the House of Lords to vote against the bill that would have imposed such sanctions.<sup>9</sup>

One symptom of the general unrest in the country at this time was the growth of the associate 'County Societies', in which local landowners expressed their dissatisfaction with the extravagance of the king and his placemen, and the general waste of public monies. One such society had been formed in Flintshire, and it met on 20 November, 1782, with Dean William Davies Shipley in the chair. He read Jones's newly published pamphlet to the assembled society, and suggested it would be a good thing to issue it again locally, and also that it should be translated into Welsh. The translator was to be the Rev. John Lloyd, Rector of Caerwys, Thomas Pennant's companion on his tours of Wales, and father of Angharad Llwyd, the historian and antiquarian. William Jones gives his own account of this event in a letter, written almost on the eve of his departure for India, to Lloyd Kenyon, Chief Justice for Chester. (ii.608) However, the High Sheriff of the county, Thomas Fitzmaurice, took an opposite view to that of the society, being violently opposed to the 'seditious, treasonable, and diabolical' ideas expressed in the pamphlet.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, 'The Principles of Government' was reprinted early in 1783, and published by Dean Shipley at Wrexham. Its new title now contained the words 'a gentleman and a farmer', and it had an 'Advertisement', written, so it would seem, by Sir William Jones himself, defending the principles embodied therein. (ii.608

<sup>9</sup> 'Freedom of the Press', 182.

<sup>10</sup> See 'Freedom of the Press', and *Life and Mind*, 185-6, for the history of 'The Principles of Government' in North Wales. For a different point of view, see Emyr Wyn Jones, *Diocesan Discord: A Family Affair, St. Asaph, 1779-1786* (Aberystwyth, 1988). The Thomas Pennant papers (NLW MSS 2598C) also show that local opinion was not entirely in favour of the Shipleys.

and note 3) It also bore his name as author, and the fact that he was a member of the Society for Constitutional Information. Now the cat had been set among the pigeons, and both in North Wales and in London, the dialogue was praised on the one hand and condemned on the other for its liberal ideas. It was circulated in the coffee-houses of the capital, and the *Gentleman's Magazine* said of it in April: 'Whether this small tract, which has been circulated in Wales, and is supposed to be by no mean hand, deserves the approbation bestowed upon it by the Flintshire Committee, or the epithets (which have also been given it) of "seditious, treasonable and diabolical", let the impartial reader determine.'<sup>11</sup>

Those who bandied about the epithets 'seditious' and 'treasonable' in relation to Jones's dialogue were in earnest. The High Sheriff in particular, Thomas Fitzmaurice, who happened to be a brother to the Prime Minister, Lord Shelburne, was out for Shipley's blood, and brought an indictment against him at the Great Sessions in Wrexham in April, where William Shipley was charged with 'wickedly and seditiously' publishing a 'certain false, wicked, malicious, seditious and scandalous libel, of and concerning our... Lord the King... in the form of a supposed dialogue between a supposed gentleman and a supposed farmer...'.<sup>12</sup>

Although the legal powers in London refused to prosecute, and King George III himself is said to have laughed, locally feelings were still running high. The accusation was brought against Shipley at the Sessions in Wrexham in September 1783. The Society for Constitutional Information undertook his defence, and hired the eminent counsel Thomas Erskine to defend Shipley. Sedition and libel were serious charges, and the legal battles that ensued were protracted and very complicated. The trial at

<sup>11</sup> 'Freedom of the Press', 182.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted by Emyr Wyn Jones, *Yr Anterliwt Goll: Barn ar Egwyddorion y Llywodraeth ... Gan Fardd Anadnabyddus o Wynedd* (Aberystwyth, 1984), Rhagymadrodd, xvii.

Wrexham in April 1784 was postponed, and in August transferred to Shrewsbury. And there began one of the most important trials of the eighteenth century. The crux of the matter was that the judge instructed the jury that they had the right to reply to only two questions: whether or not the defendant was guilty of publishing the libel, and secondly, whether he was guilty of the innuendoes and averments mentioned in the case. The question whether the published work was a libel or not was not for them to decide. At that time, only the judge was legally able to make that judgment. So, although Shipley had pleaded not guilty to the whole accusation of publishing a seditious libel, the jury were able in fact to pronounce him guilty 'of publishing only' and could not determine whether or not the tract was a libel.

This was an unsatisfactory result from everyone's point of view, but especially from that of Erskine, the counsel for the defence, and he took the matter further, to the King's Bench in London. In his request for a further trial, Erskine made the all-important legal point that a jury should be able to judge the work itself when considering whether or not a defendant is guilty of publishing a libel. He concluded that the question here involved 'in its determination and its consequences, the liberty of the press, and in that liberty, the very existence of every part of the public freedom'.<sup>13</sup>

Eventually, the whole case against Shipley crumbled away, and he returned in triumph from London to St Asaph, to be greeted by bonfires and processions. However, an important principle of freedom of the press had been aired, the issue of jury rights had been raised, and after Fox's Libel Act was finally passed by both Houses of Parliament in 1792, the jury in a libel case, and not the judge, would thenceforward have the right to decide not only

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<sup>13</sup> 'Freedom of the Press', 186.

whether the defendant had published the document in question, but also whether or not that document constituted a libel.

When William Davies Shipley returned triumphantly to North Wales in December 1784, his brother-in-law had already been in India for over a year. Jones's correspondence gives no intimation that the shock waves resulting from the publication of his little dialogue reached him there. In fact, one has the impression that when he left these shores he shook the dust of Europe from off his shoes. Fresh woods and jungles new were beckoning him to the Orient. His pamphlet, however, continued to have repercussions, particularly in the north-eastern borders of Wales, where it was soon to undergo a remarkable metamorphosis. The suggestion that it should be translated into Welsh had come to nothing, but now something even more subversive happened to it. It was transmogrified into a popular entertainment in that language, in an 'anterliwt' which also included an account, in racy, popular speech, of the trials and of William Shipley's triumphal return through the towns of Wrexham and Ruthin, and through Dyffryn Clwyd back to St Asaph.

The 'anterliwt' was a very popular literary form in eighteenth-century Wales, especially in the north-eastern corner. Its name is clearly derived from the English 'interlude' and reflects an earlier pronunciation nearer to the French. It was a descendant of the medieval mystery and miracle plays, consisting of a kind of drama in verse, which was acted on a wagon in a farmyard, or in the market place or fair, or even on a table in a tavern. *Anterliwtiau* contained a strong element of social criticism and satire, but it was the mores of the people (of all classes), rather than political events, that formed the subject matter. The 'anterliwt' that was published anonymously in January 1785 was an exception in this respect. Indeed, it has been described (by J H Davies in the pages of the

*Journal of the Welsh Bibliographical Society*) as 'the first political squib in the Welsh language'.<sup>14</sup>

There are many interesting aspects to this 'anterliwt', apart from its authorship. Emyr Wyn Jones has argued very forcibly that its author was Twm o'r Nant (1739-1810), a prolific writer of 'anterliwtiau' who lived and worked in the counties of Denbigh and Flint at this time.<sup>15</sup> Whoever wrote it, he was skilled in the practice and craft of the *genre*, and extremely well-versed in the details of the Shipley affair from first to last. The title itself is significant: *Barn ar Egwyddorion y Llywodraeth, mewn Ymddiddan rhwng Pendefig a Hwsmon*, i.e. *Judgment [or, A Judgment] on the Principles of the Government, in a Dialogue between a Gentleman and a Farmer*. Here, the title of William Jones's dialogue, 'The Principles of Government' (in an abstract sense), has been altered to the very much more subversive 'Principles of the Governments', which are (or is) under judgment of some kind. Does the word *barn* here refer to the legal judgments which the dialogue had elicited in its English form? Or does it suggest that this new work, the 'interlude' itself, embodies a judgment on the principles of the present government? Both, perhaps.

If the subject matter is new, this 'anterliwt' is typical of its kind in most other respects. It has the same stock characters, notably the miser, the fool and the Narrator or Prologue. The two latter characters always introduced the action, the fool making

<sup>14</sup> *JWBS*, iii (1925), 17-21. See also in the same issue, 48-51, E I Williams, 'A Welsh Political Squib', and J J Evans, *Dylanwad y Chwyldro Ffrengig ar Lenyddiaeth Cymru* (Lerpwl, 1928), 25-28; cf. A Cynfael Lake, 'Rhai Ystyriaethau Pellach ynghylch Awduraeth "Yr Anterliwt Goll"', *Cylchrawn Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru*, xxvii (1992), 337-352. An account of the trials and the 'anterliwt' is also to be found in Michael J Franklin, *Sir William Jones* (Writers of Wales, Cardiff, 1995), 72-78.

<sup>15</sup> *Yr Anterliwt Goll*, xxx-xxxvi.

mischievous remarks about the girls in the audience - Cadi and Neli and Betti, in this instance. The Prologue gives a summary of the action, and the interlude proceeds, to finish with an Epilogue, which was sung to the tune of a popular song. Unfortunately, the text of the 'anterliwt' is incomplete in the only copy that remains to us.

The work contains a detailed account of the fortunes of William Jones's dialogue in North Wales during the preceding years, beginning with a full and fair transposition of the words of the gentleman and the farmer into the racy, colloquial, dialectal, sometimes vulgar Welsh of the area. It is not a literal translation, the metre and internal rhyme of the *mesur triban*, even when liberally interpreted, will hardly allow that, but it is surprising how little of the original text has been omitted. It begins with the gentleman of the dialogue (played by the Fool) pushing a piece of paper under the nose of the farmer (played by the Miser) and asking him to sign it:

Ho ho fewyrth Sion Hwsmon esmwyth  
Ai chwi sydd yma'n cwyno'ch trymlwyth,  
Seiniwch hyn o bappur i drwssio'r bai  
A chwedi bydd llai'ch adwyth ... (15)<sup>16</sup>

It proceeds with the analogy of the state to the 'clwbb', and the exhortation to keep a musket in the corner of the bedroom:

A phawb a mwsked iawn a dâl  
Yn siambar ei wâl a'i wely. (22)

And it ends with a version of the statement that 'a free state is only a more numerous and more powerful club, and that he only is

<sup>16</sup> Page references in the text. A rough translation might be: 'Ho, ho, old Farmer John, /Is that you there grumbling at your lot? /Sign this piece of paper to put the matter right /And then your troubles will be less.'

a free man, who is a member of such a state.' (23) In conclusion, the farmer echoes his counterpart in William Jones's dialogue, suggesting that he is by this time a much wiser man;

Dydd dawch Syr i'm gwnaethoch'n ddoethach  
Nag oeddwn ganwaith ag yn amgenach,  
Er ceisio dysgu hynny o hyd  
Heb wybod dim byd fal bwbach. (23)<sup>17</sup>

The entertainment proceeds, following the twists and turns of the court cases in rather confusing detail. However, there is one person who bears the brunt of the satirist's scorn and that is the character referred to at the end by the name of 'Ff--z', that is the Hon. Thomas Fitzmaurice, the instigator of the furore against Jones's dialogue in that area of North Wales. Fitzmaurice was an Irishman and this fact brings forth many scandalous references to the Irish in general. Indeed, he provides an interesting example of those foreign aristocrats who settled in Wales during this period and exploited its resources and people, not entirely for their own gain. He was perhaps the paternalistic industrialist-businessman *par excellence*, though rather an eccentric one. A H Dodd describes him as 'a reforming Whig', and says that he lived 'with the affected humility of a tradesman and the pomp of a lord' on his estates at Llewenni, near Denbigh.<sup>18</sup> 'Here', says Dodd, 'he busied himself with all manner of economic enterprises till his death in 1793. One day he would be planning a canal for the Vale of Clwyd; the next, driving to Chester in a coach and six to sell the linens woven by his Irish tenants and bleached in his own bleacheries at Llewenni.' ['Y kannwr'/'the bleacher' is another epithet applied to him by the author of the 'anterliwt']. 'He would

<sup>17</sup> 'Good day sir. You have made me wiser/Than I was, a hundred times and more/If I try to learn all that/And not remain ignorant, like a booby.'

<sup>18</sup> In *The Industrial Revolution in North Wales* (Wrexham, 1990 [reprint of 3rd edition, 1971]), 32-33.

stand (so tradition has it)', Dodd proceeds, 'behind a counter inscribed "Ballymote manufacture" ... and then return to regale his neighbours with a "grand illumination of the Bleach Works in a Vauxhall style" - or else to deal out pills and plasters to the poor in his own private dispensary.'

Fitzmaurice, then, was not entirely an exploitative landowner, and the Bleachery at Llewenni was a most impressive building, 'the most elegant structure of its kind in Europe', it seems. Built at a cost of £20,000, it had disappeared without trace by 1833.<sup>19</sup> It is difficult to say what incensed 'Ffitz' so much against 'The Principles of Government'. The author of the 'anterliwt' suggests that it was a private quarrel between members of the upper classes, but there is also some mention of extortion on the part of Fitzmaurice, and that he had gone to London to buy arms - presumably to enforce his will on his opponents.

A H Dodd's book on the rapid industrialization of North Wales during this period suggests the reason why this area of Flint and Denbighshire, where the Shipleys happened to be, was a particularly fruitful seed-bed in which radical ideas could flourish. Coal mines were being opened up and other minerals and metals exploited, immigrants, in the shape of industrial entrepreneurs and labourers alike, challenged the old social order. It would be interesting to know what effect the 'anterliwt' *Barn ar Egwyddorion y Llywodraeth* with its new, popular manifestation of William Jones's 'Principles of Government' had on a disaffected and disenfranchised populace.<sup>20</sup>

Three phases have been traced in the metamorphosis of that dialogue, written in France (in French perhaps) in 1782, promulgated in English in London, and thereafter in Wrexham and

<sup>19</sup> Dodd, 296.

<sup>20</sup> In *When was Wales?* (Harmondsworth, 1985), 169, Gwyn A Williams indicates the degree of civil unrest in the Wrexham area in 1795.

Norwich, transformed into a popular entertainment in the form of an 'anterliwt' in the Welsh language in 1785. Its next appearance was at a time and place even more fraught with civil unrest - at the middle of the nineteenth century, in the South-Wales town of Merthyr Tydfil.

In his article in *JWBS* in 1925, 'A Welsh Political Squib of 1784', J H Davies mentions a translation of the dialogue into Welsh, 'printed at Merthyr Tydfil in the second quarter of the nineteenth century by David John junior, and Morgan Williams, Glebeland'. This was in the form of a pamphlet, and it was sold for a penny. The title, which reflects more exactly William Jones's original title than did that of the 'anterliwt', was 'Egwyddorion Llywodraeth: Ymddiddan rhwng Dysgawdwr a Gweithiwr'. It has assumed, once again, the more general tone of 'Principles of Government' and the subtitle suggests the translators knew the very first version, because the scholar reappears in the form of a teacher ('dysgawdwr'). The other protagonist, at this point, is translated from his rural setting in the original dialogue to the furnaces of Merthyr, and he becomes a 'worker'.

David John and Morgan Williams were the editors of *Udgorrn Cymru* (*The Trumpet of Wales*), a Welsh language monthly and organ of the Chartist movement, which was published at Merthyr between March 1840 and July 1842. I have not yet seen a copy of the pamphlet that J H Davies mentions, though it may well be hidden among his papers in the Cwrt Mawr collection in the National Library of Wales. However, there is a translation of part at least of the dialogue, with the same title, in the December 1840 issue of *Udgorrn Cymru*. Its title runs in full: 'Egwyddorion Llywodraeth: Ymddiddan rhwng Dysgawdwr a Gweithiwr, gan Syr William Jones, aelod o'r Gymdeithas am Wybodaeth Ffurflywodraethol'. Here the author is named, and named as a member of the Society for Constitutional Information. It begins with a few words of praise for Sir William, albeit at second hand. This dialogue, say the translators, was not written by a Tory or a Whig, or a

Conservative, nor yet a 'destroyer', but by an honest man, of whom Dr Johnson said 'that he was the wisest of the sons of men'. Jones taught that the spirit of our Constitution ensures to any Briton, *with any property at all*, the right to vote for representation in Parliament. He also held that it is a mockery to call a man free without that right, and without it, there are no laws, only ordinances that bind him without his permission. He believed, further, that a permanent army is a shame to society, and that the people of England would not be a people in the true meaning of the word, until 200,000 of them would be ready for the field at twenty-four hours' notice.

They go on to say that the dialogue was published in a pamphlet under the auspices of the Society in Flintshire, but that, as might be expected, the author, a learned and sensible man, along with the members of the Committee, earned the opprobrium of the 'Church and State men' and the 'passive obedience folks'. But we challenge the world, they continue, to show that common sense, that old fellow who is scorned by many for his great age and his honesty, can overturn the principles the dialogue contains.

The translation that follows is a very different kettle of fish from the racy, vulgar dialogue of the 'anterliwt'. It is written in the rather stiff literary Welsh of the middle of the last century, although sometimes it reflects the dialect of the area. The slight change in meaning that some of William Jones's words acquire in translation is often significant. For instance, in the first sentence: 'Why should humble men like me, sign or set marks to petitions of this nature?', 'humble men' have become 'poor men': 'Paham y dylai dynion tlodion fel fi arwyddo deisebau o'r natur hyn?' And the translation from the agricultural setting to the oppression of workers in heavy industry is complete.

The translators omit the discussion about holding the money-box, and proceed to the question: 'Did it never occur to you that every state or nation was only a great *club*?' And eventually, like

the English farmer (or peasant) before him, the Welsh 'worker' hastens to sign the petition for the right to choose all the law-makers who control his property and even his life. If the king insists on making laws or altering them according to his whim and pleasure, he must be expelled, and his standing army, viz. the militia, should be challenged. The 'worker' shows himself ready to take up arms immediately, and his interlocutor, as in William Jones's dialogue, offers to give him a gun 'with complete accoutrements'. The dialogue ends with the worker realizing that he is wiser than he was yesterday, but that the scholar has shown him that he already had some knowledge of this great subject, and that he had always been a politician without being aware of it: 'ac fy mod yn *bolitician* trwy fy mywyd, er nad oeddwn yn deall hynny'.

To a reader today, this partial translation of 'The Principles of Government' seems almost as innocuous as its original English version. To get some idea of its impact on its readers in 1840, we should consider the purpose of the paper in which it was published, and the nature of the public for whom it was intended. The power of the popular press in industrial South Wales at this time should not be underestimated. The Bute papers in Cardiff reflect the growing alarm with which the magistrates viewed those unstamped periodicals which were being hawked around without licence among the working population. In Swansea, L W Dillwyn, writing to Lord Bute in 1839, voices his apprehension which 'arises from the slow effect of the Poison which they are always spreading ... Last week a vast number of the papers of which I sent one to your Lordship were publicly and gratuitously distributed'.<sup>21</sup> It was considered by one magistrate that 'three-fourths of all the Chartist mischief in our district was generated' by such seditious

<sup>21</sup> See R D Rees, 'Glamorgan Newspapers under the Stamp Acts', *Morgannwg*, iii (1959), 80.

publications, which were not only distributed at large, but even read aloud in secret ale-house meetings.

In November 1839, Henry Scale of Aberaman wrote to Lord Bute that Morgan Williams, the Chartist leader, and editor of *Udgorn Cymru*, had just returned from London. He had been there 'to do what do you think, my Lord? to establish a *Chartist Newspaper*!! - thus to add fuel to the fire not smouldering but *burning* - This man went up to buy a printing press'. A rumour was spread around too that boxes marked 'type' landed at Newport from Bristol, in fact contained two or three thousand cartridges, though Lord Bute could find no confirmation of this, and could write to the Home Secretary in January, 1840, that Chartism was on the wane. In April, however, he asked for a barracks to be built at Caerffili - that was a few weeks after *Udgorn Cymru* had begun publication.<sup>22</sup>

*Udgorn Cymru*, which began as an unstamped monthly in March, 1840, was printed and published at their Glebeland office in Merthyr, by David John, the son of a Unitarian minister of that town, and Morgan Williams, a weaver. Morgan Williams, had, in fact, co-edited a previous subversive newspaper in 1834, a bilingual monthly entitled *Y Gweithiwr/The Workman*, which supported trade-union organization. It was soon suppressed. *Udgorn Cymru*, when it appeared, was owned by a group of shareholders who called themselves 'The Working Men's Press and Publications'. Their proclaimed purpose was to bring to the support of Chartism the power of knowledge and truth - and they repeat this purpose many times over in the course of the period during which the paper appeared. The *Udgorn*, and its sister paper in English, *The Advocate*, established in July, were not tied to any political party or affiliation, and so were free to expose oppression and corruption wherever they were to be found, and to help working

<sup>22</sup> R D Rees, 81-82.

men (and women) to believe in their own unity and the justice of their cause.

The appearance of these papers was taken as an ominous sign by the representatives of the property-owning classes in the area. The Lord Lieutenant, Lord Bute, sent copies of the *Udgorn*, with sections translated into English, to the Home Office, emphasizing the 'mischievous intentions' of the editors and urging the prosecution of the publishers. In January 1841, the combined sales of the *Udgorn* and *Advocate* were estimated at 1,200 or 1,500 a month, providing constant employment for two journeymen printers. Workmen who belonged to Chartist lodges carried copies in their pockets for sale in the town and at public houses, and the whole enterprise was supported by the proceeds of sales and collections among Chartist supporters. Lord Bute was impressed by the standard of these publications. Writing to Lord Normanby in October 1840, he observed (regretfully) of the *Advocate*, that it was 'conducted with considerable skill for its purpose'. He added that, but for these two publications, 'very little would be heard of Chartism in this district', and this was evidence not of the weakness of the movement in general, but an indication of the importance of the two papers in Merthyr.<sup>23</sup>

It was in this broad context that the translation of Sir William Jones's dialogue, 'The Principles of Government' appeared in the columns of *Udgorn Cymru* in December, 1840. It seems a long way from the legal fastnesses of the Middle Temple and the salons of pre-Revolutionary France, which had a part in its genesis, and even further from the stifling court-rooms and cool verandahs of India, whither its author vanished after its publication in 1782. Its appeal to the Chartist publishers in Merthyr was not only in its uncompromising advocacy of the right of individual male suffrage, but in its justification of the use of armed rebellion, when regal or

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<sup>23</sup> R D Rees, 83-84.

aristocratical oppression warranted that. What Sir William Jones would have made of the Chartists must remain a matter of conjecture (he had reason to be rather terrified of 'the mob') or of the movement for women's suffrage, or of the demand for proportional representation in our time, or the recent slide into 'quangocracy'. Had he lived today, the thought of so many fire-arms in the corners of bedrooms might not have attracted him so much. But it would certainly have rejoiced his heart to see the weavers and puddlers of that industrial town in South Wales articulating for themselves the principles of government in their native tongue.

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## 'MASTER OF PRACTICAL MAGNETICS': THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NATURAL PHILOSOPHER\*

*Patricia Fara*

In 1745, Peter Collinson had some exciting London news for an American friend. 'Hither to I have wrote only to blot paper', he enthused, 'but now I tell you some thing new Doc' night a Physition has found the Art of Giveing Such a magnetic power to Steel that the poor old Loadstone is putt quite out of Countenance'.<sup>1</sup> Collinson was writing about the dramatic performances at the Royal Society of Gowin Knight (1713-72), who had impressed his audience with the unprecedented strength of his artificial steel magnets. Although now only a shadowy figure, Knight became an eminent Fellow of the Royal Society, internationally renowned for his magnetic expertise and navigational compasses, and first director of the British Museum. He moved in élite circles, portrayed as a philosophical gentleman, his own book on the table at his side (figure 1).<sup>2</sup> The son of an impoverished provincial clergyman, Knight rose through ability, patronage and commercial opportunism to dine with nobility and be discussed by the King.<sup>3</sup>

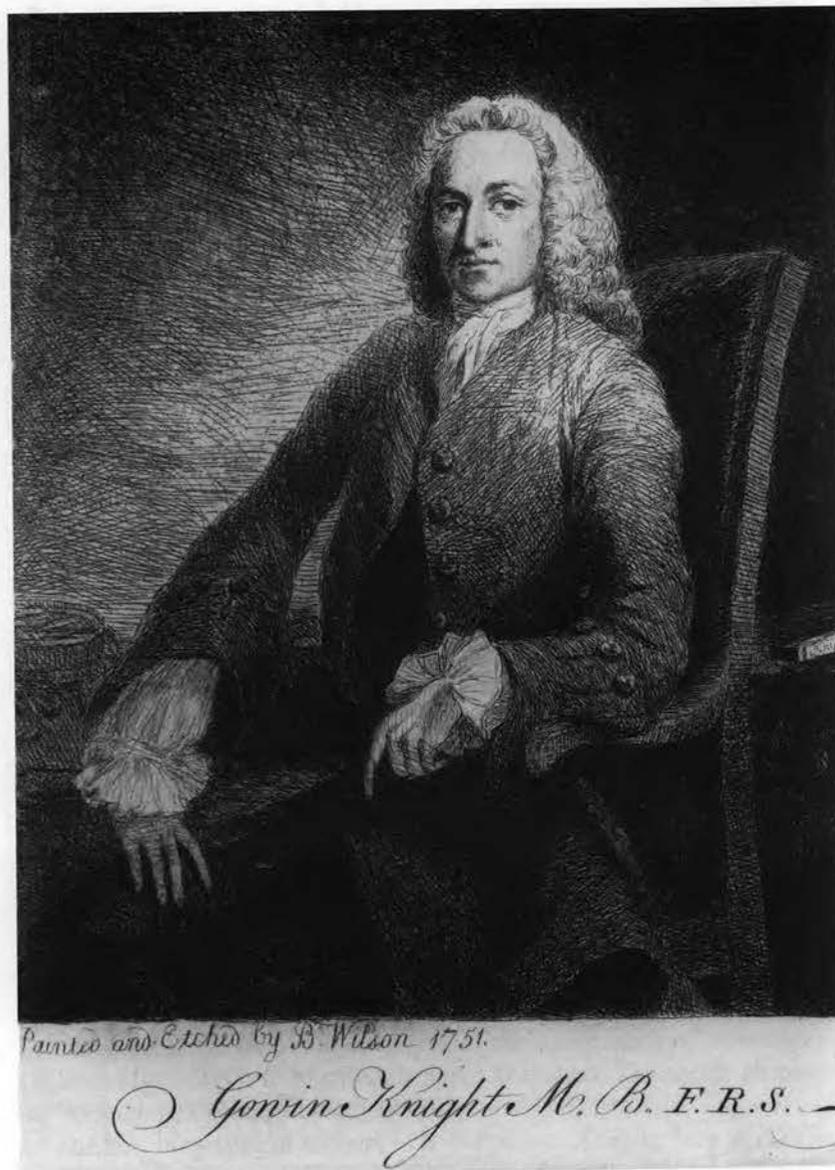
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\* I am grateful to Jim Secord and Alan Clarke for their helpful contributions to this paper.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Cadwallader Colden of 26 April 1745, reproduced in C Colden, *The letters and papers of Cadwallader Colden* (9 vols., New York, 1917-23), vol 3, 113-5, quotation from p.114.

<sup>2</sup> The other surviving portrait of Knight is an oil-painting, also by Benjamin Wilson, originally hung in the British Museum and now stored at the National Gallery archives.

<sup>3</sup> B Wilson, 'Autobiography' (manuscript at the National Portrait Gallery, London, 1783), 78.



Naval historians portray Knight as the heroic inventor of 'the first scientific compass'.<sup>4</sup> Historians of science, on the other hand, have focused on analysing his magnetic theories within a Newtonian framework.<sup>5</sup> But this artificial dissection into congratulatory technological advance and theoretical progress conceals the far more complex patterns of change lying behind the introduction of new artifacts and ideas.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, by failing to locate Knight within his social context, both approaches exclude any consideration of how his self-promotional activities moulded his writings and inventions.<sup>7</sup> Knight's life was singular in its details, but its broad features were shared by many eighteenth-

**Figure 1**  
**Gowin Knight**  
 1751 etching by Benjamin Wilson  
 Royal Society print number 1745.

<sup>4</sup> G A A Grant and J Klinkert, *The ship's compass* (London, 1970), 71. See also: A E Fanning, *Steady as she goes: a history of the Compass Department of the Admiralty* (London, 1986), xx-xxii; J B Hewson, *A history of the practice of navigation* (Glasgow, 1983), 55-9; A Hine, *Magnetic compasses and magnetometers* (London, 1968), 3; H L Hitchins and W E May, *From lodestone to gyro-compass* (London, 1952), 24-31; W E May, *A history of marine navigation* (Henley-on-Thames, 1973), 67-9.

<sup>5</sup> R E Schofield, *Mechanism and materialism: British natural philosophy in an age of reason* (Princeton, 1970), 175-81; A Thackray, *Atoms and powers* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), 141-7; P Heimann and J E McGuire, 'Newtonian forces and Lockean powers: concepts of matter in eighteenth-century thought', *Hist. Stud. Phys. Sci.*, 3 (1971), 233-306, pp.296-9; P Heimann, 'Newtonian natural philosophy and the scientific revolution', *Hist. Sci.*, 11 (1973), 1-7, pp.14-15; R W Home and P J Connor, *Æpinus's essay on the theory of electricity and magnetism* (Princeton, NJ, 1981), 158-60.

<sup>6</sup> W Bijker, T Hughes and T Pinch, *The social construction of technological systems: new directions in the social study of technology* (Cambridge, 1987); D MacKenzie and J Wajcman, *The social shaping of technology* (Milton Keynes, 1985).

<sup>7</sup> The best biographical account is R B Prosser, 'Knight, Gowin (1713-1772)' in *Dictionary of National Biography* (22 vols., Oxford, 1908-9), vol. 11, 250-2. See also A de Morgan, 'Dr Gowan Knight', *Notes and Queries*, 10, (1860), 281-2.

century men fashioning novel roles in society. As they sought to improve their own positions, they established new ways of earning money and gaining status through skill and initiative, rather than relying on patronage. By reconstructing Knight's career, this article provides a concrete example of how such upwardly-mobile entrepreneurs and administrators<sup>8</sup> contributed to the commercial transformation of the eighteenth century and the changing nature of organisations like the Royal Society.

### The business of natural philosophy

Commentators now and at the time have described eighteenth-century English people as polite and commercial. Their Enlightened views informed appropriate behaviour in a competitive and changing society.<sup>9</sup> Members of the landed gentry and the expanding mercantile community were profiting from England's increasing wealth, cooperating in a mutually-advantageous creative cult of commerce to forge a stable and prosperous British nation.<sup>10</sup> As the economy flourished, London attracted wealthy people to one of the world's richest and busiest trading cities, while the provincial landscape was transformed through the renaissance of urban towns as thriving centres of Enlightenment.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> For the use of the term administrators to describe eighteenth-century people, see J Brewer, *The sinews of power* (London, 1989), 79-85.

<sup>9</sup> P Langford, *A polite and commercial people: England 1727-1783* (Oxford, 1989), esp. 1-6.

<sup>10</sup> L Colley, *Britons: forging the nation 1707-1837* (Newhaven, 1992), esp. 55-100. See also N McKendrick, J Brewer and J H Plumb (eds.), *The birth of a consumer society: the commercialization of eighteenth-century England* (London, 1982) and L Weatherill, *Consumer behaviour and material culture in Britain 1660-1760* (London, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> P Borsay, *The English urban renaissance* (Oxford, 1989). See also J J Looney, 'Cultural life in the provinces: Leeds and York, 1720-1820' in A Beier, D Cannadine and J Rosenheim (eds.), *The first modern society* (Cambridge, 1989), 483-510 and R Porter, 'Science, provincial

Natural philosophers were centrally involved in these gradual but fundamental changes in English life. In post-Revolutionary England, Isaac Newton's growing band of adherents legitimated their activities by tying the production of knowledge to the public good. Natural theologians validated the exploitation of nature by asserting that the world had been created by a benevolent God for human benefit. By citing this divine sanction of the financial advantages of invention, they effectively translated commercial activity into holy commandment. Natural philosophers converted their private experiments into a public science by demonstrating their successful domination and manipulation of nature. As they marketed their products, they participated in building a materialist society dependent on their expertise. They used various tactics to enlist public support and capture appreciative audiences, packaging their skills, instruments and knowledge into sellable commodities competing for polite income.<sup>12</sup>

Eighteenth-century natural philosophers perceived navigation to be a key area for establishing credibility in a commercial community whose wealth depended on maritime trade. Many of them turned their attention to inventing and promoting devices for making ships more seaworthy, and navigational techniques more reliable.<sup>13</sup> The Royal Society had close links with Christ's Hospital, founded as a mathematical school for training naval officers.<sup>14</sup> As merchants and manufacturers increasingly demanded a new style of

culture and public opinion in Enlightenment England', *Brit. Journ. Eighteenth-Cent. Stud.*, 3 (1980), 20-46.

<sup>12</sup> L Stewart, *The rise of public science* (Cambridge, 1992); J Golinski, *Science as public culture* (Cambridge, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> M Deacon, 'Founders of marine science in Britain: the work of the early Fellows of the Royal Society', *Notes Rec. R. Soc. Lond.*, 20, (1965), 28-50.

<sup>14</sup> G Howson, *A history of mathematics education in England* (Cambridge, 1982), 29-44; E G R Taylor, *The mathematical practitioners of Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1954), 114-31.

education, many lecturers in natural philosophy shared classrooms with teachers of navigation and commerce.<sup>15</sup> The President of the Royal Society advertised the national significance of such work by emphasising the value of Knight's improved compass to the British people, which would enable them 'to increase and promote greatly our foreign trade and commerce, whereby we are provided at home with the fruits, the conveniences, the curiosities and the riches of the most distant climates'.<sup>16</sup>

The social barriers of eighteenth-century metropolitan culture did not correspond to modern academic faculties. Natural philosophers were engaged in many activities besides those which would nowadays be called scientific. Knight's mid-century colleagues at the Royal Society included instrument makers, artists, statesmen, admirals and doctors. They were united by mutual self-interest in an extended patronage system fostering individual enterprise. The changing relationships amongst the Fellows at the Royal Society, and between natural philosophers and their audiences, cannot be isolated from transformations taking place throughout society. New attitudes and new initiatives at the Royal Society were both a consequence of, and contributed towards, the forging of an increasingly polite and commercial British nation.

Historians of science have defined and divided the eighteenth century in a variety of ways. For England, the central years from about 1740 to 1770 remain an under-researched period, with very few studies of social networks of experimenters.<sup>17</sup> Falling beyond

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<sup>15</sup>S Pollard, *The genesis of modern management* (London, 1965), 104-22.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Folkes: 'Royal Society Journal Book' (copy) [hereafter RSJB], vol. 19, 366 (30 November 1747).

<sup>17</sup> These include D W Singer, 'Sir John Pringle and his circle', *Ann. Sci.*, 6 (1949), 127-80; V W Crane, 'The Club of Honest Whigs: friends of science and liberty', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 23 (1966), 210-33;

the reach of the Newton industry, and before either the northern burgeoning of innovation or the metropolitan expansion of the Banksian empire, this middle third of the eighteenth century comprises its own small 'valley of darkness'.<sup>18</sup> Although Larry Stewart and Jan Golinski have recently provided convincing interpretations of an extended eighteenth century stretching from 1660 to 1820, during which natural philosophers converted their activities into a public scientific culture, the ostensible ten year gap from 1750 to 1760 which falls between the stated scope of their studies is effectively far longer.<sup>19</sup>

Several historians have demonstrated the value of focusing on particular entrepreneurs for providing tangible evidence of how individual activities effected the commercial transformations of eighteenth-century life.<sup>20</sup> Knight's own rise to eminence resembled that of many of his contemporaries. For example, his career closely paralleled that of another Fellow of the Royal Society, the artist Arthur Pond. Pond and Knight were both members of the exclusive Royal Society dining club. They moved in related social circles, and deployed similar tactics of self-promotion. Like Knight, Pond

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A E Gunther, *An introduction to the life of the Rev Thomas Birch DD, FRS 1705-1766* (Suffolk, 1984).

<sup>18</sup> David Miller's phrase for the entire century: D P Miller, 'Into the valley of darkness': reflections on the Royal Society in the eighteenth century', *Hist. Sci.*, 27, (1989), 155-66.

<sup>19</sup> Stewart, *The rise of public science*, and Golinski, *Science as public culture*.

<sup>20</sup> For example, N McKendrick, 'George Packwood and the commercialisation of shaving', in McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb, *The birth of a consumer society*, 146-94; L Lippincott, *Selling art in Georgian London* (London, 1983); J R Millburn, *Wheelwright of the heavens: the life and work of James Ferguson, FRS* (London, 1988); R Porter, 'William Hunter: a surgeon and a gentleman', in W Bynum and R Porter (eds.), *William Hunter and the eighteenth-century medical world* (Cambridge, 1985), 7-34; F Doherty, 'The anodyne necklace: a quack remedy and its promotion', *Med. Hist.*, 34 (1990), 268-93.

successfully carved out a new form of livelihood, helping to transform a London art market based on patronage of French painters, into a flourishing commercial and British-based enterprise.<sup>21</sup> Medical practitioners were also implementing important changes. Enlightenment medicine was a competitive business, in which physicians vied for patients in a pluralistic milieu shaped by client requirements.<sup>22</sup> Many of the Fellows, including Knight himself, were medically trained, and his immediate circle of medical colleagues included William Hunter,<sup>23</sup> who rose through patronage and merit to attain a position from which he could dispense support to others.<sup>24</sup> Knight, Pond and Hunter were inventing strategies of self-advancement as well as marketing new magnetic devices, pictures and medical therapies. They represent numerous contemporaries who were building career structures outside existing organisations such as the civil service.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See Lippincott, *Selling art in Georgian London* and T E Allibone, *The Royal Society and its dining clubs* (Oxford, 1976), 20-80. Many of Pond's patrons and friends were close to Thomas Birch, a frequent host to Knight: see Thomas Birch's 'Diary', BL Add. MSS 4478C, passim. In particular, Knight and Pond were both close friends of Daniel Wray, and they both sought patronage from Admiral Anson and the Earl of Hardwicke. Knight's letter to Hardwicke of 22 September 1754 named Wray as a reference: BL Add. MSS 36269, fol. 29.

<sup>22</sup> N D Jewson, 'Medical knowledge and the patronage system in 18th century England', *Sociology*, 8 (1974), 369-85; R Porter, 'Before the fringe: 'quackery' and the eighteenth-century medical market' in R Cooter (ed.), *Studies in the history of alternative medicine* (London, 1988), 1-27; R Porter, *Health for sale: quackery in England 1660-1850* (Manchester, 1989).

<sup>23</sup> They were both listed as collectors of papers for the journal *Medical observations and inquiries*.

<sup>24</sup> Porter, 'William Hunter', loc. cit.

<sup>25</sup> G Holmes, *Augustan England* (London, 1982); Brewer, *The sinews of power*.

Knight is a rewarding example to analyze because he was engaged in a range of activities at a time when changes being implemented by natural philosophers were resonating throughout society. The Fellows at the Royal Society were seeking to improve their status. They were exerting more stringent controls over the steadily increasing membership,<sup>26</sup> and ensuring that their experiments were regularly reported in journals like the *Monthly Review* and *The Gentleman's Magazine*. They advertised the usefulness of experimental research through the new Copley Medal, awarded to Knight and several of his close associates.<sup>27</sup> Knight represented a growing but heterogeneous group of people who used natural philosophy to earn their living. Originally neither instrument makers nor aristocrats, their roots lay between those opposite social poles of the Royal Society.<sup>28</sup> Although, like earlier experimenters such as John Desaguliers, they relied on patronage, they were not embroiled in a symbiotic relationship of dependence, but adopted diverse strategies of marketing and self-promotion to survive and succeed.

Knight's activities exemplify the commercial initiatives of natural philosophers which were affecting English society as profoundly as the widely-cited example of industrial manufacturing processes.<sup>29</sup> Such men were closely allied with the London

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<sup>26</sup> M Crosland, 'Explicit qualifications as a criterion for membership of the Royal Society: a historical review', *Notes Rec. R Soc. Lond.*, 37 (1983), 167-87.

<sup>27</sup> M Bektas and M Crosland, 'The Copley medal: the establishment of a reward system in the Royal Society, 1731-1839', *Notes Rec. R Soc. Lond.*, 46 (1992), 43-76.

<sup>28</sup> This magnetic metaphor for eighteenth-century society is elaborated in E P Thompson, 'Eighteenth-century English society: class struggle without class?', *Social History*, 3 (1978), 133-65.

<sup>29</sup> N McKendrick, 'The rôle of science in the industrial revolution: a study of Josiah Wedgwood as a scientist and industrial chemist' in M Teich and R Young (eds.), *Perspectives in the history of science: essays*

instrument and publishing businesses, thus gaining financial profit as well as consolidating Britain's international reputation.<sup>30</sup> Through their self-promotional activities, they indelibly altered polite English culture. Consumers increasingly purchased books on natural philosophy, flocked to spectacular electrical displays, and decorated their houses with barometers and pictures featuring orreries and air-pumps.<sup>31</sup> As individual natural philosophers such as Knight sought personal recognition and financial reward, they contributed towards constructing natural philosophy as a visible and powerful public science. Examining Knight's shifting role in intersecting networks contributes towards a deeper understanding of large-scale processes of change affecting many aspects of English life.

### Gentlemanly invention

Knight's early life resembled that of many who came to hold prominent positions. He was the son of a Lincolnshire clergyman, educated like the engineer John Smeaton and their mutual friend

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*in honour of Joseph Needham* (London, 1973), 274-319. For reviews of the literature on the relationship between science, technology and economic growth in the eighteenth century, see A E Musson, *Science, technology and economic growth* (London, 1972), 1-68; P Mathias, *The transformation of England* (London, 1979), 45-71; T Pinch and W Bijker, 'The social construction of facts and artefacts: or how the sociology of science and the sociology of technology might benefit each other', *Soc. Stud. Sci.*, 14 (1984), 399-408.

<sup>30</sup> R Porter et al, *Science and profit in 18th-century London* (Cambridge, 1985).

<sup>31</sup> S Schaffer, 'Natural philosophy and public spectacle in the eighteenth century', *Hist. Sci.*, 21 (1983), 1-43. For barometers, see J Golinski, 'Barometers of change: the hermeneutics of weather instruments in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries', unpublished paper delivered at All Souls College, Oxford, 20 January 1993 (I am grateful to Jan Golinski for sending me a transcript) and T Castle, 'The female thermometer', *Representations*, 17 (1987), 1-27.

Benjamin Wilson (the electrical experimenter and portrait artist) at Leeds Free Grammar School. In 1731, he joined the swelling group of doctors' and clergymen's sons studying at Oxford by winning a scholarship to Magdalen Hall. Four years later, his academic prowess earned him a prestigious scholarship at Magdalen College, relieving him of his duties as servitor to wealthier fellow students. He stayed there until 1741, studying natural philosophy and medicine.

The tuition and examination systems at Oxford were notoriously lax at this time.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps reluctant to disturb the mould covering the library books at his college,<sup>33</sup> Knight started investigating the laborious and time-consuming techniques of

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<sup>32</sup> Prosser, 'Knight, Gowin', *DNB*; J R Bloxam, *A register of...Magdalen College* (7 vols., Oxford, 1879), vol. 6, 241-3. For Leeds Grammar School, see S Smiles, *Lives of the engineers: Rennie and Smeaton* (London, 1891), p.90. For Oxford education, see N A Hans, *New trends in education in the eighteenth century* (London, 1951), 18-45; L Stone, 'The size and composition of the Oxford student body 1580-1910' in L Stone (ed.), *The university in society, Volume I* (Princeton, 1975), 37-59; A H T Robb-Smith, 'Medical education at Oxford and Cambridge prior to 1850' in F Poynter (ed.), *The evolution of medical education in Britain* (London, 1966), 19-52; R G Frank, 'Science, medicine and the universities of early modern England: background and sources', *Hist. Sci.*, 11 (1973), 194-216, 239-69; G V Bennett, 'University, society and church 1688-1714' in L Sutherland and L Mitchell (eds.), *The history of the University of Oxford Volume V: The eighteenth century* (Oxford, 1986), 366-8; C Webster, 'The medical faculty and the Physic Garden' in *ibid.*, 683-724; G L'E Turner, 'The physical sciences' in *ibid.*, 659-82. Strangely, Knight never took the final degree which would have enabled him to become a licensiate of the Royal College of Physicians, the major advantage offered by Oxford over the more rigorous medical training institutions at Leiden and Edinburgh.

<sup>33</sup> Zacharias von Uffenbach, quoted in R Bayne-Powell, *Travellers in eighteenth-century England* (London, 1951), 96.

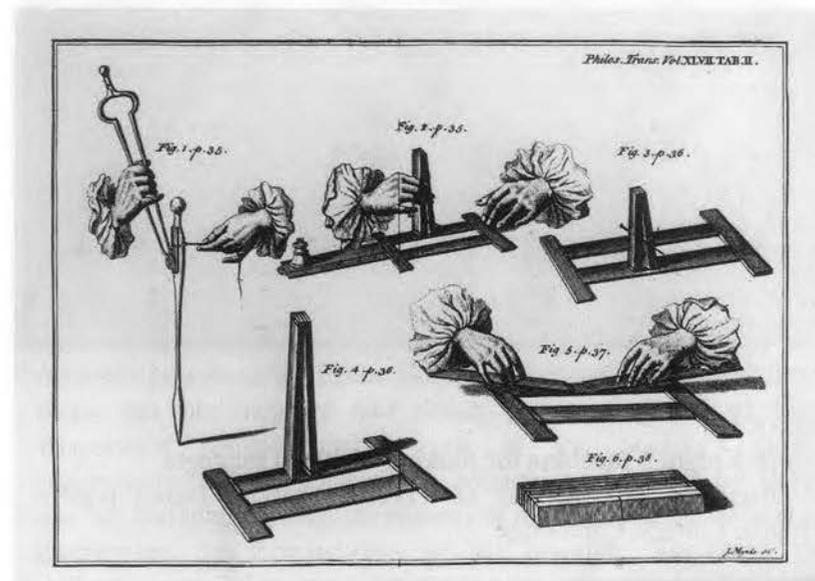
making artificial magnets. He and his competitors were to develop several different methods. These all entailed a cumulative process of repeatedly laying out steel bars in various configurations aligned with the earth's magnetism, and stroking them with either one or two previously magnetised bars (figure 2).<sup>34</sup> Knight might have got the idea from Pieter van Musschenbroek's 1726 text on natural philosophy.<sup>35</sup> He probably knew about the experiments of Servington Savery, a wealthy Devonshire recluse with a lifelong interest in magnets, whose son was a contemporary of Knight's at Oxford. In 1730, a long article by Savery had been printed in the *Philosophical Transactions*. It summarised current magnetic knowledge, and included detailed instructions for replicating his own experiments on artificial magnets.<sup>36</sup> Operating at a distance, Savery had little control over the fate of his work in London. Part of his paper had been read out at Royal Society meetings in instalments, but it was never completed after the summer break.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Reviews include L Euler, *Letters of Euler to a German princess, on different subjects in physics and philosophy* (2 vols., London, 1795), vol. 2, 292-310; W Sturgeon, *Scientific researches, experimental and theoretical, in electricity, magnetism*. (Bury, 1850), 561-7; W S Harris, *Rudimentary magnetism* (2 vols., London, 1850-2), vol. 1, part 1, 84-91.

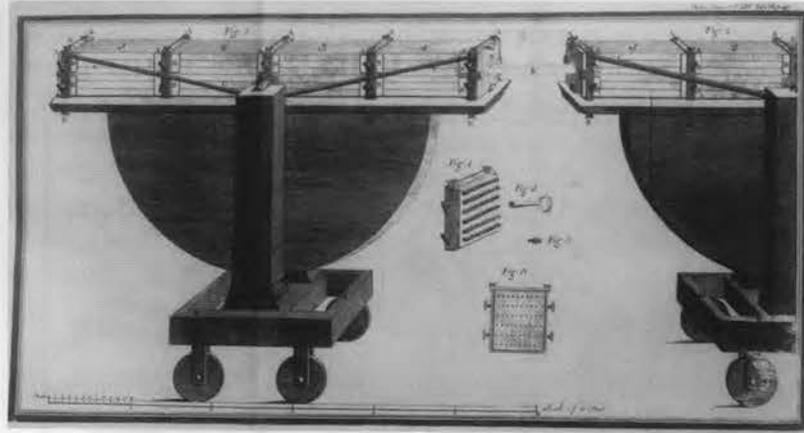
<sup>35</sup> P van Musschenbroek, *The elements of natural philosophy* (London, 1744), 209-10.

<sup>36</sup> J Burke and J B Burke, *A genealogical and heraldic dictionary of the landed gentry of Great Britain & Ireland* (2 vols., London), vol. 2, 1193; J Savery, 'Account of the Savery family' BL Add. MSS 44058, fols. 2-3 and fols. 83-93; S Savery, 'Magnetical observations and experiments', *Phil. Trans.*, 36 (1730), 295-340. Savery, a relative of Thomas Savery, came from a distinguished family. After graduating from Oxford, he continued his childhood interest in magnetism and corresponded regularly with Fellows of the Royal Society about his inventions, which also included barometers and telescopes.

<sup>37</sup> RSJB (copy), vol. 13 (16 April to 11 June 1730), 456, 466, 494.

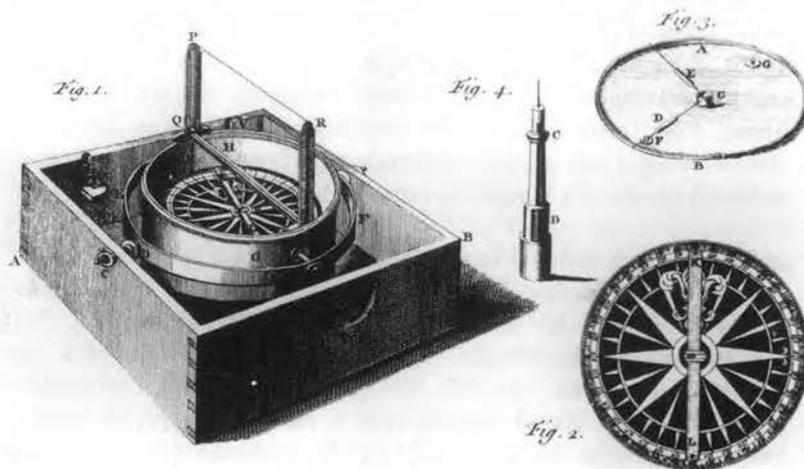


**Figure 2**  
**John Canton's method of making artificial magnets**  
*Philosophical Transactions* 47 (1751), plate 2, between pages 34 and 35. Whipple Library, Cambridge.



**Figure 3**  
**Gowin Knight's machine for making artificial magnets**  
*Philosophical Transactions* 66 (1776), plate 7, facing p.601.  
 Whipple Library, Cambridge.

*Philos. Trans. N<sup>o</sup> 495 TAB. III. p. 516.*



**Figure 4**  
**Gowin Knight's azimuth compass**  
*Philosophical Transactions* 46 (1750), plate 3, facing p.515.  
 Whipple Library, Cambridge.

Although his magnets were sold by some instrument makers, they did not come to be well known.<sup>38</sup>

In contrast, Knight succeeded by adopting far more direct promotional tactics as soon as he left Oxford. Practising as a doctor, he took lodgings in London, where he persuaded Martin Folkes to visit him and witness his experiments. Folkes reported to the Royal Society that he had seen Knight's magnets lift heavy iron keys and weights. He described how Knight would disappear into his study with pieces of loadstone, and emerge triumphantly a few minutes later to demonstrate that he had, in some unrevealed way, fortified their magnetic strength. Knight dramatically displayed his magnetic powers to the Fellows on several occasions. He convinced them that his magnets had lifting powers superior to Lord Abercom's famous terrella, one of the Society's prized possessions.<sup>39</sup> He illustrated his control over nature by deftly altering and manipulating the polarity of pieces of loadstone, and he emphasised the thoroughness of his research. To prove the utilitarian value of his work, he showed how compass needles could be easily and permanently magnetised if they were made of hard rather than tempered steel, and devised a portable case for storing his bars and preventing them losing their strength.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> J Michell, *A treatise of artificial magnets* (Cambridge, 1750), 15-16. Savery's magnets were sold in Exeter and London by the Lovelace family. References include an advertisement in *Gent. Mag.* 75 (1), (1785), 135, and a letter from William Lovelace to Savery of 3 September 1743, BL Add. MSS 44058, fol. 91.

<sup>39</sup> RSJB, vol. 12 (15 February 1721), 203-4.

<sup>40</sup> G Knight, 'An account of some magnetical experiments shewed before the Royal Society', *Phil. Trans.*, 43 (1744), 161-6; G Knight, 'A letter to the President, concerning the poles of magnets being variously placed', *Phil. Trans.*, 43 (1745), 361-3; G Knight, 'A collection of the magnetical experiments communicated to the Royal Society...in the years 1746 and 1747', *Phil. Trans.*, 44, 656-72 (1747), 656-72; 656-661

Benefiting from the patronage of Hans Sloane, by 1747, within only three years of his first appearance at the Royal Society, Knight had not only been elected a Fellow but had been awarded the Copley medal.<sup>41</sup> The following year, he was included in the first restricted membership of the Thursday evening dining club.<sup>42</sup> Through his spectacular performances, he established himself as the Royal Society's magnetic expert, and colleagues solicited his advice on various topics.<sup>43</sup> He rapidly became world famous for his strong, reliable magnets as well as his compasses, some of which were designed for maritime practitioners navigating oceanic routes, and others for land-based natural philosophers measuring the earth's terrestrial magnetism.<sup>44</sup> He also patented a mechanical window blind and invented a naval sounding device.<sup>45</sup>

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are taken from the manuscript original of Folkes' 1746 presentation to the Royal Society, preserved at the London Wellcome Institute, Folkes collection 2391(4).

<sup>41</sup> RSJB, vol. 19 (30 November 1747), 360; Royal Society Council minutes for 11 November 1747. His sponsors for Fellowship included Folkes and Charles Cavendish.

<sup>42</sup> Royal Society Club Minute Book, 1748-51; Allibone, *The Royal Society and its dining clubs*, 20-39.

<sup>43</sup> G Knight, 'An account of the mariners compass, that was struck with lightning...some further particulars relating to that accident', *Phil. Trans.*, 46 (1749), 113-7; G Knight, 'A description of a mariner's compass contrived by Gowin Knight, MB FRS', *Phil. Trans.*, 46 (1750), 505-12; W Mountaine, 'An account of some extraordinary effects of lightning', *Phil. Trans.*, 51 (1759), 286-94; G Knight, 'Some remarks on the preceding letter', *ibid.*, 294-99.

<sup>44</sup> See P Fara, 'Compasses for variation', in *Instruments of science: a historical encyclopedia* (Garland, forthcoming). For a detailed study of Knight's navigational compasses, see P Fara, *Sympathetic Attractions: magnetic practices, beliefs and symbolism in eighteenth-century England* (Princeton, 1996), 66-90. Descriptions of Knight's variation compass include H Cavendish, 'An account of the meteorological instruments used at the Royal Society's house', *Phil. Trans.*, 66 (1776),

Knight continually promoted himself and his inventions, although discreetly tailoring his tactics to match the status he wished to maintain and augment. Artists like Pond, and lecturers on natural philosophy, were mocked for advertising in the press, while doctors risked accusations of quackery for anything more ostentatious than nailing a small brass plaque to their door.<sup>46</sup> Knight prudently selected gentlemanly techniques of advertisement. To further his medical career and impress his influential visitors,<sup>47</sup> he chose to live in fashionable Lincoln's Inn Fields. In about 1750, he strengthened his ties with the Royal Society by moving to Crane Court. He took every opportunity to publicise his prestigious addresses. For example, recounting his experiences of an earthquake, he included the otherwise gratuitous information that one of his neighbours was the Duke of Newcastle.<sup>48</sup> When he

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385-401, and A McConnell, *Geophysics and geomagnetism* (London, 1986), 27.

<sup>45</sup> Window blind: BL Add. MSS 45871, fol. 197. Naval sounding device: PRO: ADM 12/52, cut 59/3 (11 August 1768); a letter from Captain Webster to the Admiralty of 23 September 1768, PRO: ADM1/2670; letter from John Le Roy to Wilson of 6 October 1768, BL Add. MSS 30094, fol. 123.

<sup>46</sup> Lippincott, *Selling art in Georgian London*, 50; A Q Morton, 'Lectures on natural philosophy in London, 1750-1765: S C T Demainbray (17120-1782) and the 'Inattention' of his country men', *Brit. Journ. Hist. Sci.*, 23 (1990), 417. Quaker practitioner Thomas Hodgkin is quoted in Porter, *Health for sale*, 44.

<sup>47</sup> These included Admiral George Anson and Lord Royston: see letters from Knight to the Lord Chancellor and the Archbishop of Canterbury of 22 September 1754: BL Add. MSS 36269, fols. 29-31.

<sup>48</sup> G Knight, 'An account of the shock of an earthquake, felt Feb 8 1749-50', *Phil. Trans.*, 46, (1750), 603; letter from Knight to the Navy Board of 7 May 1751 (PRO: ADM 106/1092). H Phillips, *Mid-Georgian London: a topographical and social survey of central and western London about 1750* (London, 1964), 190-1.

moved, he broadcast the event by arousing public interest in his discovery of an interesting old letter which had been left behind.<sup>49</sup>

Using the Royal Society as a promotional platform, Knight ensured that his reputation reached a wider audience. Wherever his name appeared, it was followed by the coveted initials FRS.<sup>50</sup> His talks were published in the *Philosophical Transactions*, to be read by natural philosophers in Britain and abroad. In these articles, Knight vaunted his achievements, but concealed his methods. Like Collinson, other allies, such as the Quaker physician John Fothergill, excitedly transmitted Knight's polemical messages through correspondence networks linking America, Europe and England.<sup>51</sup> His 'very intimate Friend' Henry Baker fielded written

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<sup>49</sup> J Nichols, *Literary anecdotes of the eighteenth century* (9 vols., London, 1812), vol. 5, 534 (a letter from William Warburton). The dates of his move given by different sources conflict.

<sup>50</sup> For the use of these initials, see: R P Stearns, 'The course of Capt Edmond Halley in the year 1700', *Ann. Sci.*, 1 (1936), 294 (on John Senex); J R Millburn, 'Benjamin Martin and the Royal Society', *Notes Rec. R. Soc. Lond.*, 28 (1973), 15-23 (on Benjamin Martin); W Wonnacott, 'Martin Clare and the defence of masonry', *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, 28 (1915), 88 (on Martin Clare); letter from John Browning to Henry Baker of 8 April 1748 in the correspondence of Henry Baker (8 vols., John Rylands Library, Manchester University, MS/9), vol. 4, fol. 81 (on James Simon); letter from Joseph Priestley to John Canton of 14 February 1756 in the correspondence and papers of John Canton (3 vols., Royal Society), vol. 2, item 58 (on Priestley). For Henry Wynne's use of Royal Society prestige to market magnetic instruments, see D Bryden, 'Magnetic inclinatory needles: approved by the Royal Society?', *Notes Rec. R. Soc. Lond.*, 47 (1993), 17-31.

<sup>51</sup> Collinson's comments were passed on by Colden to John Bartram (Colden, *The letters and papers of Cadwallader Colden*, vol. 3, 159), and Collinson later sent two separate copies of Knight's book to Benjamin Franklin (L W Labaree and W B Willcox, *The papers of Benjamin Franklin* (23 vols., New Haven, 1960-83), vol. 4: 114-5 and vol. 5: 232, 331), who subsequently gave one of them to Ezra Stiles

enquiries about the new magnets,<sup>52</sup> while Knight himself was the major channel of communication between the Royal Society and Musschenbroek, whose lavish praise guaranteed him international fame amongst magnetic cognoscenti.<sup>53</sup> He sent free samples of his bars to associates such as René Réaumur in Paris, where his techniques were admired and imitated.<sup>54</sup>

Carefully guarding his secret methods, Knight used his friends to help him win individual commissions for making magnets. For example, Wilson introduced him to William Young, who bought up Knight's entire stock for £200, and offered him £50 if he could make an artificial magnet as powerful as the famous natural loadstone owned by the King of Portugal.<sup>55</sup> Knight discreetly targeted the quality end of the market for artefacts of natural philosophy, editing a collection of his articles from the *Philosophical Transactions* into a gentlemanly advertising broch-

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(*ibid.*, vol. 6: 103). Letter from Fothergill to James Logan of 4 May 1750, reproduced in B C Corner and C C Booth, *Chain of friendship: selected letters of Dr John Fothergill of London, 1735-1780* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), 137-9.

<sup>52</sup> Letter from Baker to William Arderon of 10 March 1748: Baker correspondence (see note 50), vol. 3, fol. 256 and the Arderon correspondence (4 vols., National Art Library, Forster 47.c11-14), vol. 2, fol. 6. Letters to Baker about Knight included one from Guiseppi Bruni of Turin in March 1745 (Baker correspondence, vol. 2, fols. 26-7) and John Browning of Bristol of 18 May 1749 (*ibid.*, vol. 4, fols. 93-4).

<sup>53</sup> Letter from Henry Miles to Baker of 16 April 1746: Baker correspondence (see note 50, vol. 2, fols. 221-2. P van Musschenbroek, *Cours de physique expérimentale* (3 vols., Paris, 1769), vol. 1, 431-3, 453-7., 469.

<sup>54</sup> H Duhamel, 'Façon singulière d'aimanter un barreau d'acier...', *Mém. Math. & Phys. Acad. Roy. Sci.*, (1745), 182; P Rivoire, *Traité sur les aimans artificiels* (Paris, 1752), i-lxxxv.

<sup>55</sup> Wilson, 'Autobiography', *loc. cit.*, 17-18.

ure which he distributed to potential customers.<sup>56</sup> Warding off cheaper imitations by a signed certificate proclaiming the value of his products.<sup>57</sup> Knight sold three sizes of expensive steel magnetic bars, ranging in price from 2½ guineas a pair to 10 guineas for a pair 15 inches long in a well-made case.<sup>58</sup> He also developed a process of heating powdered iron with linseed oil, a traditional conserver of magnetic strength, to make small but powerful permanent magnets.<sup>59</sup> Disdaining press advertisements, Knight reached customers outside London through George Adams' mail-order catalogues and the international dealer Jean Magellan.<sup>60</sup> He gained further renown from his impressive wheeled magnetic machine, two magazines each of 240 bars, subsequently used by

<sup>56</sup> G Knight, *A collection of some papers formerly published in the Philosophical Transactions, relating to the use of Dr Knight's magnetical bars with some notes and additions* (London, 1758). He presented the copy now in the British Library to Thomas Birch.

<sup>57</sup> Science Museum photograph number 5437. For magnets - possibly Knight's - in the Science Museum, see A Q Morton and J A Wess, *Public and private science: the King George III collection* (Oxford, 1993), 183, 228-9, 295.

<sup>58</sup> Instrument-makers' catalogues show that Knight's magnets were among the more expensive on the market, and critics often accused him of charging exorbitant prices. However, comparisons are difficult because magnets were advertised by their length, not their strength.

<sup>59</sup> Knight, *Collection of papers*, op. cit. (note 56). B Wilson, 'Account of Dr Knight's method of making artificial loadstones', *Phil. Trans.*, 69 (1779), 51-3; A Marcel, 'An abstract of a letter...to the illustrious Royal Society of London', *Phil. Trans.*, 37 (1732), 294-8.

<sup>60</sup> G Adams, 'A catalogue of mathematical, philosophical, and optical instruments' in G Adams, *New celestial and terrestrial globes* (London, 1777); G L'E Turner and T H Levere, *Von Marum's scientific instruments in Teyler's museum* (4 vols., Leyden, 1973), vol. 4, 187; E Lefebvre and J G de Bruijn, *Martinus von Marum* (6 vols., Leyden, 1976), vol. 1-2; J Magellan, *Collection de différens traités sur des instrumens d'astronomie, physique, etc.* (Paris and London, 1780), 193-5, 215-6.

Michael Faraday (figure 3). Knight later insisted his machine should be assigned a room at the British Museum, where his duties included guiding eminent visitors round the exhibits.<sup>61</sup> Recognising the value of free publicity, when his artificial magnets were excluded from a preliminary design for the Royal Society's new diploma for foreign members, he repeatedly brought the matter up before the Council and succeeded in having a new engraving made.<sup>62</sup>

In advertising himself, Knight contributed to the legitimization of natural philosophers as the authoritative holders of magnetic knowledge. However, some people deplored his marketing strategy because it conflicted with the rhetoric of accumulating magnetic expertise for public benefit. Samuel Johnson savaged Knight's activities, devoting an entire *Rambler* essay to a critique of magnetic experimentation couched as a pornographic satire.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> General Meetings of the Board of Trustees of the British Museum, vol. 1, 233-4, 238; BL Add. MSS 4449, fol. 108. Descriptions of the machine were only published after Knight's death: J Fothergill, 'An account of the magnetical machine contrived by the late Dr Gowan Knight, FRS', *Phil. Trans.*, 66 (1776), 594-9 and RSJB, vol. 28 (23 June 1774), 112-13. A committee was established to restore it after a fire: *ibid.* (19 December 1776), 540. The parts used by Faraday at the Royal Military Academy for experiments on galvanometers are now at the London Science Museum: M Faraday, 'Experimental researches in electricity', *Phil. Trans.*, 122 (1832), 135.

<sup>62</sup> Wilson, *Autobiography*, loc. cit., 48-50; Royal Society Council Minutes, 18 and 25 January 1759.

<sup>63</sup> S Johnson, *The Rambler* (3 vols., New Haven, 1969), vol. 3, 271-6. For Johnson's attitudes towards natural philosophy, see R G Olson, 'Tory-high church opposition to science and scientism in the eighteenth century' in J Burke (ed.), *The uses of science in the age of Newton* (Berkeley, 1983), 171-204. In his choice of genre, Johnson may have been influenced by an erotic account of William Watson's electrical experiments: see P Strong-Cock, *Teague-root display'd: being some useful and important discoveries tending to illustrate the doctrine of*

Knight reputedly turned down enormous offers of money tempting him to reveal how he made his exceptionally powerful magnets.<sup>64</sup> He refused to divulge his techniques, although partial accounts were published after his death.<sup>65</sup> Writers repeatedly criticised Knight's secrecy in private letters and in texts for polite audiences.<sup>66</sup> Edmund Stone, a former gardener, used horticultural imagery to slate Knight's commercial uses of natural philosophy: 'The Plants and Trees of the Gardens, of the Arts and Sciences, cultivated by the Dung of Ambition, and nourished with the Waters of Interest, are very subject to be blasted by the Whirls of Error, and sometimes stunted by the Weeds of Imposition'.<sup>67</sup> Like other contemporary innovators such as anatomists, Knight felt he needed to protect his inventions by secrecy. He recognised the commercial value of his magnetic bars, and knew that the mid-century patent system would afford him little security.<sup>68</sup> But experimenters in

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electricity, in a letter from Paddy Strong-Cock, Fellow of Drury-Lane, and Professor of natural philosophy in M King's College, Covent Garden, to W-M W-N, FRS author of a late pamphlet on that subject (London, 1746) and P Wagner, *Eros revived* (London, 1990).

<sup>64</sup> The entry on magnetism in the 1802 *English encyclopædia* reports that he refused as many guineas as he could carry.

<sup>65</sup> Fothergill, 'An account of the magnetical machine..', loc. cit.; Wilson, 'Account of Dr Knight's method', loc. cit.; G Adams, *Lectures on natural and experimental philosophy, considered in its present state of improvement* (5 vols., London, 1794), vol. 4, 448-9.

<sup>66</sup> There were frequent hostile published criticisms. Private letters putting indirect pressure on Knight included one from Granville Wheeler to Wilson of 4 February 1748 (BL Add. MSS 30094, fol. 61: I am grateful to Simon Schaffer for this reference) and from Arderon to Baker of 12 May 1750 (Baker correspondence [see note 50], vol. 4, fols. 278-9).

<sup>67</sup> E Stone, *The construction and principle uses of mathematical instruments translated from the French of M Bion* (London, 1758), 307.

<sup>68</sup> C Macleod, *Inventing the industrial revolution: the English patent system, 1660-1800* (Cambridge, 1988); C Lawrence, 'Alexander Monro

England and overseas rapidly developed methods of their own, and soon there were enough to 'fill a volume'.<sup>69</sup>

In 1751, Knight had been selling magnetic bars to individual captains for several years,<sup>70</sup> when he decided to target a far larger client, the Royal Navy.<sup>71</sup> Silencing potential competitors like John Canton,<sup>72</sup> he negotiated lucrative contracts to supply the Navy with magnets and compasses. In this way, Knight furthered his own career as a magnetic entrepreneur, and also helped to establish a public image of the Royal Society as a valuable institution. His investigations of navigational instruments were, like those of Robert Hooke, intertwined with his efforts to understand and

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Primus and the Edinburgh manner of anatomy', *Bull. Hist. Med.* 62 (1988), 198-200.

<sup>69</sup> G Adams, *An essay on electricity, explaining the theory and practice of that useful science; and the mode of applying it to medical purposes* (London, 1787), 392. For some European research, see Rivoire, *Traité sur les aimans artificiels*, i-lxxxv; Duhamel, 'Façon singulière d'aimanter un barreau d'acier..', loc. cit.; J Coulomb, 'Septième mémoire sur l'électricité et le magnétisme', *Mém. Math. & Phys. Acad. Roy. Sci.* (1789), 455-505; N Fuss, *Observations et expériences sur les aimans artificiels, principalement sur la meilleure manière de les faire* (St Petersburg, l'Académie Impériale des Sciences, 1778). See also Home and Connor, *Æpinus's essay on the theory of electricity and magnetism*, 137-86. In England, Michell and Canton became embroiled in a bitter priority debate which was revived after Canton's death by his son: the best review (though not complete) is in A de Morgan, 'The Canton papers', *Athenaeum*, 5-7, 162-4, 375 (6 January 1849).

<sup>70</sup> Letter from the Navy Board to the Admiralty Secretary of 15 April 1751, PRO: ADM 106/2185, 430.

<sup>71</sup> Letter from Admiralty Secretary to Knight of 24 January 1750, PRO: ADM 2/697, 2-3.

<sup>72</sup> Addendum by Smeaton to a letter from Michell: *Monthly Review*, 72 (1785), 478-80.

display magnetic phenomena.<sup>73</sup> In his lecture demonstrations, Knight sought to exhibit and hence explain the forces exerted by loadstones and artificial magnets.<sup>74</sup> But unlike Hooke, he adroitly used his experiments for commercial self-promotion. As he boasted to the Fellows about his magnetic expertise, the only message remembered by some members of his audience was the parsimonious irresponsibility of naval administrators: 'it will cost only about 2s.6d. more to buy a tolerable good [compass]. So that the Lives and Fortunes of thousands are every Day hazarded for such a trifling Consideration'.<sup>75</sup>

Knight had already established himself as the Society's magnetic expert when in 1749 he was asked to examine a compass damaged by a freak storm at sea.<sup>76</sup> Knight criticised the compass at length, and emphasised the benefits of a philosophical approach to navigational problems. The following year, he explained how his experiments underpinned the construction of his own two types of compass intended for maritime use, a new steering compass, and an azimuth compass designed in collaboration with Smeaton (figure

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<sup>73</sup> J A Bennett, 'Hooke's instruments for astronomy and navigation' in M Hunter and S Schaffer (eds.), *Robert Hooke: new studies* (Suffolk, 1989), 21-32.

<sup>74</sup> Knight, 'Account of some magnetical experiments', loc. cit.; Knight, 'A letter to the President', loc. cit.; Knight, 'Collection of magnetical experiments', loc. cit.

<sup>75</sup> G Knight, 'An account of the mariners compass', loc. cit., 117; W C Lukis, *The family memoirs of the Rev William Stukeley, MD and the Antiquaries and correspondence of William Stukeley, Roger and Samuel Gale, etc* (3 vols., Durham, Surtees Society, 1882-7), vol 2, 361-2.

<sup>76</sup> J Waddell, 'A letter...concerning the effects of lightning in destroying the polarity of a mariners compass', *Phil. Trans.*, 46 (1749), 111-12; Knight, 'An account of the mariners compass', loc. cit. For Franklin's response to Waddell's account, see I B Cohen, *Benjamin Franklin's experiments: a new edition of Franklin's experiments and observations on electricity* (Cambridge, Mass, 1941), 242-3 & 320.

4).<sup>77</sup> Knight set out to produce high-quality instruments which he could market at high prices. He introduced major modifications in the casings, replacing perishable wooden boxes and magnetic iron nails with expensive but durable brass. He used his powerful bars to construct needles from hard steel which would not rust, and would remain magnetised for a long time. Making scathing remarks about traditional designs, he developed sensitive compasses which could yield far more precise measurements than older models. However, Knight had little direct contact with the maritime community, and he produced devices more suitable for the philosopher's private study than the rolling deck of an ocean-going ship. Although he did venture briefly off the English coast with Smeaton during an Admiralty-financed experimental voyage, a storm blew up, and tests were abandoned as equipment was swept overboard.<sup>78</sup>

Knight's position at the Royal Society gave him an immediate entrée to the naval market. George Anson, an active naval reformer and effective head of the Admiralty, was also a Fellow, and his best-selling account of his voyage around the world had been introduced by a plea for the government to finance the collection of magnetic data.<sup>79</sup> Anson visited Knight's home to witness his

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<sup>77</sup> G Knight, 'A description of a mariner's compass contrived by Gowin Knight, MB FRS', *Phil. Trans.*, 46 (1750), 505-12; J Smeaton, 'An account of some improvements of the mariners compass, in order to render the card and needle, proposed by Dr Knight, of general use', *Phil. Trans.*, 46 (1750), 513-17; letter from Smeaton to Wilson of 10 July 1748: BL Add. MSS 30094, fol. 69.

<sup>78</sup> Admiralty Minutes of 11 September 1751, PRO: ADM 3/62. Logbook of the *Fortune*, September 1751, PRO: ADM 51/361.

<sup>79</sup> P W Brock, 'Anson and his importance as a naval reformer', *Naval Review*, 17 (1929), 497-528. G Anson, *A voyage round the world, in the years MDCCXL, I, II, III, IV by George Anson, Esq; commander in chief of a squadron of His Majesty's ships, sent upon an expedition to the South-Seas* (London, 1748), unpaginated introduction. See G

magnetic experiments,<sup>80</sup> and he ordered the Navy Board to examine Knight's bars and compasses.<sup>81</sup> In addition, several Fellows, including Knight's patron Folkes, were Commissioners of Longitude.<sup>82</sup> Knight and Smeaton met naval experts several times, and convinced them of the value of their new instruments.<sup>83</sup> In 1752, at the second attempt, Anson convened enough Commissioners of Longitude to award Knight £300.<sup>84</sup> Later that year, the Admiralty Board ordered all ships being fitted for foreign service to be supplied with one of Knight's compasses.<sup>85</sup>

Capitalising on his status as a Fellow, Knight used self-promotional strategies to ensure his market leadership. He was present at most of the Council meetings briefing James Cook for his first voyage, and probably persuaded him to write to the Admiralty Secretary: 'Doctor Knight hath got an Azimuth Compass of an Improv'd con[s]truction which may prove to be of more general use than the old ones; please to move my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to order the Endeavour Bark under my command to be

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Williams, *Documents relating to Anson's voyage round the world 1740-44* (London, for the Navy Records Society, 1967), 230-2 & 271-83.

<sup>80</sup> Letter from Knight to the Archbishop of Canterbury of 22 September 1754, BL Add. MSS 36269, fol. 31.

<sup>81</sup> Letter from Admiralty Secretary to Navy Board of 28 February 1751, PRO: ADM 106/2077.

<sup>82</sup> Letters from the Admiralty Secretary to members of the Board of Longitude of 14 May 1752, PRO: ADM 2/511, 273. Fellows on the Board included Henry Legge (First Commissioner of the Navy), Folkes, James Bradley and John Colson.

<sup>83</sup> Letter from the Navy Board to the Admiralty Secretary of 27 March 1751, PRO: ADM 106/2185.

<sup>84</sup> Letter from the Admiralty Secretary to the Treasury of 22 June 1752, PRO: ADM 2/511, 297. Admiralty Board Minutes of 24 June 1752, PRO: ADM 3/62. Letters from Admiralty Secretary to the Board of Longitude of 14 May and 9 June 1752, PRO: ADM 2/511, 273, 286-7.

<sup>85</sup> Admiralty Board minutes of 29 July 1752, PRO: ADM 3/62

supplied with it'.<sup>86</sup> Knight's colleagues at the Royal Society provided free advertising through lavish praise in their navigation texts: 'These...imperfections, have been happily removed by the labours of the truly celebrated Dr. Gowen Knight, FRS whose admirable invention of giving magnetism to steel bars, greatly superior to any power they could derive from the natural loadstones, joined to a multitude of experiments...has produced the means of constructing sea compasses so perfect, that there seems nothing farther to be wished for'.<sup>87</sup>

Knight was initially an external supplier to the Admiralty Board,<sup>88</sup> but in 1758, he was able to take advantage of the coincidence of another compass maker's death with an acute shortage of compasses during the war, to obtain a contract with the Navy Board.<sup>89</sup> Knight benefited enormously from being well-

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<sup>86</sup> Royal Society Council Book, especially May 1768. Letter from Cook to the Admiralty Board of 25 July 1768, PRO: ADM 1/1609. Admiralty Board Minutes of 27 July 1768, PRO: ADM 3/76, 73-6. Letter from the Admiralty Secretary to the Navy Board of 27 July 1768, PRO: ADM 2/238, 90.

<sup>87</sup> J Robertson, *The elements of navigation* (2 vols., London, 1780), vol. 2, 232. Other references include: W Mountaine and J Dodson, *An account of the methods used to describe lines, on Dr Halley's chart of the terraqueous globe; shewing the variation of the magnetic needle about the year 1756, in all the known seas; their application and use in correcting the longitude at sea, with some occasional observations relating thereto* (London, 1758), 12; T Crosby, *The mariner's guide: being a compleat treatise of navigation*, ed. William Mountaine (London, 1762), 182. Their comments were often replicated in encyclopaedias.

<sup>88</sup> Letter from the Admiralty Secretary to Knight of 6 March 1756, PRO: ADM 2/703, 441.

<sup>89</sup> Navy Board Minutes of 20 March 1758, PRO: ADM 106/2567. Correspondence between the Deptford Storekeeper and the Navy Board during February 1757, PRO: ADM 106/3362. Navy Board Minutes of 2

established as official compass supplier to the Navy, persuading the Admiralty Board to delay interviewing a competitor for several weeks while he perfected some of his own modifications.<sup>90</sup> All the navigators who reported on Knight's artificial magnets agreed that they were greatly superior to natural loadstone.<sup>91</sup> Initially, many of them were also enthusiastic about Knight's new compasses.<sup>92</sup> But experienced navigators increasingly reported that magnetic instruments provided inconsistent readings, and they accused Knight of designing an instrument that performed badly at sea, particularly in stormy weather. Knight constantly implemented modifications, and in the face of increasing competition from rival compass-makers, became the first to seek protection by patenting a revised model in 1766.<sup>93</sup> However, maritime practitioners, who were drawing on a different type of expertise, continued to experience difficulties in using his land-based instruments at sea. But despite their criticisms, Knight's compasses remained official

issue for all the ships in the Royal Navy until well into the nineteenth century.<sup>94</sup>

By patenting two of his devices, Knight aligned himself with the emerging category of inventors building a new type of career.<sup>95</sup> He furthered his own interests by simultaneously publicising his membership of the Royal Society and the improvements he was making to maritime safety. In advertising himself, Knight contributed to the legitimisation of natural philosophers as magnetic innovators and experts.

### Philosophical promotion

Knight also sought to take advantage of the expanding market for books on natural philosophy.<sup>96</sup> He wrote a theoretical treatise which was completely different from the only other eighteenth-century English book which had so far been devoted to magnetic topics, William Whiston's experimental and mathematical confirmation of Biblical chronology.<sup>97</sup> Knight's style emulated that of Bryan Robinson, whose extension of Newton's aether was already into its

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March 1758, PRO: ADM 106/2567. Some orders to Knight are in the Navy Board Minutes of 13 & 18 October 1758, PRO: ADM 106/2568.

<sup>90</sup> Letters from the Admiralty Secretary to Knight and Robert Waddington of 26 June & 1 July 1766, and of 19 February 1767, PRO: ADM 2/726, 244, 512; R Waddington, *An epitome of theoretical and practical navigation* (London, 1777), 20-1; RGO 14/5, fol. 205.

<sup>91</sup> For example, George Rodney: D Spinney, *Rodney* (London, 1969), 107.

<sup>92</sup> Favourable comments include: letter from Matthew Buckle to the Navy Board of 13 February 1753, PRO: ADM 106/1108; letter from Lucius O'Bryen to the Admiralty Board of 16 January 1757, PRO: ADM 1/2245; G Robertson, *The discovery of Tahiti* (London, Hakluyt Society, 1948), 5.

<sup>93</sup> B Woodcroft, *Subject-matter index of patents of invention* (London, 1854), 530-1; G Knight, 'A new method of constructing compasses in general use so as to prevent them being affected by the motion of the ship', PRO: C54/6191; Admiralty Board Minutes of 5 April 1769, PRO: ADM 3/76.

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<sup>94</sup> Admiralty Board minutes of 29 July 1752, PRO: ADM 3/62. Standing order of the Navy Board of 18 December 1778, PRO: ADM 106/2508. W Burney, *A new universal dictionary of the marine* (London, 1815), 99.

<sup>95</sup> Macleod, *Inventing the industrial revolution*.

<sup>96</sup> G Knight, *An attempt to demonstrate, that all the phænomena in nature may be explained by two simple active principles, attraction and repulsion: wherein the attractions of cohesion, gravity, and magnetism, are shewn to be one and the same; and the phænomena of the latter are more particularly explained* (London, 1748), summarised in Schofield, *Mechanism and materialism*, 75-81. G S Rousseau, 'Science books and their readers in the eighteenth century' in I Rivers (ed.), *Books and their readers in eighteenth-century England* (Leicester, 1982), 197-255.

<sup>97</sup> W Whiston, *The longitude and latitude found by the inclinatory or dipping needle; wherein the laws of magnetism are also discover'd* (London, 1721).

second publication, and whose renown had attracted Knight's best friend Wilson to Dublin.<sup>98</sup> Knight's dissertation was tailored for natural philosophers reared on Newtonian texts, laid out in numbered propositions supported by definitions and corollaries. Tackling some of the problems posed by Isaac Newton's suggestions in the 31st query of the *Opticks*, Knight provided a short but dense elaboration of aethers made up from fundamental attractive and repulsive particles.<sup>99</sup>

Knight's basic suggestion was that matter is composed of small particles which are either attractive or repulsive. These cluster round one another to build up larger corpuscles of varying size and net force, which combine to produce fluids and solids of different characteristics. Knight aimed to provide a comprehensive text, and the topics he claimed to have explained included cohesion, elasticity, planetary motion, light and heat. He devoted the last third of his book to magnetic activity, explaining it chiefly in terms of a fluid of mutually-repellent corpuscles in the pores of various materials. As well as being influenced by current versions of Newton's ideas, Knight drew extensively and directly on the metallurgical and mining research of Réaumur and Georg Stahl. Unusually for mid-century accounts, phlogiston featured prominently in his explanations.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>98</sup> B Robinson, *A dissertation on the aether of Sir Isaac Newton* (Dublin, 1743), published initially in Dublin and subsequently in London; BL Add. MSS 30094, fols. 23-8 and fols. 55-6; J L Heilbron, *Electricity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (Berkeley, 1979), 302-5.

<sup>99</sup> A Quinn, 'Repulsive force in England, 1706-1744', *Hist. Stud. Sci.*, 13 (1982), 109-28.

<sup>100</sup> A G Sisco, *Réaumur's memoirs on steel and iron* (Chicago, 1956); H Metzger, *Newton, Stahl, Boerhaave et la doctrine chimique* (Paris, 1930), 165-9. Knight's version of phlogiston was far closer to Stahl's original suggestions than later models used in chemical explanations.

Knight published the first edition in 1748 at his own expense, naively investing a couple of hundred pounds in a handsome quarto edition with wide margins. It presumably sold enough copies to motivate John Nourse, who specialised in such texts, to publish a more sellable octavo edition from the same plates six years later, which was summarised in *The Monthly Review*.<sup>101</sup> Even so, although the book was well known amongst his contemporaries,<sup>102</sup> many of them agreed that Knight 'calls Old Discoveries by New Names, and deduces Corollaries till he loses all Sight of his Proposition'.<sup>103</sup> Like Benjamin Franklin, they thought him 'the greatest Master of Practical Magnetism that has appear'd in any Age', but never quite found the 'Leisure to peruse his Writings with the Attention necessary to become Master of his Doctrine'.<sup>104</sup> They

<sup>101</sup> J P Feather, 'John Nourse and his authors', *Stud. Bibliog.*, 34 (1981), 205-26. The first edition cost three shillings: letter from Collinson to Franklin of 22 February, 1751, reproduced in Labaree and Willcox, *The papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 4, 114-5. The second edition cost 3/6d: R Watt, *Bibliotheca Britannica; or a general index to British and foreign literature* (2 vols., Edinburgh), vol. 2, 575o. I am grateful to Alice Walters for pointing out the significance of the change in size. *Monthly Review*, 10 (1754), 456-62: the reviewer, William Bewley evidently did not realise that an earlier edition had appeared; see B C Nangle, *The Monthly Review first series 1749-89* (Oxford, 1934), 4-5.

<sup>102</sup> For example, letter from Browning to Baker of 26 January 1750: Baker correspondence (see note 50), vol. 4, fols. 166-7.

<sup>103</sup> T H Croker, *Experimental magnetism, or, the truth of Mr Mason's discoveries in that branch of natural philosophy, that there can be no such thing in nature, as an internal central loadstone, proved and ascertained* (London, 1761), 8.

<sup>104</sup> Letter from Franklin to Ezra Styles of 10 July 1755, reproduced in Labaree and Willcox, *The papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 103. Letter from Franklin to James Bowdoin of 24 January 1752, *ibid.*, vol. 4, 256. Joseph Black made similar criticisms: J Black, *Lectures on the elements of chemistry, delivered in the University of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1803), vol. 1, 516-7. Joseph Priestley did not consider Knight's book worth reading for his projected history of magnetism: Schofield,

showed most interest in those sections of his book which dealt with light.<sup>105</sup> For at least six years, Knight nursed plans to tap a wider market with a historically-based study, but he eventually cancelled the project because there were insufficient subscriptions.<sup>106</sup> Although Knight's peers ignored his theories, modern historians of ideas have found them useful for reinforcing their own analyses. Knight has been described variously and incompatibly as the author of 'a mechanistic...proto-scientific' theory,<sup>107</sup> a precursor of Roger Boscovich,<sup>108</sup> a precursor of James Hutton,<sup>109</sup> a systematic exponent of Newton's aether,<sup>110</sup> and an 'unreconstructed Cartesian'.<sup>111</sup>

At the same time as promoting his inventions and his ideas, Knight reinforced his position within the Royal Society, where his friends already included Baker, John Ellicott, John Michell and

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*Mechanism and materialism*, 81. Knight's ideas enjoyed a Victorian revival: Harris, *Rudimentary magnetism*, part 3, 129; de Morgan, 'Gowan Knight', loc. cit.; A de Morgan, *A budget of paradoxes* (London, 1872), 90.

<sup>105</sup> For Christopher Short, see T Melvill, 'A letter...with a discourse concerning the cause of the different refrangibility of the rays of light', *Phil. Trans.*, 48 (1753), 269-70; for William Herschel, see Schofield, *Mechanism and Materialism*, 252.

<sup>106</sup> Letter from Michell to Wilson of 22 December 1754: BL Add. MSS 30094, fol. 86. Advertisement in the Daily Advertiser of 12 December 1760 (I am grateful to Alan Morton for this reference); Croker, *Experimental magnetism*, 8-9. See Stewart, *The rise of public science*, 363, for Desaguliers' call for a history of magnetic experiments.

<sup>107</sup> Schofield, *Mechanism and Materialism*, 180.

<sup>108</sup> Thackray, *Atoms and powers*, 142.

<sup>109</sup> Heimann & McGuire, loc. cit., 296-9.

<sup>110</sup> P Heimann, 'Ether and imponderables' in G Cantor and M Hodge (eds.), *Conceptions of ether: studies in the history of ether theories, 1740-1900* (Cambridge, 1981), 71

<sup>111</sup> Home & Connor, *Æpinus's essay on the theory of electricity and magnetism*, 160.

Wilson.<sup>112</sup> He was elected as a member of the Council in 1751,<sup>113</sup> and a couple of months later, ran against Thomas Birch for the post of Secretary. This appointment was a sensitive issue because it affected the public image of the Royal Society, and was clouded by the controversies which had surrounded Folkes' election and the choice of papers for publication in the *Philosophical Transactions*.<sup>114</sup> With the backing of Lord Northumberland, Knight gained 76 votes, but was defeated by the more powerful lobby organised by Lord Hardwicke for Birch, who won with 91 votes.<sup>115</sup>

Knight's status at the Royal Society proved invaluable when he successfully applied for the new post of Principal Librarian at the British Museum, founded as part of Sloane's bequest. Most of Sloane's executors and the Trustees responsible for the Museum's creation were Fellows, including Knight's patrons Northumberland and Folkes, as well as colleagues like Baker, Collinson and William

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<sup>112</sup> Knight's close friends amongst the mid-century experimenters included Wilson, one of his investment partners for whom he stood bail: Wilson, 'Autobiography', loc. cit., 28-9; Baker, letter from Baker to Arderon of 10 March 1748: Baker correspondence loc. cit., vol. 3, fol. 256 and Arderon correspondence, loc. cit., vol. 2, fol. 6; Ellicott, letter from J Collings to William Canton of 13 February 1786: Canton papers, loc. cit., vol. 2, fol. 119; Michell, letter from Michell to Wilson of 22 December 1754: BL add. MSS 30094, fol. 86. Knight patronised John Canton before the priority dispute about artificial magnets.

<sup>113</sup> Royal Society Council Minutes for 12 December 1751.

<sup>114</sup> RSJB, vol. 21 (23 January 1752), 28-30 Letter from Baker to Arderon of 3 March 1752: Arderon correspondence (see note 52), vol. 3, fol. 1.

<sup>115</sup> Letter from William Bowman to John Nichols, reproduced in J Nichols, *Illustrations of the literary history of the eighteenth century* (8 vols., London, 1817-58), vol. 8, 625-6; Nichols, *Literary anecdotes*, vol. 5, 282-90; Gunther, *Life of Thomas Birch*, 35-43, 69-78; RSJB, vol. 21, 35-6 (25 January 1752).

Watson.<sup>116</sup> The Royal Society was intimately involved with constructing and maintaining this public institution, and Fellows secretly exchanged coded letters.<sup>117</sup> Knight's two rivals were John Mitchell, also a physician at the Royal Society, and the botanist John Hill. Hill waged an active campaign of self-promotion, sending off numerous oily letters soliciting patronage, and writing long, provocative newspaper articles.<sup>118</sup> Knight rejected such flamboyance. His tactful visit to Birch was rewarded by an invitation to dinner, which enabled him to acquire prestigious references for his restrained letters of application to the Principal Trustees.<sup>119</sup> Hill was notorious for his vicious satires on the monarchy and the Royal Society, and his candidature was not even put forward to the King, the ultimate arbiter for the position.<sup>120</sup>

Knight remained at the Museum until his death 16 years later.<sup>121</sup> For £200 a year, he acted as live-in caretaker, responsible

for displaying the exhibits and supervising access.<sup>122</sup> Just as the officials at the Royal Academy came to police the construction of public art,<sup>123</sup> Knight and his colleagues monitored the content and presentation of natural philosophical knowledge, thus affecting the future face of public science. Knight participated in framing the regulations governing entry to the Museum, subsequently revised to restrict public facilities still further.<sup>124</sup> He played a key role in the adoption of the Linnaean system of classification. Participating in international correspondence networks through associates like Franklin,<sup>125</sup> he contributed to the Museum's over-expenditure as he enlarged the collections and supervised the staff arranging them. While favoured visitors dozed off in the stuffy reading rooms, Knight wielded considerable local power in an empire riven by dispute. For example, he blocked off access to the lavatory, refused readers permission to view prints and books, and quarrelled with Trustees as well as subordinates like Matthew Maty and Peter Templeman.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>116</sup> E Miller, *That noble cabinet: a history of the British Museum* (London, 1973), 19-63; A E Gunther, 'The Royal Society and the foundation of the British Museum', *Notes Rec. R Soc. Lond.*, 33 (1978), 207-16; A E Gunther, *The founders of science at the British Museum, 1753-1900* (Suffolk, 1980), 1-25; A E Gunther, 'Matthew Maty MD, FRS (1718-76) and science at the foundation of the British Museum, 1753-80', *Bull. BL (Nat. Hist.)* 15 (1987)1-58.

<sup>117</sup> Correspondence between Miles and Baker in 1753 and 1754: Baker correspondence (see note 50), vol. 5, fols. 248-261, fol. 349 and vol. 6, fols. 7-8.

<sup>118</sup> G S Rousseau, *The letters and private papers of Sir John Hill* (New York, 1982), 54-64; articles in *The London Daily Advertiser* of 12 January and 6 December 1754.

<sup>119</sup> Birch, 'Diary', loc. cit., 253. Letters from Knight of 22 September 1754 to Lord Hardwicke and the Archbishop of Canterbury: BL Add. MSS 36269, fols. 29-31.

<sup>120</sup> Minutes of Trustees: BL Add. MSS 4450, 204 (3 and 4 June 1756).

<sup>121</sup> Charles Morton recorded his death in the Museum Library: BL Add. MSS fol. 83. Knight received three obituary notices: W Musgrave,

*Obituary prior to 1800* (6 vols., London, Harleian Society, 1899-1901), vol. 3, 385.

<sup>122</sup> BL Add. MSS 4449, fols. 82-109, fol. 171.

<sup>123</sup> G J Fyfe, 'Art exhibitions and power during the nineteenth century' in J Law (ed.), *Power, action and belief* (London, 1986), 20-45.

<sup>124</sup> BL Add. MSS 4449, fols. 118-65. Gunther, *Founders of science*, 158-9.

<sup>125</sup> Letters from Franklin to Rudolph Raspe of 9 September 1766 and 6 July 1767: Labaree and Willcox, *The papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 13, 407 and vol. 14, 211.

<sup>126</sup> Miller, *That noble cabinet*, 64-90. Extract from a memorandum by Alexander Small on Franklin's view of ventilation: Labaree and Willcox, *The papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 23, 486-91 (see p.490); letter from Thomas Gray to James Brown of 8 August 1759: P Toynbee and L Whibley, *Correspondence of Thomas Gray* (3 vols., Oxford, 1935), vol. 2, 632; BL Add. MSS 45868, fols. 26-7. Original letters and papers of the British Museum, vol. 1, fols. 127-72.

Knight became publicly recognised in polite society as a man of importance,<sup>127</sup> although he was increasingly reputed to be reclusive and ill-tempered. He gained entry into elite medical circles, and was known as a distinguished visitor at metropolitan soirées, the intimate colleague of society doctors like John Pringle and Fothergill. Fothergill gave him a thousand guineas after the collapse of a Cornish mining venture in which they were both involved.<sup>128</sup> Knight participated in Fothergill's new journal, launched as part of his bid to break down the restrictive practices of the Royal College of Physicians, contributing an article about his treatment of his own sister's illness.<sup>129</sup> He probably belonged to the medical club which met at the Queen's Arms.<sup>130</sup> He remained a close colleague of Birch, joining him for outings and dining frequently at his house, where he met influential statesmen and aristocrats.<sup>131</sup>

As he negotiated his social climb, Knight achieved a position from which he could wield influence and dispense patronage. He served on the Royal Society Council more than once, rarely missing

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<sup>127</sup> R L Edgeworth, *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth Esq begun by himself, and concluded by his daughter, Maria Edgeworth* (London, 1844), 74.

<sup>128</sup> Nichols, *Literary anecdotes*, vol. 5, 477-82. I am grateful to C Gordon for sending me notes on Pringle's references to Knight in the Royal College of Physicians at Edinburgh. BL Add. MSS 30094, fol. 127; J C Lettsom, *The works of John Fothergill, MD with some account of his life* (London, 1784), li; Wilson, 'Autobiography', loc. cit., 28-9. Fothergill was Knight's Executor.

<sup>129</sup> G Knight, 'Account of a singular recovery from a fever', *Medical Observations and Inquiries*, 1 (1757), 35-41.

<sup>130</sup> Knight, 'Collection of magnetical experiments', loc. cit.; Gunther, *Founders of science*; Nichols, *Literary anecdotes*, vol. 3, 258. Knight was friendly with many of the club's members.

<sup>131</sup> Birch, 'Diary', loc. cit., 314, 317 and passim.

a meeting,<sup>132</sup> and affecting the lives of men who would become more famous than himself. For example, he became involved in diplomatic negotiations behind the scenes to appoint an appropriate President,<sup>133</sup> and he was often present when Cook was being briefed for the Transit of Venus expeditions. He attended daily in December 1767 while Emmanuel Mendes da Costa, one of his own investment partners, was being accused of embezzling the Society's funds.<sup>134</sup> He persuaded Smeaton to come to London as his assistant, where he publicly commended his abilities, sponsored his application to the Royal Society, and helped him test his early inventions.<sup>135</sup> Knight also backed other applicants, including Birch's protégé James Ferguson, Michell, Canton and John Kidby.<sup>136</sup> He was a member of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, sitting on various committees assessing which inventions should be rewarded,

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<sup>132</sup> Royal Society Council Minute Books, 1751-1772, passim, especially 1751-2, 1759, 1767-9.

<sup>133</sup> Letter from Knight to Wilson of 25 October 1758: BL Add. MSS 30094, fol. 143.

<sup>134</sup> Knight may have been involved via Wilson in Stock Market gambling with the Royal Society Treasurer Samuel Wegg: see Wilson, 'Autobiography', loc. cit., 28-9 and R Ruggles, 'Governor Samuel Wegg intelligent layman of the Royal Society 1753-1802', *Notes Rec. R Soc. Lond.*, 32 (1978), 181-99.

<sup>135</sup> Letter from Smeaton to Wilson of 10 July 1748: BL add. MSS 30094, fol. 69; Knight, 'Description of mariner's compass', (note 77), 512; Smeaton, 'An account...', loc. cit.; J Smeaton, *Reports of the late John Smeaton, FRS* (4 vols., London, 1812-14), vol. 4, 16; A W Skempton, *John Smeaton FRS* (London, 1981), 11, 21; Allibone, *The Royal Society and its dining clubs*, 85.

<sup>136</sup> E Henderson, *Life of James Ferguson, FRS, in a brief autobiographical account, and further extended memoir* (Edinburgh, 1870), 272-4.; C L Hardin, 'The scientific work of the Reverend John Michell', *Ann. Sci.* (1966), 28. The Canton papers, loc. cit.

and organising the selection and viewing procedures for exhibitions.<sup>137</sup>

### Conclusion

Biographical studies are necessary to underpin broad historical analyses describing how the fruitful alliance of commerce and natural philosophy during the eighteenth century contributed to the validation of scientific expertise. Modern historians may well have devoted greater attention to Knight if more than the existing scattered handful of his papers had survived. But the fleeting references by his contemporaries demonstrate that he was a significant mid-eighteenth century character. While nowadays, navigational compasses might not seem of central importance, Knight's colleagues saw his inventions as vitally relevant to improving the economy of a maritime nation. In 1773, Pringle used his Presidential address to single out Knight's work to exemplify the value of Baconian inductivism for mastering nature as well as the terraqueous globe: 'Let those who doubt, view the Needle, which, untouched by any loadstone, directs the course of the British mariner round the world'.<sup>138</sup>

The growing consumer capitalism of the eighteenth century entailed many types of changes. As men and women redefined their gendered identities within society, the relationships between their

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<sup>137</sup> The lists show him to have been a member from 1759 or 1760 to about 1767. Minutes of the Society, vol. 5, March 1760 and passim; J B Wheatley, 'Art exhibitions of the Society', *Journ. Soc. Arts* 43, 857-61 (1895); D Allan, 'The Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce: organisation, membership and objectives in the first three decades' (PhD thesis, University of London, 1979).

<sup>138</sup> J Pringle, 'A discourse on the different kinds of air', *Phil. Trans.*, 63 (1773), 28 (appendix).

public and private lives altered.<sup>139</sup> While elite boundaries were being gradually extended to accommodate the swelling middle ranks, they were also being strengthened by the consolidating distinction - albeit a blurred one - between polite and popular cultures. Entrepreneurs seeking money and advancement invented new strategies for marketing their products and improving their social status. Natural philosophers promoted an ideology of an accessible and utilitarian scientific culture, governed by a group of experts but with skills and techniques democratically diffused throughout society for the public benefit. Inventive natural philosophers such as Knight contributed towards the foundation of a professionalised, disciplinary science framed by these Enlightenment ideals.<sup>140</sup> Like their colleagues working in other fields, they helped to transform a society based on rigid hierarchy, into one in which people could build careers and earn their livings in new kinds of ways.

Darwin College, Cambridge

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<sup>139</sup> R Sennett, *The fall of public man* (Cambridge, 1977); G Barker-Benfield, *The culture of sensibility: sex and society in eighteenth-century Britain* (Chicago, 1992).

<sup>140</sup> Golinski, *Science as public culture*, 283-7.

## A HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED LETTER OF JOSEPH PRIESTLEY<sup>1</sup>

Jenny Graham

When, in April 1794, Joseph Priestley sailed from England to settle in America, he left behind him many 'endearing Connections',<sup>2</sup> amongst them one whom Priestley himself described as 'one particular Christian friend, in whose absence I shall, for some time at least, find all the world a blank.'<sup>3</sup> This was Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808), Priestley's fellow-labourer in the Unitarian cause in England, who had in 1774 inaugurated the first Unitarian place of worship, at Essex Street in London.<sup>4</sup> Priestley, on his many visits to London, frequently met with Lindsey; he relied greatly, as he frequently acknowledged, upon Lindsey's advice, and his calmer temperament, in the publication of his theological and political

<sup>1</sup> The author would like to express her gratitude for the generous assistance of Marie Booth Ferré, Assistant Curator of Special Collections, Boyd Lee Spahr Library, Dickinson College, Pennsylvania, in the location of this letter; and to the Archivist of the Library, George Hing, for granting permission for publication. She would also like to thank the Librarians of Dr Williams's Library, Warrington Public Libraries, and the Massachusetts Historical Society, for permission to quote from manuscripts in their Collections.

<sup>2</sup> James Wodrow to Samuel Kenrick, 16-21 June 1794, Wodrow-Kenrick Correspondence, Dr Williams's Library (D.W.L.), MSS.

<sup>3</sup> J Priestley, *The present state of Europe compared with ancient prophecies; a sermon, preached at the Gravel-Pit Meeting, in Hackney, February 28, 1794 being the day appointed for a general fast; with a preface, containing the reasons for the author's leaving England* (London, 1794), J T Rutt ed., *The theological and miscellaneous works of Joseph Priestley*, 25 vols. (London, 1817-1831), XV.532 and note.

<sup>4</sup> T Belsham, *Memoirs of Theophilus Lindsey* (London, 1812), 96-112; and cf. H McLachlan, *The letters of Theophilus Lindsey* (Manchester, 1920); and also *Dictionary of National Biography* (hereinafter *D.N.B.*).

works;<sup>5</sup> and it was to Lindsey that he fled when, in July 1791, the Birmingham mob destroyed his house, his library and his laboratory. From the late autumn of 1791, when Priestley was elected to succeed Price at the Gravel Pit Meeting in Hackney, until his departure for America in the spring of 1794, he enjoyed the continuous close proximity of Lindsey's company, and was later to recall, in particular in the early years of what he regarded as his enforced exile in America, the many hours which he had spent at Lindsey's 'fireside, and with Belsham at your tea, on Sundays.'<sup>6</sup>

The extant correspondence between Priestley and Lindsey (which consists entirely of letters from Priestley)<sup>7</sup> is now in the manuscript collection of Dr Williams's Library in London. It begins in 1769, shortly after they became acquainted, and continues, with some omissions, but no significant interruption, until 1791, when Priestley moved to London.<sup>8</sup> After Priestley's emigration to America, however, he wrote to Lindsey at very frequent intervals, and carefully numbered his letters. This correspondence, when their mutual friend Thomas Belsham was

<sup>5</sup> *Memoirs of Dr Joseph Priestley to the year 1795 written by himself, with a continuation to the time of his decease, by his son, Joseph Priestley; and observations on his writings, by Thomas Cooper ... and the Rev. William Christie* (Northumberland, 1806, repr. New York, 1978), I.69-70; Priestley, *An answer to Mr Paine's Age of reason ... with a preface by T Lindsey* (below, n.37), xviii; and cf. Priestley, *Works*, I. pt.2. 277, Priestley to Lindsey, 16 October 1794: 'I want your cool judgment in this and all my other compositions. I feel myself as a ship without a rudder.'

<sup>6</sup> Priestley, *Works*, I. pt. 2. 293, Priestley to Lindsey, 10 February 1795.

<sup>7</sup> For the destruction of many of the letters written to Priestley, firstly in the riots in Birmingham in 1791, and subsequently, on his death in 1804, by his son, cf. J Graham, 'Revolutionary philosopher: the political ideas of Joseph Priestley, 1733-1804, Part One', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 8 (1989), n.27.

<sup>8</sup> D.W.L. MSS., Priestley-Lindsey Correspondence; and cf. Graham, loc. cit.

writing his *Memoirs of Lindsey*, was in his possession. It was, as he described it, 'a regular correspondence ... which continued with little or no interruption till within a fortnight of (Priestley's) decease. He numbered his letters', wrote Belsham: 'there are one hundred and four; all of them now in possession of the writer of this work.'<sup>9</sup> These letters are, almost in their entirety, contained in the Collection in Dr Williams's Library. They were published, as was Priestley's earlier correspondence with Lindsey, by Rutt, in his edition of Priestley's *Works*. Rutt's editing of Priestley's correspondence, however, as R E Schofield observed, has many deficiencies: 'A comparison of Rutt's versions with the originals ... reveals changes in wording and punctuation, the frequent omission of paragraphs without indication, and, on some occasions, the combination of parts of two or even three letters into what appears in the printed version to be a single letter!'<sup>10</sup> Priestley's letter to Lindsey published below, which consists of four closely written manuscript pages, gives some indication of the true length of much of his correspondence to his friend from America.

This letter, one of the few missing from the Collection in Dr Williams's Library, is Number Five in the series, and has recently been acquired by the Library of Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania (which also houses much of Priestley's valuable collection of scientific instruments, from his laboratory in Northumberland). The date of the letter is 24 August 1794. Priestley had landed in New York on 4 June 1794. He wrote to Lindsey from that city on 6 and 15 June;<sup>11</sup> and from Philadelphia, where he arrived on 19 June, on 24 June and 5 July.<sup>12</sup> In the middle of July Priestley removed from Philadelphia to Northumberland, but, although there are several extant letters to his friends,

<sup>9</sup> Belsham, *Memoirs of Lindsey*, 389.

<sup>10</sup> R E Schofield ed., *A scientific autobiography of Joseph Priestley, 1733-1804* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1966), vii.

<sup>11</sup> Priestley, *Works*, I. pt.2. 244-6, 255-9.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, I. pt.2. 263-6, 268-70.

including one to Belsham of 27 August, written shortly after his arrival,<sup>13</sup> the earliest to Lindsey hitherto published has been Number Six, dated 14 September.<sup>14</sup> By the time that he wrote this, however, Priestley had heard of the failure of the proposed settlement projected by his sons and his fellow emigrant Thomas Cooper, some fifty miles from Northumberland. This settlement had been first planned in the winter of 1793-4 by Thomas Cooper, John Vaughan, and Priestley's sons; it was intended, in the words of Joseph Priestley the younger, to serve as 'a rallying point for the English, who were at that time emigrating to America in great numbers'; and Priestley himself, on hearing of the plans for it while awaiting his departure from England, had viewed the prospect with great interest, encouraging his dissenting friends to join him in America.<sup>15</sup>

As Rutt chose to edit Priestley's letter of 14 September, the full impact of the failure of the intended settlement upon him, and the degree to which it affected his hopes of attracting kindred spirits to Northumberland,<sup>16</sup> is much diminished. The letter of 24 August bears the considerably more optimistic tone of Priestley's early

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, I. pt.2. 270-3, Priestley to Belsham, 27 August 1794; and also *Revolutionary in exile, The emigration of Joseph Priestley to America: 1794-1804, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 85.2 (1995), 61-3, for Priestley's letters to John and Benjamin Vaughan on his arrival in Northumberland.

<sup>14</sup> Priestley, *Works*, I. pt.2. 273-5.

<sup>15</sup> Priestley, *Memoirs*, I. 166. And cf. D J Jeremy ed., 'Henry Wansey and his American journal, 1794', *Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society*, 82 (Philadelphia, 1970), 77-9, and n.86; M C Park, 'Joseph Priestley and the problem of pantisocracy', *Proceedings of the Delaware County Institute of Science*, XI.I (Philadelphia, 1947); Graham, *Revolutionary in exile...*, 33-5; R W Davis, *Dissent in politics 1780-1830. The political life of William Smith, M.P.* (London, 1971), 75.

<sup>16</sup> Graham, *Revolutionary in exile*, 63-4, 77-8.

weeks in America, when, although acutely conscious, as he many times declared, that he had been effectively forced to leave his native country, he was certainly hoping to be joined by many of his friends of like opinions. With their help he was hoping to promote the cause which, as he wrote in a letter to Thomas Cooper on 6 April 1794, was at this time dearest to his heart - the propagation of Unitarian principles in religion.<sup>17</sup> 'If I do not greatly deceive myself', he wrote to Lindsey from New York, 'I see a great harvest opening upon me; and there is room for many labourers; but it will require great prudence and judgment at first.' It was, he wrote, 'with this view' that he would 'carefully avoid all the party politics of the country, and have no other object besides religion and philosophy.'<sup>18</sup>

The chief reason for Priestley's departure from England, as he himself freely acknowledged, was the fear of prosecution by the government of that country, and a fate similar to that of his friends, Thomas Walker, Rev. Thomas Fyshe Palmer, Thomas Muir and Rev. William Winterbotham: 'The times grow darker and darker', Priestley wrote in December 1793, after the summons of Thomas Walker to stand trial at Lancaster assizes for seditious activities; the sentencing of Muir and Fyshe Palmer to transportation for fourteen years to Botany Bay, and the imprisonment in Newgate for four years of Rev. Winterbotham for two Sermons delivered in Plymouth in November 1792. 'What affects me most', wrote Priestley, 'are the proceedings in the case of Mr Winterbotham. It shows that no man who is obnoxious, however innocent, is safe.'<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Priestley to Thomas Cooper, 6 April 1794: original now lost, but a xerox copy now in the possession of Dr D J Jeremy. The author is very grateful to Dr Jeremy for providing her with a copy of this letter.

<sup>18</sup> Priestley to Lindsey, 24, 15 June 1794.

<sup>19</sup> Priestley to Wilkinson, 9 January 1794, Warrington Public Libraries (W.P.L.), MSS; Graham, 'Revolutionary philosopher, Part One', 46; *Revolutionary in exile*, 36 and n. And cf. A Goodwin, *The friends of*

As early as the spring of 1793, when all three of his sons were actively preparing for emigration, Priestley was considering the increasingly urgent necessity for his own departure - which in the event, as a result of the rigour with which the Ministry was enforcing its policy of the persecution of radical opinion, and the severity of the sentences meted out, he was to make in considerable haste. He was also already considering how, in such a state of exile, he could best promote the cause of Unitarianism in America. For this period there are virtually no extant letters to Lindsey, but to his brother-in-law John Wilkinson,<sup>20</sup> he wrote in May 1793: 'When all my sons are settled in America, I do not think I shall stay long after them, especially if a scheme that my sons say is talked of, of establishing a liberal college in the back settlements of America should be carried into execution. In this case I would go soon, and devote myself wholly to it. My own library (to which Mr Lindsey will add his) and apparatus will make a good beginning. The colleges they have in the old towns were in a good measure, I believe, founded by Englishmen, and I do not think men of fortune

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*liberty: the English democratic movement in the age of the French Revolution* (London, 1979), 337, note; 287-9; Graham, *Reform politics in England, 1789-99* (University Press of America, forthcoming) for the trials and sentencing of the Ministry's opponents. Cf. also D.W.L. MSS., passage omitted in Rutt, Priestley to Lindsey, 14 February 1799: 'I cannot give you an idea of the satisfaction I receive from your correspondence in this state of *exile*, for such I cannot help considering it, and which has now continued a long time. But I ought to be, and am very thankful that it is not Botany bay where is the excellent Mr Palmer.'

<sup>20</sup> For Wilkinson, Priestley's brother-in-law, close political confidant, and financial adviser, with whom he was to carry on almost as extensive a correspondence as with Lindsey from America, cf. W H Chaloner, 'Dr Joseph Priestley, John Wilkinson and the French Revolution, 1789-1802', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser. 8 (1958), 21-40.

can perpetuate their names more effectually or usefully than by such foundations in such a country as America.<sup>21</sup>

Undoubtedly, the prospect of establishing such a college in Northumberland, combined with the plan of an extensive settlement of his fellow-countrymen, reinforced the many other considerations which decided Priestley to settle in an area in many other respects extremely ill-suited to his habits, occupation and temperament. He had contracted a hearty dislike of Philadelphia, but he also found the isolation and backwardness of Northumberland hard to bear. In spite of his triumphant reception in both New York and Philadelphia, he had been prevented from preaching from any pulpit in the churches of either city.<sup>22</sup> In 1796 in Philadelphia, he was not only to preach to crowded audiences in the Universalist Church, but also to be instrumental in the founding of a Unitarian Society.<sup>23</sup> In the summer of 1794, however, with - as his letter of 24 August makes clear - his wife's welfare also to consider, he was certain that his sphere of usefulness could best be promoted in Northumberland. He was to reject, very shortly after this letter was written, the firm offer of the Chair of Chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania.<sup>24</sup> Throughout 1795 he was still persuaded that

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<sup>21</sup> Priestley to John Wilkinson, 16 May 1793. And cf. same to same, 9 January 1794, for Priestley's willingness at that date, to consider accepting an offer of teaching in a college in New York. (Cf. however, below, n.41.)

<sup>22</sup> E M Wilbur, *A history of Unitarianism in Transylvania, England and America* (Boston, 1952), 396-8; Graham, *Revolutionary in exile*, 48-50, 54-5.

<sup>23</sup> Wilbur, loc. cit.; Graham, 88-9 and nn.

<sup>24</sup> Priestley, *Works*, I. pt.2. 273-5, 279-81, 282-3, Priestley to Lindsey, 14 September, 12 November 1794, Priestley to Belsham, 14 December 1794; H C Bolton ed., *The scientific correspondence of Joseph Priestley* (New York, 1892, repr. 1969), 139-45, Priestley to Benjamin Rush, 14 September, 28 October, 3, 11 November 1794; *Revolutionary in exile*, 64 and n., 68, 77.

Northumberland would 'in time ... be one of the finest situations on this continent.'<sup>25</sup> And he pursued there with unremitting zeal, and with such resources as were at hand, his theological and philosophical pursuits.

In 1795 Lindsey wrote a eulogy to his friend, and America, in a Preface to one of the pamphlets composed by Priestley in Northumberland, and subsequently published in London. Priestley, wrote Lindsey, 'will ever rank high, as one of the very few, in different ages, distinguished of heaven, who, by superior powers of mind, and the virtuous and indefatigable exertion of them, has extended the limits of human knowledge, and advanced the useful arts and comforts of life; and who, at the same time, by his various researches and writings, has contributed to the virtue and happiness of mankind.

Still actuated by the same desires, and engaged in the same pursuits to serve others, driven now from his native land, by a revival of those High-church persecuting principles, which peopled the deserts (sic) of America, in the days of the Stuarts, he has found an asylum, and been welcomed with honour into that country, which had lately to contend for its own liberty and independence; and which is glad, and able to receive into its capacious bosom, all the sufferers from religious or civil tyranny throughout the world.'<sup>26</sup>

Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge

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<sup>25</sup> D.W.L. MSS., passage omitted in Rutt, Priestley to Lindsey, 19 January 1795.

<sup>26</sup> Priestley, *An answer to Mr Paine's Age of reason ... with a preface by T Lindsey* (below, n.37), xi-xii.

Joseph Priestley to Theophilus Lindsey, 24 August 1794  
Dickinson College, Special Collections

Northumberland

Aug. 24. 1794

No 5

Dear friend,

I have just been gratified with the sight of a second letter from you, dated April 15, but have not yet received that which you say was inclosed in a parcel of books which went to New York, and when I shall receive that parcell (*sic*) I cannot tell. This is the greatest inconvenience in this country. You may think that by sending a thing to any port in America, it will soon reach any person in the country; but I find that, if it be at any considerable distance, it might as well be in England. Ever since I have heard of the package, I have written letter upon letter to expedite it, but hitherto to no purpose. Where the blame lies I cannot, at this distance, find out, and what to do more I cannot tell. However, I must have patience. If things be sent to Philadelphia directed to Mr John Vaughan,<sup>27</sup> I may have them in about a week if small, or

<sup>27</sup> John Vaughan was the fourth of the six sons of Samuel Vaughan, a wealthy London merchant of pronounced radical sympathies and a long-standing friend of Priestley's, who from 1783 to 1786 had settled, with his large family, in Philadelphia: cf. S P Stetson, 'The Philadelphia sojourn of Samuel Vaughan', *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 73 (1949), 459-74; Graham, 'Revolutionary philosopher, Part One', 52. John Vaughan had arrived in Philadelphia in 1782; and in 1784 was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society. He remained in Philadelphia after the departure of his family, and in 1791 became the very active and highly respected Treasurer of the Philosophical Society. Throughout the period when Priestley was

a month if large. A certain and ready communication with England would add greatly to my satisfaction in this country; and we have expectation of being soon better in this respect, as a stage is about to be set up between this place and Philadelphia and a post three times a week. At present it is only once.<sup>28</sup> Our last news is that of the engagement at sea, in which the French lost 8 ships, and an uncertain report of the French having some advantage in Flanders, and having taken Ypres.<sup>29</sup> We have also more hope of the continuance of the peace with England.<sup>30</sup> The Indians have been repulsed, and we have no apprehension from them any

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deciding to emigrate to America, John Vaughan played a leading role in encouraging him, in offering to assist his sons, and in helping to invest his money in the American funds. (Graham, *Revolutionary in exile*, 22 and n.)

<sup>28</sup> Not until 1797 did Northumberland have a post more than once a week to Philadelphia (Priestley, *Memoirs*, I.195). In late 1794 and early 1795, Priestley was in correspondence with John Adams, at this time the Vice-President, and a long-standing acquaintance, who had offered to assist him in the matter. But this seems to have had little effect, and there is no evidence in their correspondence that Adams, as John Binns later stated, made Northumberland a post-town out of respect to Priestley soon after he settled there. J Binns, *Recollections of the life of John Binns* (Philadelphia, 1854), 173; and cf. Priestley, *Works*, I. pt.2. 313, Priestley to Belsham, 3 August 1795; *ibid.*, I. pt.2. 386, Priestley to Lindsey, 4 November 1797, and *Revolutionary in exile*, 71-6.

<sup>29</sup> For the advances of the French in the Austrian Netherlands throughout the spring and summer of 1794, cf. J Ehrman, *The younger Pitt. The reluctant transition* (London and Stanford Univ. Press, 1983), 327-43; S Elkins and E McKittrick, *The age of federalism. The early American republic, 1788-1800* (O.U.P., 1993), 403. For 'the engagement at sea' - the 'glorious first of June', in which France suffered a nominal defeat, but the convoy of grain from America reached its destination safely, see *ibid.*, 349-50; 403.

<sup>30</sup> For the negotiations between Washington's and Pitt's Administrations in the summer of 1794, culminating in Jay's Treaty, signed in November 1794 and averting war between England and America, see Ehrman, 507-16; Elkins and McKittrick, 402-10.

farther than they are instigated, and assisted by the English.<sup>31</sup> The worst circumstance attending this country is the refusal of some of the back settlers to pay the excise. But this, we hope, will soon be settled, and without blood shed.<sup>32</sup>

I have now seen a *summer* in this country, and find it very tolerable, at the worst season, and in general delightful. The climate is certainly greatly preferable to that of England, and now I am perfectly reconciled to it, tho it is only of late that I have completely got the better of a violent diarrhea which I have had more or less of ever since my landing. My wife is better than I ever knew her. She has lately written a second long letter to Mrs Lindsey. She is so fond of this place that nothing can draw her from it, and therefore I have agreed to buy ground, on which to build a house, which will be begun very soon.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, I can

<sup>31</sup> For the unrest on the frontiers of Pennsylvania, Wayne's victory of 20 August over the Indians, and the continuing British policy of tacitly encouraging them, see Elkins and McKittrick, 436-9.

<sup>32</sup> For the Whiskey Rebellion in Pennsylvania in the late summer and autumn of 1794, in which for the first time federal troops were called out to suppress a state disturbance, cf. T P Slaughter, *The whiskey rebellion. Frontier epilogue to the American revolution* (O.U.P., 1986); Elkins and McKittrick, 461-85.

<sup>33</sup> For a tribute to Mary Priestley, as a valued helpmeet to her husband, and a woman of great strength of character in her own right, cf. H J McLachlan, 'Mary Priestley. A Woman of Character', in A T Schwartz and J G McEvoy eds., *Motion toward perfection: the achievement of Joseph Priestley* (Skinner House Books, 1990), 251-64. For her ability as a letter writer, who 'wrote the best letter of any woman of her time', cf. *ibid.*, 252. Mary Priestley's letters to Hannah Lindsey of the summer of 1794 do not appear to have survived. Cf. however, her letter to William Vaughan (elder brother of John, staunch supporter of Priestley in 1791, and with the Priestleys on the night before they sailed for America: Priestley, *Works*, I. pt.2. 225, 229), 26 August 1794, in the Priestley-Wilkinson Correspondence (W.P.L. MSS.). In this Mary Priestley writes in terms similar to her husband of Northumberland - confirming Priestley's description of her attachment to the place: 'I am happy and thankful to meet with so sweet a situation and so peaceful a

make better use of my time here, both with respect to my theological and philosophical studies, than I could by living in Philadelphia, where I could have little time to myself, and should live very disagreeably, as well as at an expence which I could not support. I only want my books and instruments about me, and in this autumn I hope to have them. My instruments I cannot make much use of till next year.<sup>34</sup> If I had my books, I could do many things immediately. I have begun the continuation of my *Church History*, by the help of a few volumes of Fleury which I had in the ship with me. When I get all my books, I shall stick close to it, and

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retreat as the place I now write from. Dr Priestley also likes it and of his own choice intends to settle here, which is more than I hoped for at the time we came up. We have taken some ground and are now in treaty to have a frame house built upon it to live in.' Some English friends would, she believed, soon join them: 'be that as it may I am anxious to be settled ourselves we are not at at time of life to keep rambling about which still unhinges people more, and we have at least I can speak for myself been sufficiently deranged already. At some future period I will send you a plan of our house, with the extent of our premises and the view from it.' Mary Priestley was never to see the house which was eventually, after much delay, built for the Priestleys in Northumberland. She died in September 1796: cf. Priestley, *Works*, I. pt.2. 359-60, Priestley to Lindsey, 19 September 1796: 'I never stood in more need of friendship than I do now ... This day I bury my wife'; and W.P.L. MSS., Priestley to Wilkinson, 19 September 1796: 'she had taken much pleasure in planning our *new house*, and now that it is advancing apace and promises to be everything that she wished it to be, she goes to occupy another.'

<sup>34</sup> By January 1795 Priestley was unpacking his scientific instruments, and in the autumn of that year was reporting to his old Lunar companion, Withering, of the experiments which he was, with difficulty, able to carry out, 'having only one room in my son's house for my library and apparatus too': Schofield, *Scientific autobiography*, 287-8, Priestley to Withering, 27 October 1795. It was not until 1797 that his library and laboratory were fully reassembled (*Memoirs*, I.194).

in two years I think I can finish it.<sup>35</sup> I have composed, and shall soon print, *an additional letter to the philosophers and politicians of France*<sup>36</sup> National Assembly (*sic*): on their professing their belief in the being of a God, and a future state, independent of Xty. I have also composed a Sermon to be delivered whenever I preach in Philadelphia. I have just seen *Paine's Age of Reason*, and shall probably make some remarks on it, in another letter to the philosophers in France. It is arrogant and absurd in the extreme.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> The first part of Priestley's *General history of the Christian church to the fall of the western empire* (London, 1790), had been published in 1790, and was dedicated to Samuel Shore (Priestley, *Works*, VIII). Priestley worked on the Church History continuously throughout his years in Northumberland, although he did not complete it until 1802, when he dedicated it to Jefferson: Priestley, *A general history of the Christian church, from the fall of the western empire to the present time* (Northumberland, 1802), *Works*, IX; and cf. Graham, *Revolutionary in exile*, 154-5.

<sup>36</sup> Priestley, *Letters to the philosophers and politicians of France on the subject of religion* (London, 1793), *Works*, XXI. 87-108; and Priestley, *Letters to the philosophers and politicians of France on the subject of religion. To which are prefixed, observations relating to the causes of the general prevalence of infidelity* (Philadelphia, 1794).

<sup>37</sup> Priestley, *A continuation of the letters to the philosophers and politicians of France, on the subject of religion; and of the letters to a philosophical unbeliever; in answer to Mr Paine's Age of reason* (Northumberland and Salem, Mass., 1795); and Priestley, *An answer to Mr Paine's Age of reason, being a continuation of letters to the philosophers and politicians of France, on the subject of religion; and of the letters to a philosophical unbeliever. With a preface by T Lindsey* (London, 1795). And cf. *Works*, XXI. 109-69, 596-7: Appendix 3. Cf. also *ibid.*, I, pt.2. 310-11, Priestley to Lindsey, 12 July 1795: 'I am exceedingly glad that you have, at last, got my answer to Mr Paine, and that you like it. I wish to see your preface. It cannot give more pleasure to you than it does to me, to have our names connected in every possible method. I hope they will be for ever inseparable.' And also *ibid.*, I, pt.2. 323, Priestley to Lindsey, 6 December 1795: 'It is not long since I received the copy of your edition of my answer to Paine. I read the

I shall give directions to send 2-5 Copies of everything I publish here, directed to you, that you may distribute them to my friends as you please, not forgetting the two Mr Wilkinson's (*sic*)<sup>38</sup> Mr Parkinson, and Mr Salte. The rest you will easily distinguish.<sup>39</sup>

The most virulent pamphlet that I have (torn) yet seen is just published here against me (torn) I will send you a copy. I shall not notice it, but I hear that some friend will.<sup>40</sup> Another I have just received printed at New York, as a *letter from the Devil to me*. I shall never read it. All these things will excite attention, and do good. I have just heard that at New York they are ready to subscribe to an unitarian meeting. Nothing but prudent and able preachers are wanted but they must be tolerably independent in their circumstances.<sup>41</sup> - This town, the most delightfully situated

preface with much emotion, from a sense of the friendship to me expressed in it. If I had laboured ten times more than I have, I should not have thought it too much for such a reward.'

<sup>38</sup> For Priestley's close relationship with both his wife's brothers, John and William Wilkinson, cf. W H Chaloner, 'Dr Joseph Priestley, John Wilkinson and the French Revolution, 1789-1802', above, n.20.

<sup>39</sup> The passage in this paragraph beginning 'I have just seen', to 'distinguish', is marked by square brackets, certainly added at a later date. This would appear to suggest that this letter was originally intended for publication, almost certainly by Rutt.

<sup>40</sup> W Cobbett, *Observations on the emigration of Dr Joseph Priestley, and on the several addresses delivered to him on his arrival at New York* (Philadelphia, repr. London, 1794). This is apparently the only reference by Priestley to this first attack by one whom Priestley in his later years in America under the Federalists frequently, and not without reason, referred to as his tormentor: *Revolutionary in exile*, 52-3 and n., 113, 126-7, 133. In his Preface to Priestley's reply to Paine (above, n. 37), Lindsey asserted that Cobbett's abuse had had no effect upon Priestley's reputation in America, and warmly defended his friend against the effect of its publication in London. (Preface, xxviii-xxxii.)

<sup>41</sup> Cf. also Priestley, *Works*. 1, pt.2. 274, Priestley to Lindsey, 14 September 1794: 'I have had an invitation both to give a course of lectures and to form an Unitarian society at New York, but it is too far off to think of it.' New York did not see a Unitarian Meeting

perhaps in the world, promises now to become a considerable place. When a few of my friends are come, we shall build an unitarian chapel, and probably have a *College*.<sup>42</sup> At present I preach sometimes in the Presbyterian meeting; but there I make a point of saying nothing to offend them. This, however, tends to abate prejudice, and will prepare the way for other things. They all know my opinions and in general do not seem to be much shocked at them. I shall introduce my small pamphlets as they are printed at Philadelphia. The Appeal<sup>43</sup> is among some of them. There are about five hundred people in this town and as many in Sunbury, which is only separated by the river.

I would now give a great deal for a complete set of the *Morning Chronicle*,<sup>44</sup> or any tolerable English newspaper tho ever

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established until 1818. (Wilbur, *A history of Unitarianism in Transylvania, England, and America*, 427-8.)

<sup>42</sup> For the proposed College in Northumberland, for which funds were raised, and land allotted, but which never in fact materialised, cf. Priestley, *Memoirs*, I, 169-70; *Revolutionary in exile*, 77-8, 82-3, 99-100.

<sup>43</sup> On his arrival in America Priestley printed and distributed the *Fast and Farewell Sermons* which he had delivered at the Gravel Pit Meeting in Hackney shortly before his departure (cf. above, n.3, and Priestley, *The use of Christianity, especially in difficult times. A sermon, delivered at the Gravel-Pit Meeting in Hackney, March 30 1794, being the author's farewell discourse to his congregation* (London, 1794), *Works*, XV. 552-69. And also Priestley, *An appeal to the public on the subject of the riots in Birmingham, Parts One and Two*, (Birmingham and London, 1791, 1792), *Works*, XIX. 'In them', he wrote, on sending copies to John Adams, 'you will see my reasons for leaving England, and I hope you will approve of them. You will see that I do not come hither from choice': Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Reel 378, Priestley to Adams, 13 November 1794. (Graham, 'Revolutionary philosopher, Part One', 46-8, 'Part Two', 43-4; *Revolutionary in exile*, 60.)

<sup>44</sup> The *Morning Chronicle* was the chief metropolitan organ of opposition opinion to the English Ministry, and in particular opposed the prosecution of the war against France. In the spring of 1793

so old. I hope Mr Belsham will send me the Cambridge Paper.<sup>45</sup> They would amuse me much. We have only poor extracts in the Philadelphia papers. It is a long time since we have had any accounts of Mr Stone, or our friends in the Tower.<sup>46</sup> The war we

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Benjamin Vaughan, perhaps the closest of all the Vaughan family to Priestley, and certainly one of the most radical, had published a series of articles, under the pseudonym 'A Calm Observer', opposing the war, subsequently published in pamphlet form, and much approved by Priestley. (W.P.L. MSS., Priestley to Wilkinson, 20 June, 3, 15 July 1793; *Revolutionary in exile*, 26-7.) Priestley frequently expressed his pleasure at receiving the copies of the *Morning Chronicle*, which his friends sent him from England: cf. *Works*, I. pt.2. 305, 313, Priestley to Lindsey, 17 June 1795, Priestley to Belsham, 3 August 1795: 'I carefully preserve all the Morning Chronicles, and the Cambridge Intelligencer, which I neglected when I was with you. They are now all in good order, and frequently referred to.' Cf. also below, n.45.

<sup>45</sup> The *Cambridge Intelligencer*, edited by Benjamin Flower, was one of the most outspoken of the radical provincial newspapers against the policies of Pitt's Ministry. Its appearance had been welcomed by Priestley in one of the last letters he wrote in England: Priestley, *Works*, I. pt.2. 217-18, Priestley to Flower, 26 March 1794: 'give me leave to express the satisfaction I weekly receive from the temper and spirit of your paper, from which it may be hoped that much good will accrue to this country.' He greatly valued it also during his years in America: D.W.L. MSS., passage omitted in Rutt, Priestley to Lindsey, 19 January 1795: 'I have great satisfaction in the *Cambridge paper*.' And Priestley, *Works*, I. pt.2. 396: Priestley to Lindsey, 8 March 1798: 'After many delays, I have, at length, received all the Morning Chronicles and Cambridge Intelligencers that you have sent me; for I find I have them complete from the time of my arrival in this country, and I value them much, especially the Cambridge paper, and as it contains almost every thing that is of much value in the other, I shall be very well content to have that only.' And cf. M J Murphy, *Cambridge newspapers and opinion, 1780-1850* (Cambridge, 1977); *Revolutionary in exile*, 61, 65 and n., 104, 152.

<sup>46</sup> For the arrests by the English Ministry in May 1794 of many of Priestley's close acquaintance, in particular William Stone, and the

hope is too violent to last much longer; and I cannot help pleasing myself much with the idea of visiting England before I die, perhaps after I have finished my Church History - I read more of the Hebrew Bible than I almost ever did, and may possibly revise the whole translation, now that I have so much time upon my hands. My best respects to Mrs Rayner<sup>47</sup> Mr Belsham and all friends,

Yours and Mrs Lindsey most affectionately,

J Priestley.

Addressed: The Revd Mr Lindsey  
Essex Street  
Strand  
London

Endorsed: 5. No. Aug. 24. 1794.

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interrogation in the Privy Council of Benjamin Vaughan, cf. Goodwin, *The friends of liberty*, 324, 332ff.; Graham, *Reform politics in England*, forthcoming. For Priestley's continuing concern, on hearing of the summing-up of the judge in the trial of Horne Tooke, cf. *Works*, 1. pt.2. 289, Priestley to Lindsey, 19 January 1795. For Benjamin Vaughan's flight to France after the arrests of May, cf. C Murray, *Benjamin Vaughan, 1751-1835. The life of an Anglo-American intellectual* (New York, 1982); and *Revolutionary in exile*, 37-8 and n. Perhaps significantly, Priestley makes no reference to Benjamin Vaughan in this letter.

<sup>47</sup> For Mrs Rayner, a wealthy widow who regularly transmitted generous benefactions to Priestley, cf. the article in *D.N.B.* on Priestley (361).

## MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT'S THEODICY AND THEORY OF PROGRESS

*Gordon Spence*

### I

Mary Wollstonecraft was a reformer who yet accepted a theodicy. She saw evils in society that were in need of urgent remedy and yet, at least when she wrote her two *Vindications* of the rights of the oppressed, she clung to the belief that the ways of God could be justified to men and women. She rejected the doctrine of the fall of mankind and original sin<sup>1</sup> and showed no interest in the redemption offered by revealed religion. Her theism, which she combined with the principles of eternal truth and reason learnt from her admired friend Richard Price, entailed a belief in divine omnipotence and foreknowledge. How she maintained her faith in divine providence when she attacked Burke on the subject of human rights, and Rousseau on the progress of civilization, is a question of some interest. In her view human rights have a theological basis, and yet they are denied and trampled on in the course of an historical process which is permitted by God, who nevertheless 'must be just, because he is wise', and 'must be good, because he is omnipotent'. The logic of the latter proposition is elusive; in 1792 Wollstonecraft was still too pious to doubt it, but she considered the exercise of God's power to be regulated by His wisdom (5.114-15), as Price held that the supreme law of rectitude was the source and guide of all of God's actions.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols. (London, 1989), 6.21. Most subsequent references are in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Price, *A review of the principal questions in morals*, ed. D D Raphael (Oxford, 1974), 109.

Edmund Burke's appeal to prejudice in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*<sup>3</sup> compelled Wollstonecraft to establish her own ethical position and to criticize the culture of sensibility. In *A Vindication of the rights of men* (1790) she describes reason as bringing forth virtue when impregnated by the feelings of the heart. 'Unexercised reason' is 'called conscience'. 'But if virtue is to be acquired by experience, or taught by example, reason, perfected by reflection, must be the director of the whole host of passions' (5.31-32). This is one of her best statements of the relation between reason and the emotions, and of the nature of reason. This view of the heart as providing motivation justifies the impassioned tone that Wollstonecraft uses in this *Vindication*, while her acceptance of the traditional doctrine of the subordination of the passions to reason justifies her condemnation of Burke's flights of rhetoric that arise from a 'pampered sensibility' without the 'sober suggestions of reason' (5.9). As conscience, reason is, in her opinion, derived from God, but it can be developed through experience of the world. She affirms that her reason deduces moral laws from the principle of her dependence on God, and as a disciple of Price adds that her submission to Him is 'not to an arbitrary will, but to unerring reason.'<sup>4</sup> She is, however, as James Boulton has said, an humanitarian reformer,<sup>5</sup> whose opinions arise from reflection, in accordance with certain moral laws, on the conditions that she sees about her and discovers in history.

There is consequently in Wollstonecraft's thought a tension between the eternal and the developing. On the one hand she scornfully rejects Burke's historical approach, according to which

<sup>3</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J G A Pocock (Indianapolis, 1987), 76-77.

<sup>4</sup> 5.34, Wollstonecraft's italics; see Price, *Review*, 52, 85-87; and D O Thomas, *The honest mind: the thought and work of Richard Price* (Oxford, 1977), 20-28.

<sup>5</sup> James Boulton, *The language of politics in the age of Wilkes and Burke* (London, 1963), 172.

our rights are an inheritance from our forefathers,<sup>6</sup> saying that on the contrary we receive at birth natural rights from God (5.14); and following Price, the student of Cudworth, she bases liberty on immutable truth:<sup>7</sup> 'that it results from the eternal foundation of right - from immutable truth - who will presume to deny, that pretends to rationality - if reason has led them to build their morality and religion on an everlasting foundation - the attributes of God?' But she admits, on the other hand, that her ideal of liberty has never yet been realized in a political form (5.9), and proceeds with an historical argument that the foundation of the liberty of the English was laid in the Middle Ages, when Edward III granted privileges to the commons in return for supplies for his wars, and Richard II, beset by his seditious barons, was obliged to confirm or renew former charters with the commons; so 'Richard's weakness completed what Edward's ambition began' (5.12). This argument is derived from David Hume's *History of England*, although it simplifies Hume's account, omitting the dissimulation of Edward III, whose several confirmations of Magna Charta would not have been necessary if he had not frequently violated it, and apparently transferring these infringements to Richard II, during whose minority, according to Hume, the House of Commons received an accession of power, and whose sceptre subsequently passed into the hands of the nobility.<sup>8</sup> However, two points emerge from this. One is turned against Burke, who, with reference to the Black Prince's courteous treatment of a defeated and captured king of France, spoke of 'generosity and dignity of thinking of the fourteenth century';<sup>9</sup> Wollstonecraft argues that in the barbarism and ignorance of that period there is no solid foundation for the construction of human rights (5.13). The other point is that

<sup>6</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, 27-29.

<sup>7</sup> See Price, *Review*, 50.

<sup>8</sup> David Hume, *The History of England; from the invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution of 1688*, 8 vols. (London 1837), 2.284-85, 335-39, 3.2-3, 37-38.

<sup>9</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, 75.

nevertheless there arose, through the belligerence of Edward III and in the conflict among king, barons, clergy and commons, the power of this last, which was to resist tyranny and oppression.

Joseph Priestley, in his *Lectures on history*, published in 1788, quoted without acknowledgement the same passage from the end of Hume's chapters on the reign of Edward III as Wollstonecraft does.<sup>10</sup> In an exposition of Priestley's view of English constitutional history, Margaret Leslie says that for him liberty issued in a providential manner from the conflict among the king and the three estates; the happy result was not intended by those engaged in the struggle, but it was part of God's plan of gradual improvement for the world. History, according to Priestley, was 'an exhibition of the ways of God', progress being a divine process towards a predetermined end.<sup>11</sup> James Hoecker quotes from Priestley's *Lectures* a statement that all the important events which have contributed to the improvement of the human condition were brought about independently of the designs of the participants 'and must be ascribed wholly to the good providence of God.'<sup>12</sup> A similar theory was advanced by Catharine Macaulay, whom Wollstonecraft greatly admired. Lynne Withey has recorded Macaulay's beliefs that reason alone could not make sense of the human condition without the faith that the world operated according to God's plan, that He could produce good out of evil, and that people were instruments in His hands in the formation of an ultimately perfect world.<sup>13</sup> 'The events of human life, when

<sup>10</sup> Hume, *History*, 2.345; Margaret Evelyn Leslie, 'The Social and Political Thought of Joseph Priestley' (unpublished Cambridge University PhD dissertation, 1966), 265; Wollstonecraft, 5.11.

<sup>11</sup> Leslie, 'Thought of Joseph Priestley', 265, 59-60.

<sup>12</sup> James J. Hoecker, *Joseph Priestley and the idea of progress* (New York 1987), 227.

<sup>13</sup> Lynne E. Withey, 'Catharine Macaulay and the Uses of History: Ancient Rights, Perfectionism and Propaganda', *Journal of British Studies* 16, no.1 (Fall 1976), 62-64.

properly considered', wrote Macaulay, 'are but a series of benevolent providences.'<sup>14</sup>

Wollstonecraft dissociated herself from these theories, both in her review of Macaulay's *Letters on education* (7.318) and in *A vindication of the rights of men*. In the latter, granting that both physical and moral evil entered into the scheme of Providence at the creation, she continues: 'The justice of God may be vindicated by a belief in a future state; but, only by believing that evil is educing good for the individual, and not for an imaginary whole. The happiness of the whole must arise from the happiness of the constituent parts, or the essence of justice is sacrificed to a supposed grand arrangement.' (5.52) It would therefore be 'impious' to suppose that in conformity with the divine plan the happiness of anyone in the fourteenth century was sacrificed in order that liberty might be enjoyed in the eighteenth, or that the suffering of anyone in the writer's own lifetime could be justified in the name of the Millennium that might come to some future generation. This point is missed by Virginia Sapiro, when she quotes Jack Fruchtman's description of Price's and Priestley's political millennialism in the belief that it fits Wollstonecraft's writing as well in certain respects.<sup>15</sup> Yet Wollstonecraft followed Price in adding, 'The Father of all only can regulate the education of his children' (5.52), for Price saw the world as a school for the

<sup>14</sup> [Catharine Macaulay Graham], *Observations on the Reflections of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke, on the Revolution in France, in a letter to the Right Hon. the Earl of Stanhope* (London, 1790), 20.

<sup>15</sup> Virginia Sapiro, *A vindication of political virtue: The political theory of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Chicago and London 1992), 231-32; Jack Fruchtman, Jr., *The apocalyptic politics of Richard Price and Joseph Priestley: A study in late eighteenth-century English republican millennialism* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1983), 2, 24, 29.

education of virtue and believe that God would reward the virtuous in a future state.<sup>16</sup>

Wollstonecraft thus rejects a providential theory of history, but sees Providence as operative in the lives of individuals, whose sufferings on earth are only justified as parts of the education which will make them capable of perfect happiness in heaven. Now, this education involves principally the development of reason, which may be better cultivated in an enlightened epoch than in a barbarous one. Consequently, the possibilities of rational growth for individuals may have been fewer in the Middle Ages than they are in the late eighteenth century, when liberty is better understood and the oppressive system established in the past is being thrown off. Despite her disagreement with Macaulay and Priestley, Wollstonecraft's opposition to Burke implies a conception of social progress which is not entirely secular, since moral laws and human rights are derived from God while their realization in society is through institutions, positive laws and customs, and as these things are improved the rational education that prepares individuals for heaven is surely promoted.

In the discussion of the first principles of ethics which forms the opening chapter of her *Vindication of the rights of woman* (1792), Wollstonecraft distinguishes herself from both primitivists and optimists by saying: 'Rousseau exerts himself to prove that all was right originally: a crowd of authors that all is now right: and I, that all will be right.' (5.84) Her purpose is to reconcile her reforming zeal with her theism. Even if evil is the work of mankind, she assumes that it must have been foreseen by God at the creation of the world and so it must form a part of the divine plan. It is 'impious' to assert that, although God made all things right, error was introduced by the creature whom He formed with foreknowledge. According to her theodicy, God willed 'that the

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<sup>16</sup> Price, *Review*, 257, 260-61; see Thomas, *The honest mind*, 29.

passions should unfold our reason, because he could see that present evil would produce future good' (5.83).

The axiom contained here is announced on the first page of the chapter, that our passions were implanted in us in order that by struggling with them we might improve ourselves as reasonable beings (5.81). The contemporary culture of sensibility without the balance of reason was repugnant to Wollstonecraft both because it was used to suppress women as weak, delicate creatures, and because it implied a denial of her view of life as a rational education. In her mind, the refusal to grant to women opportunities for the development of reason was profoundly irreligious. The rationalist theology of the *Vindication of the rights of woman* has been well described by Emma Clough, who recognized its source in Price's philosophy. This is not acknowledged by Sapiro, who places Wollstonecraft in the empirical tradition of Locke, Hartley and Helvétius, without reference to the intellectual tradition passed on by Cudworth and Price.<sup>17</sup> It is true that Wollstonecraft gave a definition of knowledge as an inductive process (5.123), but she described the perception of moral truths as intuitive: 'they shine clearly, for God is light, and never, by the constitution of our nature, requires the discharge of a duty, the reasonableness of which does not beam on us when we open our eyes' (5.225). For Wollstonecraft in her second *Vindication*, as for Price, reason is the faculty not only of deduction but of intuition or immediate perception; it includes the power of discerning general truths, both abstract and moral, and it is perfectible or capable of infinite improvement. It is, says Wollstonecraft, 'an emanation of divinity, the tie that connects the creature with the Creator.'<sup>18</sup> This accords with Price's view of God's nature as 'the fountain of reason and

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<sup>17</sup> Sapiro, *Political virtue*, 51-55.

<sup>18</sup> Price, *Review*, 18-21, 41, 97-98, 225; Wollstonecraft, 5.122; Emma Rauschenbusch Clough, *A study of Mary Wollstonecraft and the Rights of Woman* (London, 1898), 51-56, 126.

wisdom'; and as Price called God 'the *supreme reason*', Wollstonecraft refers to Him as 'the unclouded Reason'.<sup>19</sup> From her idea of the education of men and women as rational beings there follows a belief in the immortality of the soul, since the process of self-perfection can only be completed in the next world. If the soul died with the body, our attempts at self-improvement would be futile and appetites would suffice instead of passions. 'But the powers of the soul that are of little use here ... prove that life is merely an education' (5.178).

This argument presents a problem. It seems to imply that whenever women are denied the education that would enable them to begin the process of self-perfection, God's purpose is frustrated. This, besides showing the wickedness of oppression, casts doubt on Wollstonecraft's theodicy. If reason in women is not developed, so that they become the victims of their passions, their sufferings are surely not justified. The same applies to all forms of servitude and degradation inflicted on mankind, which the victims do not overcome by the power of the rational soul.

Yet Wollstonecraft is even willing to concede to the optimists that 'Whatever is, is right'. With her belief in a future state she does not argue that the world is the best possible, but she defends Pope's aphorism as an optimist world, by distinguishing between God's point of view and ours. Yet as a reformer she maintains that it is right that we should try to alter whatever appears to us, in our partial view, to be wrong, even while we bow to God's superior wisdom (5.154). She does not see the objection that on the optimistic principle whatever we do is right, for by a logical necessity it must be part of the divine plan. As A D Nuttall has remarked, optimism reduces the ethical to the level of the non-ethical.<sup>20</sup> For her programme of reform Wollstonecraft needs an

<sup>19</sup> Price, *Review*, 113, 83, Price's italics; Wollstonecraft, 5.190.

<sup>20</sup> A D Nuttall, *Pope's 'Essay on Man'* (London, 1984), 129-30.

ethical imperative, but her theism brings her too close to the optimists, from whom she wants to be distinguished.

It is perhaps through following Price that Wollstonecraft has been led into this problem, though his view of Providence was different from Popean optimism. In his essay 'On Providence' Price argued that since God is omnipotent yet bound by the eternal law of rectitude, it is impossible that anything should occur that ought not, that the evils which exist can be reconciled with His perfect benevolence, and that what is achieved by the divine plan more than justifies the misery involved in its realization.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Wollstonecraft declares her conviction 'that no evil exists in the world that God did not design to take place' (5.84).

Her view of the divine plan is, as we have seen, that it concerns the rational education of individuals, and consequently it has an historical dimension, since this education is facilitated by social progress. Accordingly, she says, when arguing against Rousseau, that to assert that a state of nature is preferable to civilization 'in all its possible perfection' is to arraign supreme wisdom (5.83). But she is acutely aware of the difference between civilization as it may be and as it is. She complains that Rousseau, failing to distinguish between the consequence of civilization and the vestiges of barbarism, never thought of tracing the gigantic mischief of contemporary society up to arbitrary power and hereditary distinctions (5.84-85). Wollstonecraft appears as the associate of Thomas Paine in her outspoken opposition to monarchy.<sup>22</sup> In her opinion, 'It is the pestiferous purple which renders the progress of civilization a curse, and warps the understanding', and if Rousseau had gone further in his investigation he would have been able to 'contemplate the

<sup>21</sup> Thomas, *The honest mind*, 30-34.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Paine, *The rights of man*, Everyman's Library (London, 1969), 103-15; Wollstonecraft, 5.85.

perfection of man in the establishment of true civilization' (5.87). This is in fact what he attempted to do in the *Social Contract*, to which Wollstonecraft does not refer, evidently having in mind only the two *Discourses*.

She gives briefly her own theory of history, saying that the dawn of civilization came with monarchy and hierarchy and the establishment of feudal tenures, and that as the people acquired some power in wars and insurrections, rulers were obliged to 'gloss over their oppression with a shew of right', and to resort to covert corruption rather than open force as 'wars, agriculture, commerce, and literature, expand the mind'. The next stage is told in a footnote: 'Men of abilities scatter seeds that grow up and have a great influence on the forming opinion; and when once the public opinion preponderates, through the exertion of reason, the overthrow of arbitrary power is not very distant' (5.87 & n.). Here, then, is the idea that intellectual progress is, through public opinion, the predominant cause of social improvement, but with the recognition that other things further this development. How wars do so Wollstonecraft learnt from Hume's account of the reign of Edward III. As for commerce, she presented in *The female reader* (1789) a passage which mentions the advantages arising from it and contributing to the enlargement of human culture, and which she took from William Robertson's 'View of the Progress of Society in Europe from the Subversion of the Roman Empire, to the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century'.<sup>23</sup> Commerce, in Robertson's opinion, tends to promote peace and produce a new and beneficent spirit in society.<sup>24</sup> But Rousseau included commercial rivalry in his

<sup>23</sup> *The works of William Robertson, D.D.*, 8 vols. (London 1827), 3.68-69; Wollstonecraft, 4.110-11.

<sup>24</sup> *Works of Robertson*, 3. 72-77.

depiction of the evils of civilization,<sup>25</sup> and Wollstonecraft was soon to change her mind about the alleged beneficence of commerce.

Meanwhile, she deplors some of the evils of contemporary society at the same time as affirming that any existing evil must be part of God's design. This proposition refers to her system of individual salvation; but because she cannot ignore the dynamics of social progress in her discussion of the rational education of individuals, noting that some evils in the past have led indirectly to social improvement while maintaining her belief in divine omnipotence and foreknowledge, her limited theodicy tends towards the general one which she rejected. This tendency is betrayed by her concession to Pope's optimistic principle, which is inconsistent with her struggle as a reformer against the evils of oppression and prejudice.

## II

Wollstonecraft's subsequent writings on social progress do not have the religious dimension of her two *Vindications*, as if she did not need to call on her faith in works that were descriptive rather than prescriptive. Yet she probably acquired her belief in the possibilities of human improvement from three Millennialists, Price, Priestley and Macaulay. Price's view on progress to the Millennium was clear in a discourse delivered in 1787 and published as *The evidence for a future period of improvement in the state of mankind*.<sup>26</sup> Priestley, like Price, found support for this great hope in Scripture as well as in history,<sup>27</sup> and Catharine

<sup>25</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondemens de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, note ix, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3 (Pléiade, 1964), 202-208.

<sup>26</sup> Carl B Cone, *Torchbearer of freedom: The influence of Richard Price on eighteenth century thought* (Lexington, 1952), 166-67.

<sup>27</sup> Leslie, 'Thought of Joseph Priestley', 85-87; Hoecker, *Joseph Priestley*, 156-68; Fruchtman, *Apocalyptic politics*, passim.

Macaulay had a similar belief in the possibility of gradual improvement leading to human perfection on earth, which would precede Christ's second coming.<sup>28</sup> Wollstonecraft formed a theory of social progress which was devoid of Biblical prophecies. Since she vindicated God's justice by a belief in the immortality of the soul, and not by the Millennium as the far goal of time, she could describe social progress without invoking divine providence and yet without detriment to her conception of natural rights.

However, soon after she had settled in Paris to witness the continuation of the French Revolution, she was assailed by a mood of dejection. She wrote in a letter intended for publication: 'if the aristocracy of birth is levelled with the ground, only to make room for that of riches, I am afraid that the morals of the people will not be much improved by the change, or the government rendered less venal' (6.444). Moira Ferguson and Janet Todd say that in the passage which follows Wollstonecraft 'sadly renounced her rationalist faith in human progress and the revolutionary belief in the efficacy of sudden political and social change she had inherited from Price ... In the depth of her disappointment she cried that the theory of perfectibility had failed and that vice and evil were in reality the "grand mobile of action".'<sup>29</sup> These critics do not notice how qualified Wollstonecraft's statement is; she says that the perspective of the golden age 'almost' eludes her sight, that she is losing 'in part' her theory of a more perfect state, that she 'begin[s] to fear' that vice or evil is the grand mobile of action, and later that she 'cannot yet give up the hope, that a fairer day is dawning on Europe' (6.444-45). In a shrewd analysis Harriet Devine Jump

<sup>28</sup> Withey, 'Catharine Macaulay and the uses of history', 61-63, 81.

<sup>29</sup> Moira Ferguson and Janet Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft* (Boston, 1984), 77.

acknowledges Wollstonecraft's declaration of hope but shows how it is made in the face of all the evidence to the contrary.<sup>30</sup>

Ferguson and Todd seem to refer only to Price's famous *Discourse on the love of our country*, in which he welcomed the French Revolution,<sup>31</sup> not to previous works, in which his support was for a gradual process of improvement. According to Jack Fruchtman, Price held that political change should never be so drastic as to surpass intellectual and moral development but should be commensurate with it.<sup>32</sup> The dependence of progress upon education was stressed by Price in *The evidence for a future period of improvement*, where he also said that he knew no Dissenters who wanted to change 'our mixed form of government' into a democracy.<sup>33</sup> That he was a political reformer, who understood the English Revolution of 1688 as a restoration of constitutional rights, rather than a revolutionary in the modern sense,<sup>34</sup> is shown by the fact that he had no wish to abolish the monarchy or the House of Lords, but wanted to check the power of the executive by a reformation of the House of Commons.<sup>35</sup>

The dejection in Wollstonecraft's 'Letter on the Present Character of the French Nation' is certainly in contrast with the enthusiasm with which she had written in reply to Burke of 'the glorious *chance*' of attaining virtue and happiness given to mankind by the French Revolution (5.48), but though the chance was not taken at once she did not give up her hope for the future. When war made a series of letters impracticable, she proceeded to deal in

<sup>30</sup> Harriet Devine Jump, *Mary Wollstonecraft: Writer* (Hemel Hempstead, 1994), 93-96.

<sup>31</sup> See Stephen Prickett, *England and the French Revolution* (Basingstoke, 1989), 31-42.

<sup>32</sup> Fruchtman, *Apocalyptic politics*, 83-85.

<sup>33</sup> Cone, *Torchbearer of freedom*, 168.

<sup>34</sup> Prickett, *England and the French Revolution*, 2, 4-5, 39.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas, *The honest mind*, 200, 305-306.

a book with the problems presented by sudden political change and by the power of commercial interests. Her solution of the former problem was to advocate gradualism even after the initial overthrow of despotism. For the latter, she must have known of Price's opposition to the spread of luxury, which caused him (in spite of his belief in the importance of trade with the American colonies as 'one of the main springs of our opulence and splendour') to propose limitations on foreign trade and to advocate a simple way of life based on agriculture.<sup>36</sup> But for her the enemy became not so much luxury as the spirit of commerce itself. When she complains of 'the narrow principle of commerce' (6.445), she seems to have meditated on a remark of Samuel Johnson's: 'there is nothing in trade connected with an enlarged mind.'<sup>37</sup> This is the ancient ground for despising commerce; but with the increasing power of commercial interests Wollstonecraft's theory of progress is called into question. It does not seem consistent to despise the spirit of commerce in its advanced stage while maintaining a theory of progress in contemporary Europe. Gary Kelly assumes that Wollstonecraft found the solution to this problem in the belief that the professional middle class, which contained the revolutionary élite, could be independent of the commercial bourgeoisie.<sup>38</sup> She may well have realized, however, that an intellectual independence

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas, *The honest mind*, 135-37, 267-68, referring to Price's *Observations on reversionary payments*, 3rd edn. (1773), 281-380, and to his *Observations on the importance of the American Revolution* (1784); Richard Price, *Observations on the nature of civil liberty, the principles of government, and the justice and policy of the war with America*, 8th edn. (London, 1778; rpt. in *Two tracts on civil liberty, the war with America, the debts and finances of the kingdom* [New York, 1972]), 72-73.

<sup>37</sup> Boswell's *Journal of a tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D., 1773*, ed. Frederick A Pottle and Charles H Bennett (London, 1963), 319-20.

<sup>38</sup> Gary Kelly, *Revolutionary feminism: the mind and career of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Basingstoke, 1992), 180, 184-85.

does not entail an economic one, and she was certainly afraid of the influence of an aristocracy of riches, which could pervade a new social order even if resisted by a number of alienated intellectuals.

In *An historical and moral view of the origin and progress of the French Revolution* (1794) Wollstonecraft maintains that there are further stages of progress beyond that reached at the end of the eighteenth century. When the Constituent Assembly, after resolving to limit the King of France to a suspensive veto, decided not to have a second chamber, she, having learnt from Price the value of a mixed form of government, deplored this plan as one for which the French in the degenerate state were not ready, saying that it was 'proper only for a people in the highest stage of civilization' (6.162). She urged that the revolutions of states ought to be gradual (6.166). To recover from the depraving influences of the old régime, the French people should be led through stages of moral improvement by means of a gradual alteration of their laws and institutions, until they were ready for popular sovereignty. As it was, the members of the Assembly did not act with 'the wisdom of experience', but at the nation's sudden liberation from despotism they endeavoured to establish the sovereignty of the people, and this, says Wollstonecraft, 'the perfection of the science of government, only to be attained when a nation is truly enlightened, consisted in making them tyrants' (6.193, 213).

Jump has argued that Wollstonecraft's revulsion at the atrocities of the French Revolution seems irreconcilable with her theory of progress, despite her recognition of the depraving influence of the old régime and of the mistakes that could be attributed to the precipitous speed with which the revolution was carried out.<sup>39</sup> Jump's argument is persuasive but unduly restricted, for she dwells on Wollstonecraft's reaction to the acts of atrocity without considering the larger challenge to her theory of progress

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<sup>39</sup> Jump, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, 98-108.

that was presented by the development of commercial interests. Gradualism is not only advocated by Wollstonecraft as a method of procedure, but it is also related to her conception of the stages of social progress. The function of commercial development in these social dynamics is, in her view, to be both an impetus at an early stage and an obstacle at a later one.

The description in the last chapter of the 'destructive influence of commerce' is set in the context of an account of the causes of the degradation of the French under the old régime, but, joining issue as it does with Adam Smith, it clearly has implications beyond that context and raises the question asked in the 'Letter on the Present Character of the French Nation', what moral improvement can be expected when a plutocracy replaces an hereditary nobility. An 'aristocracy of wealth', says Wollstonecraft, 'degrades mankind, by making them only exchange savageness for tame servility, instead of acquiring the urbanity of improved reason'. The division of labour 'renders the mind entirely inactive'; village craftsmen are manifestly both more intelligent than, and morally superior to, journeymen in great towns, where men are 'turned into machines' and 'every noble principle of nature is eradicated' by the submission to monotonous occupations (6.233-24). The reader is left with no indication how the author expects this destructive influence to be overcome, and consequently how those further stages of progress that lead to popular sovereignty can be reached.

In a way that foreshadows the central preoccupation of her next book, Wollstonecraft here, in recoiling from the evils of civilization, comes close to Rousseau when she favourably contrasts savages with 'the degenerate slaves of tyrants', stressing the courage and magnanimity of the former and the littleness of mind of those who obtain honours by intrigue (6.232). On the last pages she writes: 'Let us examine the catalogue of the vices of men in a savage state, and contrast them with those of men civilized; we shall find that a barbarian, considered as a moral being, is an angel, compared with the refined villain of artificial life. Let us

investigate the causes which have produced this degeneracy, and we shall discover that they are those unjust plans of government, which have been formed by peculiar circumstances in every part of the globe.' (6.235) This is again to trace the evils of civilization up to 'the pestiferous purple', which she thinks Rousseau failed to do; but when her description of the influence of commerce weakens the hope that she offers for future improvement, her qualified praise of the savage state may make as sharp a contrast with the conditions prevailing under a plutocracy as with those under a monarchy or hereditary aristocracy.

In criticizing Adam Smith, Wollstonecraft seems unaware how far he was in agreement with her about the dehumanizing effect of the division of labour. She quotes from the first chapter of *The wealth of nations*, without regard to Book V, chapter i, where he made exactly her point about the mental torpor induced by monotonous occupations, in contrast with the vigour and resourcefulness of every man in so-called barbarous societies.<sup>40</sup> This point occurs also in the first Book of Lord Kames's *Sketches of the history of man*, to which Wollstonecraft was directed by an essay that she had to review.<sup>41</sup>

Though acknowledging the role of commerce in weakening the feudal structure and providing a basis for individual independence, Wollstonecraft was in some degree inclined towards primitivism by

<sup>40</sup> Adam Smith, *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*, ed. R H Campbell, A S Skinner and W B Todd, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1976), I.i.7, V.i.f.50-51.

<sup>41</sup> To Samuel Stanhope Smith's *Essay on the causes of the variety of complexion and figure in the human species* were added strictures on Kames's first sketch (Wollstonecraft, 7.50). The remark that a monotonous occupation makes a person 'dull and stupid, like a beast of burden' occurs in Book I, sketch v of [Henry Home, Lord Kames], *Sketches of the history of man*. 2 vols. (Edinburgh, London, 1774), I.104-105.

her hostility to the effects of further commercial development. Similarly, Lois Whitney found in the thought of both Price and Kames a primitivistic strain, which was connected with their abhorrence of the evils of luxury.<sup>42</sup> Both men may have been influenced by John Brown's notable *Estimate of the manners and principles of the times*, in which it is said that in its first and middle stages commerce is beneficial to society, but that in its third and highest stage it causes among the ruling classes 'a vain, luxurious, and selfish effeminacy' and a general loss of moral principles, which weaken the national capacity for defence and increase national disunion.<sup>43</sup> Kames wrote: 'Successful commerce is not more advantageous by the wealth and power it immediately bestows, than it is hurtful ultimately by introducing luxury and voluptuousness, which eradicate patriotism'; and 'man by constant prosperity and peace degenerates into a mean, impotent and selfish animal; more despicable, if less odious, than an American savage.'<sup>44</sup>

Neither Brown nor Kames considered national degeneration to be inevitable, for they, like Price, sought ways of resisting it, but the cyclical theory of history was not distant from their speculations. 'Thus nations go round in a circle, from weakness to strength, and from strength to weakness', wrote Kames. Wollstonecraft rejected this theory; nor did she share Kames's opinion that war is necessary as a school for manly virtues.<sup>45</sup> On the contrary, she defended the luxury introduced with the arts and

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<sup>42</sup> Lois Whitney, *Primitivism and the idea of progress in English popular literature of the eighteenth Century* (New York, 1973), 49-50, 97-99, 223, 232, 277-79.

<sup>43</sup> (John Brown), *An estimate of the manners and principles of the times* (Dublin, 1757), 93, 96-97, 109.

<sup>44</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, 1, 446, 430; William C Lehmann, *Henry Home, Lord Kames, and the Scottish Enlightenment: A study in national character and in the history of ideas* (The Hague, 1971), 191-93.

<sup>45</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, 1.452, 438; Wollstonecraft, 6.22, 108-11.

sciences, on the ground that the cultivation of these alone can turn the sword into a ploughshare (6.23). But she seems to have been divided in the inferences that she drew from her observation of contemporary life. The hope that she attached to the American and French Revolutions was countered by a perception of the harmful tendencies of commercial development, so that her discussion showed the need for a new theory of society, by which policies might be found to resist those tendencies without weakening the impetus of social progress.

### III

In *Letters written during a short residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796) Wollstonecraft's observations of social life in Scandinavia are linked to her theory of progress, which is briefly set out in the appendix, where she expresses her 'conviction of the increasing knowledge and happiness of the kingdoms' that she passed through (6.346). The work, however, is deeply dyed with her personal melancholy. The cause of this is not mentioned in the text, but it is due to her fear of betrayal by Imlay, who sent her to Scandinavia as his representative on a case of commercial fraud. Her personal predicament gave her insight, or at least coloured her view of life in Scandinavia.

These opposite tendencies, the progressive outlook of a social radical and the despondency of a romantic wanderer, create a tension which is felt everywhere in the book. On the one hand, she deplores the brutal condition of backward people and looks forward to a development of the arts and sciences, which will bring about an improvement in taste and morality. On the other hand, she admires the simplicity of peasants and inveighs against the spirit of commerce, which perverts the feelings and narrows the mind. With a radical's hostility to the remnants of feudalism, she approves of the free spirit of self-interest, since this leads to the industrial development that requires intellectual advancement. But she fears the accumulation of national wealth, which in England, she says,

'only increases the cares of the poor, and hardens the hearts of the rich' (6.337). When she declares that an adoration of property is the root of all evil, she admits that in America it renders the people enterprising and she attributes the avarice of the Danes to a system of vassalage which is gradually ceasing (6.325). A crucial statement at the end of letter 14 sums up this problem in her social thought: 'England and America owe their liberty to commerce, which created a new species of power to undermine the feudal system. But let them beware of the consequence; the tyranny of wealth is still more galling and debasing than that of rank.' (6.309)

She reflects in the first letter that people so 'near the brute creation' as the Swedish peasants lack the imagination necessary for intellectual development; yet she finds among them 'much of the simplicity of the golden age' (6.245, 246). In Norway she finds liberty, equality and independence of spirit, due to the fact that most of the land is divided into small farms, which belong to their cultivators (6.272-73). Recognizing that intellectual progress depends upon social conditions, she says that knowledge is not generally diffused until it is necessary to the livelihood of a large part of the community (6.276). She also sees how at one stage of development the way is prepared for progress to the next. Noblemen, who alone can travel overseas, bring back knowledge of agricultural and horticultural improvements, which is gradually passed on to their tenants; in this way a feudal tenure is advantageous to the people, who through learning new methods 'are stimulated to think for themselves' (6.286).

Wollstonecraft seems aware of the assumption of Scottish conjectural history, that societies pass through similar stages of economic development.<sup>46</sup> She probably found this in Kames's

<sup>46</sup> J W Burrow, *Evolution and society: a study in Victorian social theory* (Cambridge, 1966), 10-14; Lehmann, *Lord Kames*, 178-84; Ian Simpson Ross, *Lord Kames and the Scotland of his day* (Oxford, 1972), 203-21;

account of progress from the primitive state of hunting and fishing, through the pastoral state, to agriculture.<sup>47</sup> But since she does not appear to have read *The Wealth of the Nations* through to the end, it is uncertain whether she knew of Smith's discussion, in Book III, of the natural progress of capital investment, first in agriculture, then in manufactures, and finally in foreign commerce - an order of things which had been inverted in Europe.<sup>48</sup> This would have more relevance to Wollstonecraft's observation of development in Scandinavia, for if the commercial stage naturally follows the agricultural, the social basis for further moral improvement is in her view a treacherous one.

Her contempt for commerce appears in letter 13. She is sarcastic about 'the noble science of bargain-making' and describes commercial speculation as gambling, 'I might have said fraud' (6.302, 304). She is convinced, however, that association with scientists and artists 'not only diffuses taste, but gives that freedom to the understanding, without which I have seldom met with much benevolence of character, on a large scale.'<sup>49</sup> This raises the question at which stage of society the arts and sciences will be best promoted. She says bluntly that these have not been encouraged by the spirit of commerce (6.330), referring to Denmark, of which Norway was a dependency. But in Christiania she expresses her hostility to the grand bailiffs, noblemen from Copenhagen, 'political monsters' who show 'the cloven foot of despotism' (6.305). In neither aristocratic nor commercial systems, then, in neither rank

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Andrew S Skinner, *A system of social science: papers relating to Adam Smith* (Oxford, 1979), 68-103.

<sup>47</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, Book I, sketch ii.

<sup>48</sup> Smith, *The wealth of nations*, III.i.2-9.

<sup>49</sup> 6.302. This sentence seems to be misprinted: 'I am not more than ever convinced ...' for 'not' read 'now'. See Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Short residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*, and William Godwin, *Memoirs of the author of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Richard Holmes (Harmondsworth, 1987), 141.

nor wealth, does she see the source of intellectual and moral advancement.

It is not surprising that, having reached this impasse, she should listen attentively to an account of the simplicity of the farmers north of Christiania: 'The description I received of them carried me back to the fables of the golden age: independence and virtue; affluence without vice; cultivation of mind, without depravity of heart' (6.308). She highly esteems the way of life of independent farmers, and a question that her book poses is how in them the cultivation of the mind can be preserved and developed. Self-interest must be allowed to sharpen their faculties, without producing the cunning of the commercial speculator. Industry must be developed to promote the diffusion of science, without the pursuit of wealth leading to a mean commercial spirit.

Letters 23 and 24 consist mainly of a tirade against commerce, chiefly as its influence is observed in Hamburg. The progressive view taken in the appendix depends on the hope that the Scandinavian kingdoms will be able to avoid the fate of Hamburg, which may be possible through the preservation of agriculture as a way of life. But on a theoretical level Wollstonecraft has not solved the problem that her view of commerce raises in relation to her theory of progress. This is similar to her unsuccessful attempt to produce a convincing theodicy, since in both cases theoretical beliefs come into conflict with a lively sense of existing evils.

These failures are linked in so far as it is true that, in spite of her rejection of a providential theory of history, Wollstonecraft's view of the divine plane had an historical dimension. If in barbarous ages oppressive social systems inhibited the rational education of individuals, the same may be said of the monotonous occupations to which many are condemned in advanced industrial and commercial societies, in spite of the understanding of the principles of liberty and equality in enlightened circles. Wollstonecraft's hatred of commercialism in its highest stage of development milita-

ted against her belief that life on earth is a preparation for heaven. Perhaps she feared that social progress had reached a stage at which it would not generally promote individual development, and that the suffering and degradation which she saw were not justified when they could not be overcome by the power of the rational soul.

Her leap into the Thames in October 1795 was a meditated act of despair. There is a painful irony in the fact that this enlightened spirit tried to destroy herself when betrayed by a commercial speculator. She had lost the faith that could have prevented her from making the attempt.

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RICHARD ASHCRAFT ON LOCKE'S  
TWO TREATISES

D O Thomas

I

In his *Revolutionary politics and Locke's Two treatises of Government*<sup>1</sup> Richard Ashcraft undertook a detailed account of John Locke's involvement in practical politics before the publication of *Two treatises*, an exhaustive account of the ideas and beliefs that influenced the writing of the work, and an analysis of the debt owed to previous thinkers. In these enterprises he has been highly successful. Ashcraft's book is an excellent study of the work of a leading philosopher in its political and intellectual context and as such, by virtue of the detail in which Locke's practical concerns are investigated and the scope and breadth of his own acquaintance with contemporary literature, it is a work that no student of Locke can afford to ignore.

The fruit of Ashcraft's researches has profoundly altered our conception of Locke and his involvement in the political struggles of his day. The picture of him in Holland quietly contemplating the eternal verities, far removed from the noise of battle, prevented, as Macaulay believed, by his temperament from indulging in the 'violence of a partisan'<sup>2</sup>, an image already badly dented by Maurice Cranston,<sup>3</sup> is conclusively destroyed. Ashcraft shows Locke to

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<sup>1</sup> Princeton, 1986. References to *Two treatises* are to Peter Laslett's revised 1988 edition. References to the *First treatise* are indicated by FT, references to the *Second treatise* by ST; in both cases references are to the relevant section. The place where the work was published is given if it is other than London.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The history of England from the accession of James II* (1856), I, 541.

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Cranston, 'The politics of a philosopher', *The Listener*, Jan 5, 1961, p.18, cited by Ashcraft, 86n.

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have been closely involved and wholeheartedly committed to Shaftesbury's cause, determined to use all means, including armed uprisings if necessary, to prevent the Duke of York, as James II then was, from coming to the throne, and, when that failed, to do what was required to remove him. It was prudence and the fear that he might die the death of a subversive and a rebel, and not simply a yearning for philosophical detachment, that prompted Locke's speedy retirement to Holland. Had he stayed in England, it is highly unlikely that he would have lived to see the publication of *Two treatises*.

In other respects too, Ashcraft has changed our perceptions of Locke: although *Two treatises* will always be studied as the classic defence of the Glorious Revolution and the political beliefs that inspired it, and although it will be studied as the work which has inspired all the succeeding generations who have believed that political authority arises from the people, that government exists to serve their interests, and that the exercise of political power has to be prevented from degenerating into arbitrariness, Ashcraft's study shows that it was very much a tract for the times, heavily influenced in the detail of its prescriptions by the aims and purposes of the group that gathered around Shaftesbury. Of course, thanks to the researches of Peter Laslett, it has been established that the bulk of *Two treatises* was written nine or ten years before it was published, largely inspired by the need to justify those who sought to exclude the Duke of York from the throne.<sup>4</sup> Ashcraft completes the picture with an overwhelmingly comprehensive attention to detail.

To succeed in his opposition to the Stuarts, Locke had to do two things: first, he had to destroy their claim to rule by Divine Right and their pretensions to absolute power; secondly, he had to provide an alternative account of the nature and foundation of

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<sup>4</sup> Laslett (1988), 45ff.

authority that would justify the people obstructing the intentions of the Stuarts, by recourse to armed resistance if necessary. Taking the body of Locke's thought as a whole, with careful attention to its development through the whole of his career, Ashcraft shows that Locke was much more radical in his political thinking than has previously been supposed, and, in particular, much nearer to the democratic and egalitarian ideas of the Levellers.

The question naturally arises as to what extent Ashcraft has been successful in demonstrating that Locke was a radical and a revolutionary, and to what extent the *Two treatises* can be regarded as a text which demonstrates and justifies Locke's views. It is important to recognize that it may well be the case that Locke held extremely radical views without it also being true that the *Two treatises* established and supported anything so radical and revolutionary as Locke himself, either in private or in Shaftesbury's coterie, might have held. It cannot be assumed that Locke's reforming programme was fully embodied in *Two treatises*. That there might well be a gulf between what Locke himself thought and what he was prepared to defend in public at the time *Two treatises* was published, can be seen if we bear in mind the primary purpose of writing, and, at a later date, publishing, the work. It was not primarily an academic work setting out in elaborate detail both a defence of resistance to established authority and a philosophical account of the origin and nature of authority. Although it contains a great deal of material that is highly relevant to these issues, it was above all a tract for the times, designed to promote a cause and to win over to it as wide a constituency as possible. To do this effectively, it had to concentrate on those matters that the great majority of the constituency were interested in and which they were prepared to support, namely, preventing the destruction of the Protestant establishment, checking and reversing the slide towards arbitrary rule, and defending the powers and privileges of Parliament. In order to maximize support Locke had to avoid treating in detail the issues that were likely to divide those who supported the principal aims of the radicals, and he had to avoid

giving answers to questions that would alienate potential supporters. For this reason several important issues had to remain open, leaving the reader with the hope that when the time came for decisive action they would be dealt with in accordance with his wishes.

We have then to distinguish questions concerning the extent of Locke's own radicalism from those concerning the nature and degree of radicalism to be found within *Two treatises*. It would be dangerous to assume that *Two treatises* was intended to appeal to all readers in the same way. Those who were privy to the discussions in Shaftesbury's circle might well have known how the questions that were left open in the tract were to be closed, so to speak, after the Revolution, and it is conceivable too that certain expressions were to be understood as coded messages reminding those in the know what were the real intentions of the reformers. It is quite possible that the text conveyed to the privileged reader quite different messages from those it presented to the general public. So, in addition to bearing in mind the possibility that *Two treatises* did not embody explicitly the whole of Locke's thought, we also need to bear in mind that the messages it conveyed to some readers were more radical than those it conveyed to others

One problem area concerns Locke's attribution of political authority to the people. According to *Two treatises* it is clear that in some way or other political authority sprang originally from the people, that the ruler or rulers were entrusted with the powers of government on a conditional basis, that their authority depended upon governing in accordance with the articles of the trust invested in them, and that if the executive or the legislative breached that trust they could be removed, by force if necessary, and authority would revert once again to the people who would then have the right to determine afresh the conditions upon which they wished to be governed. Thus far Locke's account is clear; difficulties arise, however, when we ask who are to count as the people and how are they conceived to exercise their right to choose their governors. Is

it at all credible that Locke believed that political power should be exercised by every adult male member of the population? If power is not to be widely shared in this way who precisely are to be given the privilege? Again, if the people are to exercise power, through what institutions are they to exercise it? This is an important question when we ask who is to exercise power when those who have forfeited their trust cease to have the right to exercise it. Is democracy for Locke just a theoretical but virtually impracticable option, or did he really believe that power could and should be exercised in some form or other by the bulk of the population? What did Locke himself believe, and how much of that did he set out in *Two treatises*?

Equally important problems arise concerning Locke's treatment of property. He went to a great deal of trouble in sketching out the origin and the development of property rights, and almost all known political persuasions can find inspiration or consolation in some facet or other of his account. Locke is emphatic that the function of government is to protect property and prevent any violation of the owner's rights, and he is equally insistent that the government should not invade them, but although he gives an elaborate account of how the possession of property is morally justifiable, it is far from clear, at least according to *Two treatises*, that it is only ownership that is morally acceptable that is to be protected. In that work he seems to take it for granted that it is the property sanctioned by the law of the land that is to be defended by the state. It is quite understandable that Locke did not wish to alienate those who held great possessions by raising doubts about the moral propriety of their holdings. It would hardly help his cause if instead of frightening the landowners that James might arbitrarily invade their possessions, he alarmed them with the prospect that after the Revolution those whose properties could not be morally justified would find their possessions sequestered. If, on the other hand, for all practical purposes Locke was seen to have a prescriptivist justification of property and if everyone was to be left in undisturbed possession of all he held, then whatever he privately

thought, or whatever agreements were come to in Shaftesbury's circle, the radical thrust of *Two treatises* was thereby much diminished.

Before dealing with these problems in greater detail, it is necessary to say something about a general difficulty that arises in the conduct of projects such as Ashcraft's. The whole idea of studying a work in its political and intellectual context with the intention of showing how the full meaning and significance of the text can only be arrived at by relating the text to the thought and practice of the time, throws into high relief problems associated with the use of language. How best are we to describe what we find? What terms are we to use in identifying Locke's thought? If we use terms that were not in use in Locke's day we run into the dangers of anachronism, of importing into the seventeenth century words or phrases that belong to a later age, and in doing so run into the further danger of imputing to that age ideas and concepts that were foreign to it. For example, if we use the twin terms right and left to identify political allegiances, terms that did not become current until the French Revolution, we run the risk of identifying polarities in Locke's thought that are not to be found in the seventeenth century. This is not to say that a concept is inapplicable to the thought of an age whose writers did not use the relevant term, for it may well be that later thinkers can detect a pattern of thinking that Locke's contemporaries were not aware of, but the danger still exists that we bring with the use of a term associations that are only relevant to a later age. Similar considerations apply to the use of the term ideology which it is now extremely difficult to divest of the contempt that Napoleon poured on the ideologues and the associations with 'false consciousness' that it acquired at a later date.<sup>5</sup> Again, those who lived through the Second World War associate with the term 'propaganda' ideas and value judgements that hardly have a place in Stuart England. The

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<sup>5</sup> Ashcraft, 181-227.

difficulties that I have referred to would not necessarily be removed by confining ourselves to terms that were current in Locke's day, because many of them have undergone shifts in their meaning, some of them substantial, some slight. Where the shift is considerable the danger of misunderstanding may not be great: it is where the shift is relatively slight and difficult to detect that the danger may be much greater. Take, for example, the use of the term 'people'. It is obvious that Locke does not use the term in the way that it would be used in the twentieth century, but, as I shall try to demonstrate, it is difficult to know precisely whom Locke refers to when he uses the term and whether he uses it to refer to the same persons on every occasion. The term 'property' was also used by Locke in a way that we should today find unfamiliar. As Laslett has pointed out, except in those cases where material possessions, especially in land, were being referred to, the term was used much more extensively to refer to 'Lives, Liberties and Estates'.<sup>6</sup>

Special attention needs to be given to the two main terms in Ashcraft's armoury: revolution and radical, because they are frequently used in the delineation of Locke's thought and in his account of the aims and purposes of *Two treatises*.<sup>7</sup> In the seventeenth century revolution had quite a different meaning from that which it has today. It comes as something of a surprise to learn that the Restoration of 1660 was thought of as a revolution. The reason for our being surprised is that since the end of the seventeenth century a revolution has come to be thought of as a series of political events in which new ground is broken. To constitute a revolution the changes must be large-scale, speedily brought about, and effecting fundamental changes in the structure of government and indeed of society. A revolution must bring into being something new, something that did not exist before. In modern times it is difficult to think of a revolution as an exercise in

<sup>6</sup> Laslett, 102; and *ST* 87 and 123 and 173.

<sup>7</sup> Ashcraft, Chs. VII and XI.

conservation or as a return to former glories, imagined or real. In the seventeenth century things were rather different. The element of novelty (in the serious sense of the term) that is essential to the ideas of progress and evolutionary change had no very firm hold on the seventeenth century mind; on the contrary, the idea of going back in time to former glories is an idea that had immense widespread and popular appeal. It was fortified by the concept of a Golden Age shrouded in the mists of antiquity, by the myth of the Garden of Eden, but, above all, by a desire to re-embodiment in social institutions the simple life of godliness and moral purity celebrated in the New Testament and practised by the early Christians. It was a mode of thinking that dominated the Protestant mind.

When Locke set out to justify the exclusion of the Duke of York from the throne or when he justified his removal from it, he did not proceed by proclaiming the need to introduce new elements into the structures of society and government. On the contrary, he claimed that resistance to the Stuarts was necessary to prevent the introduction of new practices that would disrupt established institutions. He sought to prevent the subversion of the Protestant religion, he sought to prevent the destruction of Parliament and the introduction of absolute, arbitrary government. And he justified these steps wholly in terms of the need to defend what had been established. Charles II and James II had offended by their attempts to re-introduce the Catholic religion and to establish absolute, arbitrary rule. Because they offended in this way, because they attempted to dispense with traditions they had to be challenged and defeated. More positively, resistance on the part of those who sought to defend the privileges of Parliament was justified either by the need to re-establish the old constitutional framework which the Stuarts had disrupted, or by an appeal to the tradition of natural law and natural rights which established institutions were held to embody. Of course it can be argued that in practice this is not an accurate or a complete description of what the radicals were doing. It can be argued that the radicals were intent upon breaking fresh constitutional ground and that under the guise of restoring or

conserving the old they were seeking to introduce new features into the constitution. Whether or not the radicals were innovative, it can hardly be denied, I suggest, that they presented their aims in terms either of restoration or of conservation.

That Locke thought that revolutionary change had been and was still seen by his contemporaries as a return to established traditions can be seen in the following passage, where after discussing the reluctance of people to initiate change, even where it is required to remove corruption and remedy defects, he writes:

This slowness and aversion in the People to quit their old Constitutions, has, in the many Revolutions which have been seen in this Kingdom, in this and former Ages, still kept us to, or, after some interval of fruitless attempts, still brought us back again to our old Legislative of King, Lords and Commons: And whatever provocations have made the Crown to be taken from some of our Princes Heads, they never carried the People so far, as to place it in another Line.<sup>8</sup>

To argue that Locke was not a revolutionary in the sense that is given to the term at the end of the twentieth century does not however argue that he was not one in a sense that was current in his own day. Ashcraft's contention that Locke was a revolutionary might still stand, albeit in a way that we might now consider eccentric. To hold this, however, has very important implications for the way in which those questions which Locke leaves open are to be understood. If Locke presents himself as a conservator/restorer, it must be assumed that those questions that he has left open, at least as far as *Two treatises* is concerned, are to be treated in a conservative way.

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<sup>8</sup> ST 223.

It will immediately be seen that the question whether the revolution was to be a restoration, and not an opportunity for developing original experiments in the art of government, has an important bearing upon Locke's treatment of property rights. If Locke did hold an ethics of property holding that was original, but did not also specify the ways in which those whose property holdings could not be morally justified were to surrender their holdings, the very silence on this point, the openness of his general discussion of the subject, combined with the feeling throughout the whole work that the resistance to the Stuarts was inspired by the need to prevent the incursion upon property rights by arbitrary power, enhance the conviction that the radicals were not concerned to alter positive property rights. If this contention holds good then the notion of the revolution being a restoration or a conservation confirms the contention that *Two treatises*, whatever Locke might have said in other contexts, was an attempt to justify political changes that would leave the social fabric that depended upon continuity in the distribution of property, undisturbed.

The term radical presents us with some interesting semantic points. According to *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, when used as a noun substantive in political discourse, the term is defined as 'an advocate of radical reform on democratic lines, and thus belongs to the extreme section of the Liberal Party', a usage originating in 1802. In *A dictionary of political thought* Roger Scruton defines a radical as 'one who wishes to take his political ideas to their roots, and to affirm in a thoroughgoing way the doctrines that are delivered by that exercise.' Scruton points out that it is a mistake to think that all radicals are of the 'left'; nonetheless, because the radical is not content with the 'status quo' and seeks a comprehensive reform, the notion of a radical conservatism 'is apt to seem oxymoronic'.<sup>9</sup> At this stage it is important to note, as Dr D A Rees has pointed out to me, that in

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<sup>9</sup> Roger Scruton, *A dictionary of political thought* (1983), 391.

many contexts in which the term is used being a radical involves pulling something up by the roots and comprehensively extracting it. Radicals love to eradicate, and in this stronger sense a radical conservatism seems even more oxymoronic, even if conservation requires the eradication of those cancers that threaten the health of the body politic. In applying this notion of what a radical is to Locke we are in danger of assuming that if he was a radical he was one in all he said and did. If by definition a radical is one who derives all his policies from one set of principles and applies them rigorously and comprehensively, and if, in addition, the uprooting of all that hinders the realization of the principles, then I wish to argue that there are good grounds for holding that Locke was not a radical. If, on the other hand, we allow that a thinker might be radical in some respects without being radical in all, then there is a case for holding that Locke was a radical in some respects, even in the stronger sense that involves eradication. There is a related danger of supposing that all political thinkers or activists can be placed on a continuum, like a spectrum, stretching from an extreme position on the left to an extreme position on the right according to the degree of their radicalism. But radicalism is not a phenomenon that can be ordered in this quasi-spatial way, for some persons may be more radical than others in some respects while being less radical than them in others. I shall try to show that Locke was a radical of this kind.

## II

In justifying the attitudes of Shaftesbury's radicals, particularly his beliefs that political authority proceeds from the people, and that the people were justified in resisting the abuse of power, Locke's major intellectual task was to refute the claim that the King ruled by Divine Right and that he was given absolute power. As all readers of Locke's *First treatise* will know, he attacked the version of this doctrine given in Filmer's *Patriarcha*. He attacked Filmer's belief that princes inherit directly from Adam, that Adam was given dominion over all the world and all things in it

by the Deity, and that the absolute authority that a King exercises over his subjects is the same as that which a parent exercises over his children. He argued as though Filmer had simply maintained that his thesis was historically true. But as W H Greenleaf has pointed out, Filmer's position is much more sophisticated than the one that Locke attacked so vehemently. Filmer held that the thesis could be taken to be either historically or quasi-historically true. If need be it could be understood as a piece of 'as if' philosophy.

It is true, all Kings be not the natural parents of their subjects, yet they all either are, or are to be reputed, as the next heirs of those progenitors who were at first the natural parents of the whole people, and in their right succeed to the exercise of supreme jurisdiction.<sup>10</sup>

Locke should have approved the method even if not the substance, of the stratagem, for he was not above deploying fictions of his own. The fiction of Divine Right is replaced by the fiction of the Social Compact. He cites examples of political societies being founded by men coming together and agreeing to constitute themselves a political society, but he realized perfectly well that the fact that some societies were created in this way does not establish that they all were, and although he finds it convenient and attractive to dress up normative positions as though they were established by historical agreements, he appreciates that the validity of his claim that political authority depends upon the consent of the governed cannot be made to depend upon agreements concluded in the distant past. The proposition that government depends upon the consent of the governed must be allowed to stand on its own ground. As Locke himself admits,

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<sup>10</sup> Sir Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha, and other political writings*, ed. Laslett (Oxford, 1949), 60-61; W H Greenleaf, *Order, empiricism and politics* (1964), 85-86.

[A]t best an Argument from what has been, to what should of right be, has no great force.<sup>11</sup>

As J G A Pocock has pointed out, Locke's political theory was founded not on historical precedent but on the notions of natural law and natural right. Indeed Locke would seem to have been unique among the political theorists in his generation in his disregard of the force of historical precedent.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, since it is implausible to hold that all who are bound by the laws of a society and are deemed to be members of it have actually given their express consent, Locke has to fall back on the weaker notion of tacit consent: that all who have enjoyed the protection of the laws are deemed to have given their consent.

Once political society is established and the members are held to be bound by the majority of their number, the institutions of government have to be created and peopled. At this stage, Locke employs the notion of a fiduciary trust. In the formulation of a constitution and the creation of legislative, executive and federative powers, those appointed to the relevant offices are entrusted with powers to govern for the good of the whole society. Theoretically, the people are free to choose from a wide variety of options, including a 'perfect Democracy',<sup>13</sup> but Locke thinks that the people, in their wisdom, would opt for a form of government in which the powers of government are distributed.<sup>14</sup> No one officer has absolute, arbitrary power and although Locke does not recommend the creation of separate, independent powers, he does most emphatically advise against the concentration of authority and power in one pair of hands,

<sup>11</sup> ST 103

<sup>12</sup> J G A Pocock, *The ancient constitution and the feudal law* (Cambridge, 1957), 236, 237.

<sup>13</sup> ST 132.

<sup>14</sup> ST 151.

Because it may be too great a temptation to humane frailty apt to grasp at Power, for the same Persons who have the Power of making the Laws, to have also in their hands the power to execute them.<sup>15</sup>

The crucial assumption for our purposes is that once the trust of government has been formulated and the various officers appointed to their places, the people have effectively transferred power to those to whom they have entrusted it, and the trustees retain it as long as they exercise their powers within the conditions and limits established by the trust (and within these limits for the period set for their continuance in office if such a time limit is set).

This *Legislative* is not only the *supream power* of the Common-wealth, but sacred and unalterable in the hands where the community have once place it.<sup>16</sup>

If any branch of government, legislative or executive, breaches the articles of its trust, then power returns to the people. As Sir Ernest Barker pointed out although Locke did employ the concept of a social compact, namely the idea that a political society is formed by the people coming together to form a society, he did not employ the concept of a contract of government, that is, the notion of an agreement between the people and their government.<sup>17</sup>

In place of the latter, he employed the concept of 'a fiduciary trust' which, at least as far as the government is concerned, is a weaker instrument, for whereas under a contract both parties to it have obligations towards and rights against each other, under a trust, the trustee has duties towards the beneficiary but no rights against him, and the beneficiary has rights against the trustee but no obligations towards him. This point, however, should not be

<sup>15</sup> ST 143.

<sup>16</sup> ST 134; cf. ST 157.

<sup>17</sup> *Social contract: essays by Locke, Hume and Rousseau* (1948), xxx.

allowed to obscure the truth that the citizen does have obligations - obligations that derive from the contract by which political society is created - to accept the constitution determined by the majority and to uphold the laws passed by the legislative. The notion of a trust of government accorded well with Locke's main purpose, that of guarding against the abuse of power by emphasizing that allegiance to a governor or set of governors is conditional upon their observing the limits set to the exercise of power. But although the ultimate political power of the people is maintained by the notion of government being a trust, in one important respect the power of the people is significantly reduced. Although under this arrangement the governors lose their authority if they breach the articles of their trust, the people only regain their powers if the trustees misbehave. In Locke's scheme the people do not exercise power continuously: at most in normal times they have duties of vigilance to see that their government does not kick over the traces.

Thus the *Community* may be said in this respect to be *always* the *Supream Power*, but not as considered under any Form of Government, because the Power of the People can never take place till the Government be dissolved.<sup>18</sup>

In effect, upon what seemed to be a democratic foundation, Locke built an oligarchic superstructure. The virtual abandonment of democracy for all day-to-day purposes can more easily be seen if we contrast his position with that of Milton in *The tenure of kings and magistrates*, where it is held that the people retain their creative powers and are free to alter the terms and personnel of government at their discretion.<sup>19</sup> Of course, Locke was radical in

<sup>18</sup> ST 149.

<sup>19</sup> *Milton's prose writings*, intro. K M Burton, (1958), 194, '[S]ince the king or magistrate holds his authority of the people, both originally and naturally for their good in the first place, and not his own, then may the people, as often as they shall judge it for the best, either choose him or

the sense that against Filmer he contended that a king who attempted to gain absolute power and dispense with the limits set to the exercise of power could be removed, but he was not a radical to the extent that he was willing to let the exercise of power remain with the people. If a king is removed and a new form of government is set up, we are left to suppose that power will once again be exercised on oligarchic lines.

But consideration of this question is obscured by another difficulty, namely, that of determining who for political purposes are to count as the people. It seems as though there are two options: (a) to suppose that all male adults who are members of the political society are content to delegate their political responsibilities to those who have the right by virtue of their possession of property to perform certain political functions, say, to choose representatives to Parliament; or (b) for political purposes the people are those who by virtue of their possession of property have the right to choose representatives to Parliament. Locke holds that when the articles of trust are broken, power reverts to the people, but who for this purpose are to count as the people? Are they the wider constituency (a) or the narrower one (b). Locke, I believe, leaves this question open in *Two treatises* and in doing so leaves it vague whether he embraces the wider, more democratic alternative or not. It is true that Locke often writes as though all men are entitled to the rights and privileges of freemen:

All that share in the same common Nature, Faculties and Powers, are in Nature equal and ought to partake in the same common Rights and Priviledges.<sup>20</sup>

The only apparent exceptions to this claim, at least as far as *Two treatises* is concerned, is the slave. A man may forfeit his freedom

reject him, retain him or depose him, though no tyrant, merely by the liberty and right of freeborn men to be governed as seems to them best.'

<sup>20</sup> FT 67; cf. ST 4.

if he violates the Law of Nature or if he become a captive in a just war.<sup>21</sup> Leaving aside these exceptions it would seem as though Locke was in favour of a full blown democratic distribution of rights, including political rights. What tells against this interpretation of his intentions is that if he really was in favour of granting political rights of this order, he would have made explicit his belief in the need to reform and extend the franchise. But this he failed to do, leaving the reader with the impression that his conception of the political nation was that current in his own time. The issue is an important one because it raises the further question whether or not in the determination of political rights in Locke's thought, status is prior to contract or consent. Sir Henry Maine alleged that 'the movement of the progressive societies has hitherto been a movement from *Status to Contract*'.<sup>22</sup> Although Locke is frequently thought of as one who maintains that political authority derives from contract, expressed or implied, if the exercise of political rights is restricted to those who possess (substantial) property, he has not entirely escaped from the grip of status. However, as far as the continued exercise of power is concerned, there is, I believe, no doubt that Locke is an oligarch. The political powers of the people, however defined, are invoked only at the creation of political society and the adoption of a constitution, or at times of crisis when those in office have misbehaved. Locke has no place for the notion that the people have a right to reform and reconstitute their political institutions from time to time as they see fit without having to wait until those in office are deemed to have forfeited their trust.

In order to get a clear understanding of the role of the people, what rights and duties they have, and to estimate to what extent the issue is left an open one, it is useful to examine Locke's discussion

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<sup>21</sup>ST 23, 178.

<sup>22</sup>Sir Henry Maine, *Ancient law*, 12th edn. (1888), 170; the first edition of this work was published in 1861.

of representation. We need to consider the following questions: (1) what is his conception of a representative; (2) who are those eligible to be representatives; (3) who is eligible to choose a representative?

A representative may be thought of in different ways: (a) as one who is a typical member of a class; (b) as one who is a perfect member of a class; (c) as one who works for and tries to further the interests of a class; (d) as one who is chosen by the members of a class to pursue their interests; and (e) as one who is chosen by the members of a class to follow their interests and receive instructions from them that he is bound to follow. In most of the instances in which the term occurs in *Two treatises* it is used in sense (d). Representatives are to be chosen by the people and are accountable to them, in the sense that if they do not conduct themselves, or rather, more precisely, if the body of the legislators do not conduct themselves in accordance with the articles of the trust, they may be dismissed by them. Although on occasion Locke uses the term deputy instead of the term representative<sup>23</sup> there is no indication that representative is to be used in sense (e); on the contrary, to suppose that the Member should receive instructions from his constituents runs counter to his conception of trusteeship. There is, however, one instance where the use of the term approximates to sense (c). In section 151 of the *Second treatise* he refers to the Supreme Executive as the 'Image, Phantom or Representative of the Common-wealth': in this sense a person can stand for, and act on behalf of, the body politic without being chosen by the body of the people to do so.

Locke takes considerable pains to safeguard the integrity of the electoral process and the independence of electors. Although the Prince, as head of the executive, has the power to initiate electoral reform in order to make the representation 'fair and

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<sup>23</sup>ST 142.

equal<sup>24</sup> (see, for example, the abolition of a rotten borough as in the case of Old Sarum,<sup>25</sup>) he must not, if he is to remain faithful to the articles of the trust, interfere in the process of election either by choosing or rejecting representatives or by altering the method of election.

Now the idea that representatives are to be chosen by the majority of the people and to be answerable to them has, when considered in the abstract, a fine democratic ring about it, but it cannot be conclusively shown to be what Locke intends until we know how questions (2) and (3) are to be answered: (2) who are eligible to be chosen; and (3) who does the choosing? As far as I can see, there are no answers in *Two treatises* to these specific questions. The issues are left open. To find what was in Locke's mind we have to go outside the covers of *Two treatises* either to discover what elements of established practice Locke would endorse or the reforms that were being urged in Shaftesbury's circle.

It would be difficult to present the state of the representation of the people in Parliament in the latter half of the seventeenth century in a short summary. According to Sir G N Clark,

The composition of the house of commons was the result of a long historical growth, and to a greater extent it was founded on conditions which had long passed away. Constituencies were unequal, electoral qualifications were various and almost all irrational, with the result that some parts of the country were unrepresented and, where there was representation, it was haphazard.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup>ST 158.

<sup>25</sup>ST 157.

<sup>26</sup>Sir G N Clark, *The later Stuarts, 1660-1714*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1965), 11-12.

There were, however, detectable patterns in the development of the electorate that tended in a more democratic direction. Throughout the seventeenth century the electorate was growing rapidly, thanks largely to inflation which made the property qualification in the counties - a 40 shillings freehold - steadily easier to come by, until by the reign of William III it had grown to approximately 200,000, one thirtieth of the entire population.<sup>27</sup> The radicals wanted to expand the electorate. In March 1679 a far-reaching bill for reform under the title *A bill for regulating abuses in elections of members* was introduced into the Commons; among other things it proposed alterations to the franchise. In the shires the vote was to be given to householders and to inhabitants having 200 pounds in fee, and in the boroughs it was to be invested in those inhabitants who had been resident for a year, were rated for poor relief, and paid scot and lot.<sup>28</sup> In view of the interest taken in radical circles in the extension of the franchise, it is noteworthy that Locke avoided specifying what he thought the qualification for voting should be. It is true, as I have mentioned above, that 'rotten boroughs' should be abolished and that constituencies should be restructured throughout the kingdom to ensure a 'fair and equal' representation, but he avoided committing himself on how far reform in a democratic direction should proceed. It is also noteworthy that he does not discuss what the qualification for a representative should be. His silence on these issues leaves the reader with the impression that Locke was content to leave things as they were.

### III

The determination of the political nation is dependent upon the determination of property rights, for if property owning is essential

<sup>27</sup>J H Plumb, *The growth of political stability in England, 1675-1725* (1967), 27-29.

<sup>28</sup>J R Jones, *The first Whigs, the politics of the Exclusion crisis, 1678-1683* (1961), 53.

to political rights, the question of how far Locke's radicalism extends towards democracy can only be decided by finding out who are entitled to own and retain property.

Time and time again in *Two treatises* Locke stresses that men enter into political society to protect their properties,<sup>29</sup> the rights to which are determined pre-politically. Unlike Hobbes, Locke denies that the state has the right to determine rights to property. He does also say, however, that the state has the right to regulate property as well as protect it,<sup>30</sup> but this is intended in the minimalist sense of adjudicating disputes between individuals; it does not embrace large-scale redistributions. The state cannot confiscate the property of the individual: all rightful possessions, including the farthing of the soldier, are sacrosanct.<sup>31</sup>

Locke's account of the development of property rights is now so familiar that I need refer only to those points that are relevant to my theme: it falls into different stages. At first all land was given in common to all men. At some point individual appropriation began to take place and this was justified on the principle that every man is allowed to lay claim to what he needs to survive. Appropriation is of two kinds: of moveables and immoveables. Where a man by his labour produces goods they become his because of the labour he has invested in them (it does not necessarily have to be his own labour but, notoriously, can be that of his servant<sup>32</sup>) and the land in which he has invested his labour also becomes his. On the appropriation of land, Locke held that,

<sup>29</sup>ST 3, 124, 127.

<sup>30</sup>ST 3, 50.

<sup>31</sup>ST 139. It should be noted, however, that Laslett points out that nowhere in *Two treatises* does Locke contradict his assertion in *Essay on toleration* (1667) that the magistrate can appoint ways of transferring property from one man to another and make what property laws he likes, provided they are equitable. Laslett, 104, 105.

<sup>32</sup>ST 28.

the earth itself, 'not the Fruits of the Earth and the Beasts that subsist upon it' - is the '*chief matter of Property*'.<sup>33</sup>

He adds the proviso that a man may acquire what he needs as long as there is as good left over in common for others. Locke assumes that at this stage of development there is enough land to satisfy everyone's needs; in all contexts other than the development of the frontier, this is an unrealistic assumption. In making it, Locke avoids the knotty question of what is to happen where there is not enough land to go round. A further proviso is that a man must only keep for himself, either in moveables or immoveables, what he can profitably use. Nothing must be allowed to waste. Before the invention of money this limit meant that men could only acquire relatively small amounts of wealth in terms either of perishable goods or of land. Another proviso is that every one must bear in mind the claims of charity: he must from his surplus relieve the distress of his neighbour.<sup>34</sup>

The next stage followed on the invention of money. Money allowed men to acquire wealth that does not perish. In the course of time considerable inequalities in possessions emerged, and this took things into the next stage, where inequalities could be justified on the grounds that they were essential preconditions for the growth of prosperity in society as a whole. The underlying principle is that inequalities are morally justified if, but only if, they are the precondition of prosperity being enjoyed by the whole community. The accumulation of wealth in private hands made possible by the invention of money leads in many communities to a shortage of land, to the consequent emergence of rent and to the elimination of appropriation of land by the simple act of investing labour in it. Communities decide that established distributions of land should be respected, but it is not entirely clear whether the collective

<sup>33</sup>FT 32.

<sup>34</sup>FT 42.

agreements take place *before* the creation of political society or *after* it. In section 45 of *Second treatise* Locke seems to suggest that the settlement of individual properties within political society takes place at the same time that communities settle their boundaries between themselves. On the other hand, in section 50 of *Second treatise* he writes:

This partage of things, in an inequality of private possessions, men have made practicable out of the bounds of Societie, and without compact only by putting a value on gold and silver and tacitly agreeing to the use of Money.

Locke then takes a massive step, none the less massive because it is taken quietly: he assumes that because inequalities in property holding can be morally justified, all existing property holdings are justified. Here there is nothing less than a stupendous sleight of hand. Locke creates the illusion that all existing inequalities are due to some men having become more wealthy than others because they, or their ancestors, have been more industrious, more inventive, more frugal, perhaps even luckier than others. He shuts his eyes and would shut the reader's eyes to the fact that not all existing differences in wealth are due to the exercise of the puritanical virtues. He ignores the part played in the creation of positive political rights by conquest, the distribution of sequestered lands, royal largesse, marriage, and other accidents of history.

It would be difficult to overestimate the magnitude of the consequences of this quiet transition for Locke's theory of property. The significance of his elaborate account of the development of property rights is negated at a stroke, and for all practical purposes his radicalism evaporates and he is seen, at least as far as property rights are concerned, to be a philosopher of the *status quo*. So far from being a radical on this issue, Locke emerges as highly conservative. Considering his immediate aim of enlisting support against the Stuarts it is not surprising that he took this step. Had he admitted that some forms of property holding could not be

morally justified, he would have been pressed to say what they were, and what he thought should be done to remedy the defects. Any indications of radical reform along these lines would have alarmed those he was most keen to conciliate.

The upshot of this attempt to appease the large landholders of his day is to lead his argument into a state of confusion. It is not just that his radicalism is blown away: his position is incoherent. For example, in his chapter on conquest, he goes to a great deal of trouble to show that conquest by force cannot create a title to property:

He that by *Conquest* has a right over a Man's Person to destroy him if he pleases, has *not* thereby a right over his Estate to possess and enjoy it.<sup>35</sup>

Even a Conqueror in a just war does not obtain a 'right and title' to the possessions of the vanquished. The most he can claim from the vanquished is reparation for damage.<sup>36</sup> All those who suffer the depredations of a conqueror are entitled to recover their property. But Locke says nothing of the legitimacy, or otherwise, of those who owe their possessions to conquest in the past. He did not allow his theory to be embarrassed by historical precedents: he implied what Edmund Burke was later to make explicit, that it is better to draw a veil over the actual origins of property, or rather to divert attention from the historical facts by emphasizing his own theory about the creation of legitimate property rights: that Labour is the '*great Foundation of Property*'.<sup>37</sup>

More light is thrown on Locke's conception of the relation between natural law and positive law by an examination of his discussion of the rights of inheritance. Locke believes that

<sup>35</sup>ST 182.

<sup>36</sup>ST 183.

<sup>37</sup>ST 44.

according to natural law all the children of a marriage have equal rights to inherit shares of the parents' landed property and possessions.<sup>38</sup> But he also notes that the municipal laws of some countries incorporate the principle of primogeniture.<sup>39</sup> He is at pains to point out that where this happens, we must not infer that political rights also pass exclusively to the eldest son in the same way. What is strange is that in discussing this point Locke does not complain that the principle of primogeniture offends against the law of nature, and this failure to defend natural rights against positive law is all the more strange since he does complain that natural law is offended in those communities which prohibit a father inheriting from his son in the event of the son dying before his father.<sup>40</sup> Locke allows us to infer that there are at least some cases in which one may not appeal to natural law against positive law. In this respect the treatment of inheritance is similar to Locke's treatment of property. On both these issues, that of the consequences of conquest in the past and the treatment of inheritance in positive law, Locke leaves the reader with the impression, as he does in his general discussion of property, that he has no wish to disturb existing distribution.

### Conclusion

There are two different sets of reasons why the claim that *Two treatises* sets out a radical, revolutionary position needs to be treated with circumspection and some caution. The first centres on the contention that on those issues that were not essential to his main purpose, namely, to attack the pretensions of the Stuarts to exercise absolute power, and to justify resistance to their claims, Locke's stance is highly conservative. It is not just that in Locke's eyes it is James II who was the rebel, and that he presents his own

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<sup>38</sup>FT 88-90.

<sup>39</sup>FT 91.

<sup>40</sup>FT 90.

position as a restorer and a conservator, but that on those issues that do not touch upon the attempt to prevent James II becoming King or upon removing him from the throne, Locke did not, at least as far as *Two treatises* is in evidence, seek fundamental changes in the constitution or in the political and social structure of society. That this was so can be seen in his claim that his main purpose was to thwart the attempt made by the Stuarts to reduce the power and influence of Parliament by dispensing with it altogether, or by making it completely subject to the will of an absolute monarch. Throughout, Locke presents himself as a restorer and not as a destroyer, and celebrates the advent of William III, as that of 'our Great Restorer'.<sup>41</sup>

Similar conclusions can be drawn from his treatment of property rights. Although Locke has a highly specific moral justification of ownership, one that *could* have been the basis for an extensive redistribution of possessions, he shrank away from advocating any such course of action in favour of tacitly legitimizing existing possessions. And just because in his day ownership of land was such a powerful determinant of the distribution of political power, an unwillingness to disturb the distribution of property embodied an unwillingness to alter the way in which the representation of the people in Parliament was determined.

A quite different set of reasons for querying the validity of the claim that *Two treatises* favours a radical restructuring of social and political institutions lies in what I have termed the openness of Locke's treatment of some crucial issues. This can be most clearly seen in his treatment of the people. On the face of it, Locke seems to espouse what the twentieth century reader would take to be a

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<sup>41</sup>See Preface to *Two treatises*, Laslett (1988), p.137, and Laslett's reference to Locke's letter to Mordaunt, 21 February 1689, in which William is referred to as 'our great deliverer'.

radical, democratic position: that political authority stems from the people, that government exists to serve their interests, that they have the right to supervise the conduct of affairs, and, where grievous lapses occur, the right to resist the abuse of power and seek remedies for corruption. So far it would seem that Locke's democratic credentials could not be improved upon. But since he did not specify who were to count as the people, since he did not specify how they had cause to dismiss their executive and legislative, and since, with the exception of his concern to promote a redistribution of seats to create a 'fair and equal' representation, he did not specify how existing electoral practices were to be changed in order to make the constitution more democratic, it must be assumed that Locke wanted the seventeenth century reader to take it for granted that by the people he meant what for political purposes the majority of his readers would take it to mean. In effect, Locke's openness on the issue meant that he accepted the practice of his day which limited political power to those who possessed substantial property. There is a studied vagueness in Locke's treatment of the people, of popular political activity, and representation that belies what has seemed to many later readers to be the radical, democratic thrust of his founding political authority in the will of the people and in seeing them as the founders and architects of their political institutions.

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**G J Barker-Benfield**, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1992, 520 pp. £39.95.

Critics and historians have described a *cult* of sensibility: G J Barker-Benfield's contention is that the sighs and swoons of sentimental literature are only part of a much wider *culture* of sensibility - incorporating the valorization of feeling, the exaltation of family affection and domesticity, and the feminization of social life - that was a central feature of eighteenth-century life in Britain. He finds the roots of this culture in the changes in middle-class life brought about by commercial expansion and the rise of consumerism. The links between economic and psychological developments are traced in convincing detail. Pairing new domestic luxuries with the sentimental luxury of feeling, Barker-Benfield places the self-indulgence of consumer psychology at the heart of both the new economy and the culture of sensibility. Drawing on contemporary philosophical and psychological works, medical discourse, popular journalism and sentimental novels, he presents a rich picture of this culture, encompassing the reform of male manners (which he sees as the biggest reform project), women's role in consumerism, the change in domestic life, the rise of female literacy and self-expression, and the growth of humanitarianism.

Throughout the book, gender is treated as a key factor shaping the development of culture, and for once the development of masculinity is considered as much in need of analysis as that of femininity. Revising the recent consensus that sex roles became more sharply differentiated, and women more confined to domesticity, during the century, Barker-Benfield argues that attempts to achieve these changes were fuelled by a sense that the opposite was happening: that men were becoming more effeminate as they engaged in commerce instead of war, and becoming more attached to their newly-comfortable middle class homes; and that women were moving out of domesticity by engaging in the politer

public pleasure of the shops and assembly rooms that were displacing the rougher world of taverns and bearpits.

Wollstonecraft, seen as a central figure for sensibility, occupies a pivotal position in the analysis. Her attempt to find ways for women to be accepted as both rational and sexual creatures indicated the feminist potential of sensibility. But after the anti-Jacobin attacks on her, women were pressed into a tamer compromise, upholding their claims to intellectual ability and domestic authority while turning away, for the time being, from more comprehensive political and sexual liberation.

This is a work of great breadth, drawing fruitful connections between areas often kept by narrow specialization. It offers an important addition to our understanding of eighteenth-century and of the centrality of gender relations in historical development.

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**Robert D Cornwall:** *Visible and Apostolic: the Constitution of the Church in High Church Anglican and Non-Juror Thought* (University of Delaware Press, 1993), £29.50.

In *Visible and Apostolic*, Robert Cornwall provides a valuable and detailed exposition of Anglican high church and non-juring ecclesiology and sacramental theology in the period between 1688 and 1745. Cornwall draws on once neglected authors such as William Beveridge, Charles Leslie, George Hickes, William Law, Henry Dodwell and Thomas Brett. Cornwall has certainly read widely and cites an impressive array of high church and non-juring authorities, but his study, while solid, is rather dull, repetitive, ill-digested and marred by a clumsy, inelegant style of writing. Cornwall's judgement can also be called into question, given the inflated and bogus claims to originality which he makes in his introduction.

Revisionist studies of the eighteenth-century Church of England have become fashionable, and Cornwall rather jumps on the bandwagon of the genuine historical revisionism pioneered by J C D Clark. Cornwall identifies with Clark's rejection of a Whig-dominated historiography which portrayed eighteenth-century Anglicanism as predominantly Latitudinarian, rational and ethical and downplayed Tory, high Church and non-juring influence. Cornwall also admits that he draws very heavily on the work of G V Bennett, John Findon and especially F C Mather, whom he concedes (p.145) he follows in 'uncovering the important nuances of High Church and Non-Juror ecclesiologies'. In spite of this dependence on the work of other scholars in the field, however, Cornwall contradicts himself by making the surprising assertion that his study 'seeks to fill a void in contemporary historical scholarship by providing an analysis of the theological basis of High-Church Anglican ecclesiology' (p.14). Cornwall's assumption (p.18) that the work of the scholars to whom he is clearly indebted focused exclusively on the political programme of high churchmen and non-jurors to the neglect of the theological

ideas underpinning them, does not bear close examination (and in the case of Mather, is contradicted by his own testimony). Moreover, long prior to the work of Bennett, Mather and Clark, scholars such as Addleshaw, Every and Stranks, were focusing on the theological and sacramental dimension of eighteenth-century high churchmanship. In discussing these themes, Cornwall is treading on old and familiar territory.

While Cornwall's study provides exhaustive detail on high church doctrines of the church, ministry, apostolical succession, and sacraments, the discussion is conducted somewhat in an historical void, and detached from a contemporary political context. Cornwall neglects the concrete, living history of the Church of England in the period. Parish Anglicanism does not get a look in. Statements such as 'many among the common people may have been indifferent towards religious things' beg far too many questions, and should not have been dropped into the text even as casual asides. When Cornwall does make a connection between theology and politics, he makes a particularly useful point (p.143) when he stresses the political implications of Roger Laurence's denial of the validity of Lutheran orders as bearing on the legitimacy of Hanoverian dynastic rule. It is a pity that he does not analyse other aspects of the political consequences of a rigorous pursuit of high church and non-juring theological principles.

While Cornwall's delineation of the theological content of Anglican high churchmanship in the period is thorough, there are too many banal or inappropriate statements. 'Deist ecclesiologies' (p.26) is a particularly unfortunate example of this tendency. Cornwall also makes errors of interpretation. For example, he wrongly contends (p.121) that eighteenth-century high churchmen did not generally adhere to a receptionist doctrine of the eucharist. A section of the high church party represented by John Johnson, vicar of Cranbrook, along with later non-jurors such as Thomas Brett, held to a virtualist doctrine whereby the bread and wine became the body and blood of Christ in *virtue*, power and effect.

On the other hand, the high church consensus as set forth by Daniel Waterland in his *Review of the Doctrine of the Eucharist* (1737) was receptionist, whereby the presence of Christ depends on the disposition of the communicant, in its emphasis on 'worthy receiving' of the sacrament; it stood opposed to the doctrine taught by Brett as well as to the Zwinglian teaching of Benjamin Hoadly. Cornwall mistakenly identifies standard eighteenth-century high church eucharistic doctrine with that of an 'objective' real presence in the eucharist, whereas such teaching was only expounded by Robert Wilberforce and Pusey in the 1850s and represented a later Tractarian innovation and departure from that of earlier high churchmanship.

Cornwall treats the high church party of the period too much as a monolith and as too distinct from the 'orthodox' mainstream. The term 'high-church movement' is misleading at this date. Contrary to Cornwall's assertions, high churchmen did not represent a coherent or unified group in the early eighteenth century. High churchmen may have given the appearance of being a close-knit and well-defined party during the Convocation controversy of the 1700s, but this was something of a short-lived political illusion. Whig bishops such as Gibson, Potter and Wake, while opposed to the 'high church party' on political questions, were high churchmen in theological terms. The original separation of the non-jurors was on political grounds; a theological rationale only gradually developed. Many Whig high churchmen were no less committed than the non-jurors to the doctrine of the divine origins of episcopacy. In short, doctrinal and sacramental high churchmanship transcended Tory political allegiance.

Cornwall is correct to point out the continued influence of non-juring and high church theological values through the writings of later eighteenth-century divines such as William Jones of Nayland and Charles Daubeny, Archdeacon of Salisbury, and a useful bibliography reveals the extent to which the force of Anglican orthodoxy was restated in numerous nineteenth-century editions of

non-juring and Hanoverian high church divines. Moreover, there was a marked kinship between Tractarian and later non-juring teaching such as the value placed upon Tradition as independent authority. Cornwall, however, overlooks the important discontinuities which separated the Tractarians from their mainstream eighteenth-century precursors. The differences between the later Oxford Movement and older high church parties was more than a mere difference of atmosphere as Cornwall contends.

Cornwall's underlying lack of sympathy with the subject of his study becomes rather too evident in parts of his text. There are also too many gratuitous and anachronistic concessions to modern political correctness which sit uneasily with the themes which he covers, e.g. a laboured justification of the term 'churchman' being used in a non-'gender exclusive sense. One can imagine what Charles Leslie and other such arch-'patriarchists' would have thought of this!

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**Plangesis (Yannis), *Phileleutherismos kai theoria demokratias. He ennoia tes eleutherias sten politike skepse tou Joseph Priestley. (Liberalism and democratic theory: The concept of liberty in Joseph Priestley's political thought).*** Thessaloniki. 1994, 128pp., 4 illustrations, paperback.

There is supplied with this work a Table of Contents and Abstract in English. The author's *Hyle kai Pneuma (Matter and spirit, the philosophical thought of Joseph Priestley)* (Thessaloniki, 1991) was reviewed in *Enlightenment and Dissent*, no.11 (1992). The present work concentrates mainly on his *Essay on the first principles of government* (1768; ed. 2, enlarged, 1771).

It is a scholarly and thought-provoking contribution to the literature, furnished with detailed references both to the original works and to the considerable bulk of recent commentary. The three main themes which are throughout intertwined are those of liberty, democracy and utilitarianism, and one of Priestley's main contributions is his distinction (which, he recognizes, cannot be absolutely sharp) between civil and political liberty, the main function of the latter being in his view the protection of the former. This emphasis on civil liberty receives particular exemplification in the centrality accorded to religious toleration. Plangesis sees Priestley, in view of his generously wide-embracing conception of the bounds of toleration, as a half-way house between Locke and Mill, paving the way for the latter. On the other hand, to us today the ambit of Priestley's thought appears closer to that of Locke, though more definitely utilitarian than to that of Mill; Mill's standpoint was secular, by his time the battle for religious toleration had been won, and his mind was much concerned with problems raised by the coming of democracy and the dangers of a tyranny of the majority, as also by the pressures of society in the form of public opinion, and not simply legal restrictions imposed by the state. If we look at the other side however, we recognize that both Priestley and Mill saw individual rights as having ultimately a utilitarian justification, and diversity of thought as the main engine

of social progress so conceived; in this Priestley was a true Enlightenment figure, and Plangesis views his typical optimistic vision of the future (of which there are echoes in Mill) with a proper degree of caution. Priestley and Mill were alike, too, in seeing a reformed education, free from a conformity imposed by state control, as conducing to this end. But in the last analysis, Plangesis thinks, Priestley leaves the relation between liberty and democracy unresolved.

Looking at Priestley and the issues involved from the standpoint of the end of the 20th century, he sees the question of the tenability of liberalism, as so understood, as one to be viewed on the one side from the standpoint of such recent liberal thinkers as Rawls, and on the other in the light of problems arising for socialism from the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. His conclusion is that no form of liberalism, whether Priestley's or any more recent, has been able to reconcile liberty with equality in a satisfactory manner.

He concludes his work with an ample and very useful bibliography.

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#### Books Received:

We have received the following books, some of which will be reviewed in future numbers:

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