



Enlightenment and Dissent

No. 23 2004-07

CONTENTS

Page

vii Editorial

Articles

- 1 'Aspers'd and Blacken'd': Pierre Coste's Critique of
Locke's Moral Theory *James Dybikowski*
- 24 Richard Price and Francis Hutcheson – Does a
Moral Sense Theory Make Ethics Arbitrary?
Nicholas Hunt-Bull
- 45 John Balguy and the sense of beauty. A rational realist in
the age of sentiment
Peter Kivy
- 71 Did Paine abridge his *Rights of Man*? Textual
scholarship and controversial context
Iain Hampsher-Monk
- 85 'Probably the most indefatigable prince that ever existed':
A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great
Anthony Page
- 131 Ethics and aesthetics in the British Moralists
DD Raphael

Documents

- 148 'A Register of Vexations and Persecutions': Some Letters
of Thomas Fyshe Palmer from Botany Bay during the 1790s
Michael T Davis

Review Articles

- 167 Jenny Graham, *The Nation, the Law and the King. Reform
Politics in England, 1789-1799*
Emma Vincent Macleod
- 174 Editing Mary Shelley *Michael Rossington*

Reviews

- 182 Paula R Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia eds., *A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture* Gillian Skinner
- 187 Michael T Davis, Iain McCalman and Christina Parolin, eds., *Newgate in Revolution: An Anthology of Radical Prison Literature in the Age of Revolution* H T Dickinson
- 190 Malcolm Dick ed., *Joseph Priestley and Birmingham* Anthony Page
- 191 Gavin Edwards, *Narrative Order, 1789-1819: Life and Story in an Age of Revolution* Mary-Ann Constantine
- 195 Amanda Goodrich, *Debating England's Aristocracy in the 1790s: Pamphlets, Polemics and Political Ideas* Martyn Powell
- 197 Geraint H Jenkins ed., *A Rattleskull Genius: The Many Faces of Iolo Morganwg* Colin Kidd
- 202 Judith Jennings *Gender, Religion and Radicalism in the Long Eighteenth Century: The 'Ingenious Quaker' and Her Connections* Linda Wilson
- 204 Paul Keen ed., *The Popular Radical Press in Britain 1817-1821* Paul Pickering
- 207 F Arant Maginnes, *Thomas Abthorpe Cooper: father of the American stage, 1775-1849* David O'Shaughnessy
- 211 Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: translation, scholarship, culture* Martin Mulso
- 216 Mark G Spencer, *David Hume and Eighteenth-Century America* Peter Jones
- 219 **Books received**

EDITORIAL

As readers will be aware, over the years there has been a slippage in the production of the journal, eventually reaching proportions where it was not possible to bring the journal up to date by producing an issue for each of the late years. The solution is this number which covers the years 2004 to 2007. With this, we bring ourselves up to date and that is where we aim to stay. Of course, we cannot do that without the support of scholars in the field and a regular flow of submissions, but we are pleased to say that the prospects for the next few years are good and we have planned for 2009 a special issue devoted to Isaac Newton and his legacy to be edited by Stephen Snobelen. The papers will examine the historical, philosophical, theological and literary aspects of Newton and his relation to eighteenth-century thought and the enlightenment.

Over the years, too, we have also lost valuable members of the editorial advisory board, which came to be in need of strengthening. The first step we took was to appoint Anthony Page of the University of Tasmania as Reviews Editor. He has brought new energy to the reviews section as can already be seen in this number. Then, we invited a number of distinguished scholars to join our editorial advisory board, and as a result are pleased to welcome the following new members to the board. They are:

Michael T Davis, Faculty of Arts Director of Studies, University of Tasmania

Harry T Dickinson, Professor Emeritus, University of Edinburgh
Grayson Ditchfield, Professor of History, University of Kent at Canterbury

Knud Haakonssen, Professor of Intellectual History, University of Sussex

Emma Vincent Macleod, Lecturer in History, University of Stirling
Stephen Snobelen, Assistant Professor, History of Science and Technology Programme, University of King's College.

We very much look forward to receiving their advice and assistance.

MHF

JD

**‘ASPERS’D AND BLACKEN’D’: PIERRE COSTE’S
CRITIQUE OF LOCKE’S MORAL THEORY**

James Dybikowski

When the Huguenot journalist and editor, Pierre Des Maizeaux (1672/3-1745), published *A Collection of several pieces of Mr. John Locke* in 1720, he included a translated elegy of Locke originally published in French shortly after Locke’s death by his Huguenot translator, Pierre Coste (1668-1747). Des Maizeaux prefaced the translated version with an anonymous letter purportedly written on behalf of the friends of Locke.¹ With reason, these friends have been taken to be Des Maizeaux himself and Anthony Collins whose assistance made the collection possible.² According to the letter, the elegy was intended to be a ‘proper Vindication’ of Locke against its author who, since writing it, ‘in several Writings, and in his common Conversation throughout France, Holland, and England has aspers’d and blacken’d the Memory of Mr. Locke’.

In her book *Impolite learning*, Anne Goldgar aptly observes: ‘This letter is mysterious.’³ Indeed, it is. It refers to conversations and offers no details about how Locke’s memory had been blackened. It puzzled contemporaries as it has more recent scholars.⁴ Is there any foundation for its condemnation of Coste,

¹ *A Collection of several pieces of Mr. John Locke* (London, 1720), i-iii.

² In the second edition, printed in 1739, Des Maizeaux acknowledges his debt to Collins. The collection is there said to be ‘Publish’d by Mr. Des Maizeaux, under the Direction of ANTHONY COLLINS Esq.’ See Anne Goldgar, *Impolite learning: conduct and community in the Republic of Letters, 1680-1750* (New Haven, 1995), 124, for a discussion of the evidence for attributing responsibility for the anonymous letter to Collins, Des Maizeaux or both.

³ Goldgar, *Impolite learning*, 124.

⁴ Contemporaries who expressed skepticism that the attack on Coste could be justified included the reviewer for *Bibliothèque angloise*, 7 (1720), 285-343. For more recent expressions of puzzlement, see

Pierre Coste's critique of Locke's moral theory

whatever one might think of the propriety of the way in which it is made? The general verdict has been that there is no evidence to warrant this attack. Coste himself maintained a discreet silence, and the friends of Locke never felt compelled to explain themselves. Some have argued that there is no evidence even to support the view that Coste, at this stage, intended to criticize Locke. Goldgar, on the other hand, concedes that Coste criticizes him in notes to his 1715 edition of *Le Christianisme raisonnable*.⁵ She argues, however, that the intent of the notes was not to refute Locke, but merely to advance the discussion of issues in his text.⁶ She adds that the friends of Locke demonstrated themselves unable to distinguish legitimate criticism from personal attack. For Goldgar, the real basis for their charge against Coste is the notion that 'editions of famous authors' works which included corrections, textual alterations, and additions, were apparently an attempt to build a reputation, a connection with, and even a triumph over, the late philosophers. Not only were they critical, but they were not modest and humble in their criticism.⁷ In short, Coste exceeded his station in daring to assert 'his intellectual independence'.⁸

My aim is to offer a different solution by adding to the relevant evidence and using it to reinterpret the evidence Goldgar cites. The key to the solution is Coste's friendship with the Earl of

Margaret Rumbold, *Traducteur Huguenot: Pierre Coste* (New York, 1991), 19-23; Charles Bastide, 'Pierre Coste d'après quelques lettres inédites', *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français* 57 (1907), 529-30. La Motte wrote to Des Maizeaux that he had not encountered anyone who approved of the letter's publication (British Library (BL), Add. Ms. 4286/248, La Motte to Des Maizeaux, 7 September 1723 n.s.).

⁵ *Le Christianisme raisonnable, tel qu'il nous est représenté dans l'Écriture Sainte, Traduit de l'Anglois de Mr. Locke. Seconde édition, revue, corrigée; & augmentée d'une Dissertation où l'on établit le vrai & l'unique moyen de réunir tous les Chrétiens malgré la différence de leurs sentimens. On a joint à cette édition la Religion des dames* (2nd. edn., 2 vols, Amsterdam, 1715). The notes are at I: 320-22 and 326-27.

⁶ Goldgar, *Impolite learning*, 128, 143.

⁷ Goldgar, *Impolite learning*, 169.

⁸ Goldgar, *Impolite learning*, 124.

James Dybikowski

Shaftesbury. From Shaftesbury and his philosophy, Coste acquired a foundation for a critique of Locke's moral theory he had not previously possessed. Under Shaftesbury's tutelage, he came to believe that Locke's philosophy of mind, his rejection of innate ideas in particular, robbed him of any objective basis for morals and made him a dangerous ally of Hobbes. He also came to believe that Locke's belief in the need for a future state of rewards and punishments in order to motivate moral conduct not only undermined the conditions required for acting morally, but also constituted a scandalous satire on it. Coste's intellectual debt to Shaftesbury, however, cannot be properly understood, except in light of the distant, sometimes badgering, even hostile personal relation between him and Locke, which contrasts markedly with the supportive friendship he enjoyed with Shaftesbury, especially before the latter's departure to Italy in 1711. His correspondence with Shaftesbury reveals an animus against Locke that provided the friends of Locke with a foundation for their charge.

Coste's friendship with Charles de La Motte

Pierre Coste, now best known for his translations of Locke, was born in the south of France and sent to Geneva in 1684, shortly before the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, to be educated for the Protestant ministry.⁹ There he befriended Charles de La Motte (1667-1751), who arrived the following year and subsequently became a copy editor in Amsterdam where he carried on his trade for some five decades. In that role, he shepherded Coste's translations and editions, as well as Des Maizeaux's editions, through the press. More than that, he functioned as a literary agent and as the hub of a correspondence network that linked Huguenot writers to each other, their publishers and the Republic of Letters at large.¹⁰ Coste and La Motte separated in 1687, but converged again in Amsterdam in 1689 where Coste lived at his house and

⁹ Sven and Suzanne Stelling-Michaud, eds, *Le Livre du Recteur de l'Académie de Genève (1559-1878)* (6 vols, Geneva, 1959-80), vol. 2: 569.

¹⁰ See B Lagarrigue, 'Les Coulisses de la Presse de Langue Française dans les Provinces-Unies pendant la première moitié du XVIIIe Siècle', *Documnetieblad 18E EEUW*, 22 (1990), 77-110; 147-62; and Goldgar, *Impolite learning*, esp. 35-53.

Pierre Coste's critique of Locke's moral theory

maintained himself by copy editing and translating. Coste stayed in Amsterdam until the autumn of 1697 when the Mashams engaged him to tutor their son at Oates where Locke was then living permanently. The friendship that developed between Coste and La Motte was close and life long even if after 1697 it was almost entirely conducted by correspondence, most of which has disappeared.¹¹

Coste celebrated his friendship with La Motte in the preface to the third edition of *De l'education des enfans*, his translation of Locke's *Some thoughts concerning education*.¹² The first edition of Coste's translation, his first attempt at translating from English, was published in 1695. Coste originally intended to include this dedication in the second edition of 1708, but La Motte intervened to prevent it. La Motte later relented and allowed it to appear in the third edition of 1721 for what he described as 'des raisons particulieres'.¹³ This was the year after the friends of Locke attacked Coste, whose conduct towards Locke La Motte vigorously defended to Des Maizeaux whom he principally blamed. As La Motte saw it, the party sinned against was not Locke, but Coste, while his critics were guilty of the same fault, if it was a fault, for which they blamed him.¹⁴

La Motte penned a manuscript account of Coste's life, recently published by Maria-Cristina Pitassi. Written soon after Coste's

¹¹ The surviving remnants of Coste's correspondence with La Motte are at Bibliothèque de la Société de l'histoire du Protestantisme Français, Ms. 295. Most, although not all of these letters are late and center on Coste's literary projects and editorial changes to translations and editions.

¹² Coste, *De l'education des enfans*, V-VI: 'Que vous m'aimez avec autant de tendresse que vous faites; Que mes intérêts vous sont aussi chers que les vôtres; & Qu'une longue absence, bien loin de diminuer l'amitié que vous avez pour moi, semble lui donner tous les jours de nouvelles forces. ... Ce n'est pourtant qu'une foible peinture d'une Amitié qui tire tout son feu d'elle-même, & qui par son zele & sa sincérité est d'un prix supérieur à tous les fruits qui m'en sont revenus'.

¹³ BL, Add. Ms. 4286/275, La Motte to Des Maizeaux, 11 September 1725, n.s.

¹⁴ BL, Add. Ms. 4286/242, La Motte to Des Maizeaux, 16 July 1720, n.s.; 4286/248, 2 September 1723 n.s.

death while La Motte suffered acutely from a series of painful maladies, it is a compelling and poignant sketch, its disorganization notwithstanding. He complains that illness prevented him from even consulting Coste's letters, but most of what he says was deeply engraved in his mind and of a piece with accounts to be found in his correspondence with Des Maizeaux.¹⁵ The life is an unrivalled source for Coste's personal relation with Locke, judged from what can be presumed to be his perspective.¹⁶

Coste showed philosophical promise early. When he moved from Geneva to Lausanne in 1686, his professor of theology was a Cartesian.¹⁷ His earliest publication was an abbreviated history of philosophy that prefaced a Dutch edition of the Cartesian, Pierre Sylvain Regis' *Cours entiers de philosophie*.¹⁸ In it he argues for the superiority of modern over ancient philosophy, identifying the achievements of the former largely with Descartes and the Cartesians. Of Descartes, he remarks that he succeeded in discovering more truths than had been discovered in earlier ages due to the power of his philosophical method. He characterizes Malebranche's *Recherche de la vérité* as the utmost achievement of the human spirit. His fondness for Malebranche later weakened, but his loyalty to Descartes proved to be longer standing and more

¹⁵ BL, Add. Ms. 4286-87. This correspondence is inventoried in Joseph Almagor, *Pierre Des Maizeaux (1673-1745), journalist and English correspondent for Franco-Dutch periodicals, 1700-1720* (Amsterdam, 1989), 157-237.

¹⁶ Charles de La Motte, 'La Vie de Coste et anecdotes sur ses ouvrages', ed. Maria-Cristina Pitassi, in *John Locke Que la religion chrétienne est très-raisonnable* (Oxford, 1999), 260.

¹⁷ La Motte, 'La Vie de Coste', 232-34. His Cartesian teacher was Jeremias Sterky, a pupil of Jean-Robert Chouet, who taught at Geneva and under whom La Motte had hoped to study because he was compelled to leave Geneva as a result of pressure directed against refugees by the French court.

¹⁸ P-S Regis, *Cours entier de philosophie, où système général selon les principes de M. Descartes* (3 vols, Amsterdam, 1691; reprint New York and London, 1970), 1, 'Discours sur la philosophie', unpaginated.

Pierre Coste's critique of Locke's moral theory

resilient.¹⁹ In a comment he published in 1716 on a Cartesian work in defense of the doctrine of innate ideas, he appeals to the philosophical virtues of Cartesianism to expose critical shortcomings he finds in Locke's philosophy of mind.²⁰

Coste remained at Oates for seven years until shortly after Locke's death. While he was still in Amsterdam, he attracted favourable notice, including Locke's, for his translations of *Some thoughts concerning education* as well as *Reasonableness of Christianity*. With Jean Le Clerc's encouragement, Coste also agreed to translate *An Essay concerning human understanding*. He initially thought the commission might prove to be beyond his powers, but accepted it, knowing that Le Clerc was ready to assist him.²¹ Initial progress, however, was slow because of illness and other personal concerns. In any case Coste worked slowly and deliberately as a translator, acutely aware that translating philosophy demands that the translator not intrude his own person: 'Je me suis donc fait une affaire de suivre scrupuleusement mon Auteur sans m'en écarter le moins du monde'.²² Coste later boasted that his scrupulous attention to the text of the *Essay* compelled Locke to clarify and make more precise numerous passages.²³ That said, he later told Mathieu Marais that each time he reviewed his

¹⁹ See Pierre Coste, trans., *Discours sur l'amour divin*, (Amsterdam, 1705), Avertissement du traducteur, and Coste's letter to Leibniz of 20 April 1707 occasioned by Leibniz' response to his translation (C. J. Gerhardt, ed., *Die Philosophischen schriften von Gottfried von Leibniz, dritter band* (Hildesheim, 1960), 389-91). The translation was of Lady Masham's *A Discourse concerning the love of God* (London, 1696).

²⁰ *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* (November-December 1716), 'Fragment d'une Lettre écrite de Londres à l'Auteur de ces Nouvelles', 762-67.

²¹ *Correspondence of John Locke*, ed. E. S. De Beer (8 vols, Oxford, 1976-89), V, 1933, Le Clerc to Locke, 20 August 1695 n.s., which suggests that Le Clerc initially encouraged the venture; 1940, Coste to Locke, 3 September 1695 n.s.; 1958, Le Clerc to Locke, 15 October 1695 n.s.

²² *Essai philosophique concernant l'entendement humain* (Amsterdam & Leipzig, 1755; reprint. Paris, 1994), Avertissement du traducteur, XII. This translator's introduction was first added in the 1729 edn.

²³ *Essai philosophique*, Avertissement du traducteur, XIV.

translation of the *Essay* he found new corrections. He concluded that a perfect translation of it was an unattainable phoenix.²⁴

According to La Motte's account, Locke was reserved towards Coste from the first and gradually became still more distant, eventually communicating with him largely through Lady Masham with whom Coste's relations were altogether warmer and closer. La Motte accounts for the gulf that separated the two as originating in temperamental differences compounded by philosophical ones. Coste's partiality for Descartes and Malebranche, La Motte remarks, provoked Locke into baiting him, although Coste, La Motte insists, responded with restraint and politeness. The flavour of these discussions is conveyed in some of the critical notes Coste added to editions of *Essai philosophique* from 1729 onwards. He describes, for example, his failure to convince Locke that his account of the Cartesian view of sensible qualities was mistaken, although he took comfort in Pierre Bayle's agreement with his analysis.²⁵ He also recalls another exchange, this one remote from and, indeed, at odds with Descartes, in which he insisted that Locke underestimated the ability of animals to compare ideas beyond their sensory circumstances:

Mr. Locke m'a répondu brusquement, *Je n'ai pas écrit mon Livre pour expliquer les actions des Bêtes. ... Mais j'aurois fort bien pu repliquer civilement à Mr. Locke, qu'il s'ensuit évidemment de sa réponse, qu'il n'appartient pas à l'Homme de fixer, de déterminer les causes & les limites des facultés des Bêtes.*²⁶

Despite these differences, Locke continued to pressure Coste to translate more of his work and shortly before his death he proposed

²⁴ Henri Duranton, ed., *Correspondance littéraire du Président Bouhier*, no. 14, *Lettres de Mathieu Marais VII (1735-1737)* (St.-Etienne, 1988), 174-75.

²⁵ *Essai philosophique*, 131-32. For Bayle's response, see Elisabeth Labrousse, ed., *Pierre Bayle, oeuvres diverses* (4 vols, Hildesheim, 1968), IV, 831, Bayle to Coste, 20 July 1703 n.s.

²⁶ *Essai philosophique*, 111. See also p.82 where he recalls another objection on the nature of space he put to Locke, but reported that he forgot Locke's reply as soon as it was given. Unapologetic, he adds that philosophical subtleties generally made men neither wiser nor better.

Pierre Coste's critique of Locke's moral theory

that he should translate *Two treatises of government*.²⁷ There already existed an unsatisfactory translation that omitted the first treatise as well as the opening chapter of the second connecting it to the first.²⁸ Coste, who did not relish the prospect, put Locke off by using La Motte to elicit an unsatisfactory publishing proposal from the Dutch publisher. The publisher agreed to print a new edition, but only if the 200 remaining copies of the earlier one were taken off his hands and the new translation, based on a projected new English edition, were supplied gratis. Locke's retreat, however, was temporary. Days before his death, he extracted a promise from Coste to do a translation and promised that he would be handsomely rewarded for his efforts.

At the time Locke did not inform Coste of the identity of the work to be translated. This Coste learned only when he opened a packet Locke arranged to have delivered after his death. It contained *Two treatises* with Locke's manuscript corrections. The packet also contained a letter recounting their interview and repeating Locke's promise that Coste would be well rewarded when he presented the finished translation to Locke's executor, his nephew Peter King. Coste dutifully began work on the translation.²⁹ When Anthony Collins subsequently informed him that the intended payment would be a derisory £10, however, Coste abandoned the project and burned his manuscript. He had previously been passed over in Locke's will, a slight that both La Motte and Des Maizeaux regarded as a stain on Locke's memory.³⁰ This further slight made matters worse. With few exceptions, Coste

²⁷ La Motte, 'La Vie de Coste', 242-44.

²⁸ Peter Laslett, ed., *John Locke: Two treatises of government* (rev. edn., Cambridge, 1963), 24-25.

²⁹ La Motte, 'La Vie de Coste', 243-45.

³⁰ Des Maizeaux complained to Shaftesbury that Locke enriched some who were undeserving, while he ignored others, notably Coste, who had served him well for years (Public Record Office 30/24/27/17, Des Maizeaux to Shaftesbury, 10 February 1705). Des Maizeaux also wrote to La Motte to the same effect. La Motte replied that those in Amsterdam who had held Locke in high regard were scandalized by his ingratitude (BL, Add.Ms.4286/11, 6 January 1705 n.s.).

James Dybikowski

translated no additional work by Locke, although he revised previously translated ones, initially without pleasure.³¹

Whatever their personal differences, Coste drafted a handsome elegy days after Locke's death – 'plein de mon sujet' – and read his manuscript to Lady Masham before he sent it to his friend Jacques Bernard for publication in *Nouvelles de la république des lettres*.³² Generous and uncritical, it focuses on Locke the man rather than his works. It praises his love of truth and order, his delight in the use of reason, his vivacity, modesty and integrity and his habit of accommodating himself to the capacities and strengths of those he encountered. No one, Coste roundly declares, had worked more effectively for the public good in Europe in his time than Locke. He reissued the elegy in editions of *Essai philosophique* from 1729 not because, he said, Locke needed praise from him, but to witness the service he had performed in perpetuating his memory.³³ Its republication constituted his reply to the friends of Locke.

Coste and Shaftesbury

After Coste left Oates, the third Earl of Shaftesbury took him under his wing. Coste spent nearly six months with him and, even after he accepted a tutoring position with Edward Clarke at Chipley in Somerset, they remained in close touch by correspondence and occasional visits. Coste relied heavily on Shaftesbury's letters and support while he doggedly persevered in a position where he was not only geographically isolated, but dependent on an employer

³¹ The exceptions are his translation of Locke's account of the first Earl of Shaftesbury, done at the request of the third Earl (Hampshire County Record Office (HCRO), 9M73/G232, Coste to James Harris, 27 December 1738 n.s.) and Locke's exchanges with Limborch on free will (*Correspondance littéraire du Président Bouhier*, no. 14, 175). On his lack of pleasure in revising his translation of *Some thoughts concerning education* in particular, see HCRO, 9M73/G255/7, Coste to Shaftesbury, 23 August 1706; 9M73/G255/8, 20 September 1706. Coste was irritated by Locke's figurative language and inclined to abandon translation altogether. This irritation is reflected in his translator's introduction.

³² *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* (February, 1705), 154-77; HCRO, 9M73/G232, Coste to James Harris, 27 December 1738 n.s.

³³ See *Essai philosophique*, XVIII.

Pierre Coste's critique of Locke's moral theory

who was depressive, isolated and increasingly hostile. Locke had been a passing subject of their correspondence before a series of seminal letters in 1709, although only those from Coste dealing with Locke survive.

In the first of these key letters of 7 May 1709, Coste basks in Shaftesbury's praise for a little defense of virtue he had recently penned against Locke's insults.³⁴ He reports that the more he thought about it, the more convinced he became not only of the falsity, but also of the baseness of Locke's principles. His critique, it appears, took the form of an imaginary debate. One of the parties is the Cynic philosopher Crates, who emphasizes the importance of emotional detachment from worldly goods and who values good and fine actions as well as the pleasures derived from commerce with the muses. He is plainly intended to mirror Shaftesbury and his values. Crates is opposed by the Assyrian King Sardanapallus, immortalized by Aristotle as the paradigm of a life of base pleasure and slavish gratification.³⁵ For him, nothing is worth having other than the pleasures that result from greed, drunkenness and decadence. Coste represents Locke as siding with Sardanapallus. It is a hard-hitting and provocative attack which only seems plausible if one ignores all the indications in Locke's *Essay* and elsewhere that the pleasures Locke singles out as exemplars do not collapse into those desired by Sardanapallus. Locke carefully distinguishes the pleasures of the mind, including those taken in music, rational conversation with a friend and the well-directed search for and discovery of truth, from the pleasures of the body.³⁶ The supreme pleasure he praises, in the manner of the *Psalms*, is that taken in God's presence 'with [whom] there is fulness of joy and pleasure for evermore'.³⁷

The critique of Locke's moral theory is a point on which Coste's and Shaftesbury's thinking powerfully converges. Coste's letter of 7 May also includes his initial response to the manuscript of Shaftesbury's *Sensus communis*, which contained obliquely

³⁴ HCRO, 9M73/G255/23, Coste to Shaftesbury, 17 May 1709.

³⁵ Aristotle, *NE*, 1095b22.

³⁶ Locke, *Essay*, II.20.§18.

³⁷ Locke, *Essay*, II.21.§41.

expressed criticism of Locke. It also precedes by weeks a letter from Shaftesbury to Michael Ainsworth, a student at Oxford whose education he was financing, and by months another to General Stanhope in both of which he strongly attacks Locke's moral theory.³⁸ The letter to Ainsworth was published posthumously in 1716 in a collection of letters from Shaftesbury to Ainsworth.³⁹ Shaftesbury's adverse references to Locke in print became more transparent in 1710 with the publication of *Soliloquy: or advice to an author*.

A central theme of Shaftesbury's attacks is that Locke's view of virtue is no different than that of Hobbes for whom it has no natural foundation and is based on nothing stronger than convention or arbitrary decree, whether it is made to depend on fashion, custom, the law of the commonwealth or even God's law, which, on Shaftesbury's account of Locke, depends on nothing other than his power and will, whatever he pleases it to be.

Shaftesbury had struck a contrasting tone on Locke and his *Essay* in an earlier letter to Ainsworth on 24 February 1707. There he writes: 'No one has done more towards the Recalling of Philosophy from Barbarity ... No one has opened a better or clearer Way to Reasoning ... into Religion.'⁴⁰ Shaftesbury was responding to religious and academic critics who attacked Locke for the role he assigned to reason in matters of religious faith, which, as Shaftesbury sees it, provides the only real defense against religious enthusiasm and fanaticism. As Shaftesbury later explained to Stanhope, he concealed his philosophical differences with his old tutor as a matter of policy, given that Locke's critics were intent on beating back his genuine accomplishments and undermining in the process such notable latitudinarians as Tillotson, Barrow and Chillingworth.

³⁸ Shaftesbury's letter to Ainsworth is dated 3 June 1709. See Rand, *The Life, unpublished letters and philosophical regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury*, 403-5. The letter to Stanhope is dated 7 November 1709 (Rand, *Life*, 413-17).

³⁹ *Several letters written by a noble Lord to a young man at the University* (London, 1716).

⁴⁰ *Several letters written by a noble Lord* (London, 1716), 3-7.

Pierre Coste's critique of Locke's moral theory

In his letter to Ainsworth of 3 June 1709, however, Shaftesbury's focus is different, notably his concern about the comfort freethinkers, such as Matthew Tindal, derived from Locke's philosophy. From this perspective, Shaftesbury sees Locke as dangerous, far more so than Hobbes whose authoritarian political theory immunized readers from his influence. He argues that Locke, as much as Hobbes, holds the ideas of order and virtue to be without natural foundation and, in particular, without foundation in the human mind, following from his rejection of innate ideas. Shaftesbury prefers to call such ideas 'conatural', since the claim is not, as Locke would have it, whether an infant at birth already has them, but whether they inevitably arise in human beings in virtue of their constitution. Nor for him is innateness a claim about the innateness of propositions concerning right and wrong, but rather of the human affection for society. For, he writes to Stanhope, Locke views virtue and morality as 'law' established by a law-maker, leading him into 'labyrinths' from which he cannot extricate himself. To Ainsworth, he concludes that Lockean virtue 'has no other measure, law, or rule, than fashion and custom; morality, justice, equity, depend only on law and will, and God ... is, free to anything, that is however ill: for if He wills it, it will be made good; virtue may be vice, and vice virtue in its turn if he pleases.' Locke may protest, as he does, that God supplies a true foundation for morality, but the protest is hollow so far as Shaftesbury is concerned because it merely makes morality depend on another will.

Soon after Coste communicated his 'little defense' of virtue to Shaftesbury against Locke's insults, he began to translate Shaftesbury's *Sensus communis*. He diligently communicated a string of detailed queries and suggestions to Shaftesbury as well as the draft of a preface designed to make the work more accessible to continental readers. Among other things, he proposed to add a note on Locke at the point where Shaftesbury personates a relativist, who is skeptical whether there is any other basis for so called 'common sense' in religion, policy or morals. In support, he cites the differences of opinion that exist on all these issues. As he concludes his argument, he claims that such a view is not only held by Hobbes, but also by 'our most admir'd modern Philosophers'

who maintain ‘that Virtue and Vice had, after all, no other Law or Measure, than mere Fashion and Vogue.’⁴¹ Coste’s proposed note identifies Locke as the person Shaftesbury had in mind. Shaftesbury wrote to instruct Coste to delete the reference to Locke, but Coste, after a delay, reported it was too late to do so.⁴² Coste was confident, however, that the note, with its artful reference to Locke, would not upset him:

Je n’ai pû découvrir de moi-même à qui en veut ici mon Auteur: mais un de mes Amis qui a fréquenté long-temps en Angleterre les meilleures Compagnies, & qui connoît les bons Livres de ce País-là, m’a assuré qu’il s’agit ici de Mr. Locke, qui dans son *Essai sur l’Entendement* appelle la Vertu la *Loi d’Opinion* (Liv. II. Chap. 28. §7.10.) & la *Loi de Coûtume*, §13.⁴³

The note identifies the textual basis for attributing such a view to Locke. It fails to mention, however, that Locke had addressed and disowned a similar interpretation proposed by James Lowde in his *Discourse concerning the nature of man*.⁴⁴ Locke’s response to Lowde appeared from the second edition of the *Essay* onwards and his rebuttal appears in Coste’s translation.⁴⁵ Locke observes that Lowde’s claim relies on his reading of *Essay* II.28, but he observes that a careful reading of this chapter, among others, shows his view to be altogether different.

Locke argues that when he connects the *ideas* of virtue and vice to the law of opinion at *Essay* II.28, his object is not to say what virtue and vice are of themselves, but what actions people generally use these expressions to designate, notwithstanding the claims of objectivity they may make on behalf of those claims.⁴⁶ In particular, his intention is not to distinguish true moral

⁴¹ *Sensus communis: An Essay on the freedom of wit and humor* (London, 1709), 27-32.

⁴² HCRO, 9M73/G255/41, Coste to Shaftesbury, undated.

⁴³ *Essai sur l’usage de la raillerie* (The Hague, 1710), 42-43.

⁴⁴ James Lowde, *A Discourse concerning the nature of man, both in his natural and political capacity* (London, 1694; reprint New York and London, 1979), Preface to the Reader; ch. III.2.

⁴⁵ *Essai philosophique*, Preface de l’auteur, XXXIII-XXXV.

⁴⁶ *Essay*, II.28. §10.

Pierre Coste's critique of Locke's moral theory

propositions from those that are false, but merely to identify the origin of moral *ideas* that figure in moral propositions, true or false, and to show that these ideas can be constructed from simple ideas derived from experience and reflection.⁴⁷

For Locke, the law of nature is at the foundation of true and immutable moral laws. In principle, these laws are discoverable by unaided reason and are the subject of a demonstrative science, even if philosophers have failed to make significant progress in establishing a complete body of ethics on such a basis. For that reason, human beings have been compelled to rely on assistance from divine revelation. For Locke, moral laws in fact depend on God's will, but they do not underlie true morals simply because God willed them. While the laws God promulgates are the foundation of true moral judgments, God, by virtue of his goodness and wisdom, directs human beings to act for the best.⁴⁸

The variety of moral opinions so often cited to justify moral conventionalism is used by Locke solely as an argument against innate practical principles and ideas.⁴⁹ Where Shaftesbury infers that Locke thereby rejects the objectivity of morals, Locke is at pains to separate these issues from the outset. Locke likewise makes it clear that to deny the innateness of moral rules, expressible as propositions with a truth value, is not to deny the existence of innate inclinations that do not function as principles of knowledge, but operate simply on the will and appetite.⁵⁰ Shaftesbury in his letter to Stanhope appears to have had in mind something like the latter. For Locke the purpose of moral rules is to regulate and restrain such inclinations.⁵¹

Locke's conception of moral rules sets him markedly apart from Shaftesbury. For him, moral rules depend on law while law depends on the existence of a law maker possessed of the power to reward and punish and, in God's case, to do so in an after life.⁵²

⁴⁷ *Essay*, II.28.§14.

⁴⁸ *Essay*, II.28.§8.

⁴⁹ *Essay*, I.3.§1.

⁵⁰ *Essay*, I.3.§3.

⁵¹ *Essay*, I.3.§13.

⁵² *Essay*, I.3.§12, In the *Essay*, Locke subsequently stipulates that his use of the expressions 'virtue' and 'vice' is relegated to the law of opinion

When Locke unpacks the idea of a duty, which he substitutes in the *Essay* for the notion of virtue, he claims that it implies the ideas of God, Law, Obligation, Punishment and a Life after this. Like Bayle and unlike Locke, Shaftesbury accepts the possibility of a virtuous atheist, although he concedes that theism's world-view supports virtue more strongly than atheism ever could.⁵³ Theism provides this support through God's example and its assurance of divine superintendence reflecting and reinforcing the moral order. It does not do so by conceiving God as a lawgiver.⁵⁴ For Shaftesbury, virtue, grounded in natural affection and practiced for its own sake, contributes to self-enjoyment and human happiness, while its absence guarantees a miserable life.⁵⁵ Like the ancient philosophers by whom he was powerfully inspired, Shaftesbury transforms pre-philosophical ideas about happiness as well as pre-philosophical conceptions of the self in defense of his view. Locke disagrees, although the depth of his disagreement only emerges in *Reasonableness of Christianity*. There he is openly pessimistic that happiness can plausibly be regarded as a natural end or product of virtue, while he accepts happiness at the same time as the supreme motive of human action. He resorts to a conception of morality as law not to weaken or undermine its objectivity, but to provide a compelling motive for acting out of duty in view of its non-natural consequences.⁵⁶ As he observes, if compliance with duty could be adequately motivated simply as the natural product and consequence of compliance, there would be no need to view morality as law.

Coste further commented on the relation of Shaftesbury to Locke's philosophy following the posthumous publication of Shaftesbury's letters to Ainsworth.⁵⁷ Extracts of his letter reviewing that correspondence as well as a Cartesian work by Abbé

and reputation, while he identifies objective morality by 'duty' and 'sin' (I.28.§7). This use may have confused some readers about his intentions.

⁵³ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 1: 261-62.

⁵⁴ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 1: 268.

⁵⁵ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 1: 280 ff.

⁵⁶ Locke, *Essay*, II.28.§4-6.

⁵⁷ *Several letters written by a noble Lord* (London, 1716).

Pierre Coste's critique of Locke's moral theory

Genest were published in *Nouvelles de la république des lettres*, whose editor, Jacques Bernard, was a longstanding friend.⁵⁸ Coste sympathizes with the Abbé's defense of innate ideas and uses it to attack Locke's rejection of the doctrine. He argues that Locke cannot consistently reject the doctrine while he accepts that the nature of the human soul remains unknown. Coste retreated from this position in a second letter, however, when he encountered criticism from unnamed sources that he misunderstood the basis of Locke's claim. For, Coste represents his critics as arguing, Locke does not reject innate ideas from an inventory of the mind's contents, as Coste had implied, but justifies his position epistemologically and, in particular, through his account of the formation of ideas from sense experience and reflection. Coste answered these critics feebly. He claimed unconvincingly that his point was directed not against Locke, but only against those philosophers who unqualifiedly claimed that the mind at birth is a *tabula rasa*.

When Coste turns to Shaftesbury's correspondence with Ainsworth, he expresses admiration for his critique of Locke, but blunts his praise of other aspects of Locke's philosophy, which he finds exaggerated. The Locke who emerges from Coste's letter is not the figure he had praised in his elegy a decade earlier who had done more for the public good in Europe than anyone else in his time. On the contrary, he constitutes a greater danger to morals and religion than Hobbes. Coste's commentary provoked a strong reaction from Anthony Collins, who restrained his initial impulse to respond in print, as we shall see.

In 1709 Coste was asked to produce a revised version of his translation of Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity*, the earlier edition then being out of print.⁵⁹ On rereading the work, a natural occasion offered itself, Coste wrote to Shaftesbury, to defend virtue against Locke. This time he defends it not by way of

⁵⁸ *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* (November-December 1716), 762-67; (January-February 1717), 124-28. For Coste's longstanding friendship with Bernard, see HCRO, 9M73/G255/42, Coste to Shaftesbury, undated.

⁵⁹ BL, Add.Ms. 4286/89, La Motte to Des Maizeaux, 24 October 1709 n.s.; HCRO, 9M73/G255/37, Coste to Shaftesbury, undated

James Dybikowski

commentary on Shaftesbury, but his philosophy nevertheless supplies the inspiration.

In *Reasonableness*, Locke argues that while in principle there is no need to rely on anything other than human reason to demonstrate God's existence or his moral attributes, reason is not generally employed for this purpose. On the contrary, priests claim that reason has nothing to do with religion the better 'to secure their Empire'.⁶⁰ So far as virtue and the obligation to act virtuously are concerned, reason is left even worse off. Unaided by revelation, it had failed to demonstrate the truth of a complete body of ethics from self-evident principles. Even if it had been successful in this undertaking, it would still be necessary to motivate human beings to act on that knowledge in view of the powerful obstacles constituted by 'Men's Necessities, Passions, Vices, and mistaken Interests'.⁶¹ Earlier philosophers, Locke acknowledges, claimed that virtue perfects an exalted human nature, but in this life virtue and prosperity are not often seen in each other's company. Virtue, accordingly, requires help from religion and, in particular, the promise of a future state of rewards and punishments that only Christian revelation convincingly provides to mankind in general: 'Upon this foundation, and upon this only, Morality stands firm'.⁶² By morality, Locke is clear that he has in mind a law which functions as an 'eternal, immutable Standard of Right' as he did in the *Essay*.⁶³

⁶⁰ Locke, *Reasonableness of Christianity*, 143.

⁶¹ Locke, *Reasonableness of Christianity*, 149.

⁶² Locke, *Reasonableness of Christianity*, 163. See the draft of Shaftesbury's critical letter to an unnamed friend in response to a copy of a letter sent to him addressed by Locke to Collins in which Locke had remarked that in this life there was 'no solid satisfaction but in the consciousness of doing well, and in hopes of another life.' There Shaftesbury, responding to the comment about another life, says that he would never have guessed that these were the sentiments of a dying philosopher. Shaftesbury would have his friend be mindful only of doing good for good's sake 'without any farther regards' to future rewards and punishments (Rand, *Life*, 344-47, Shaftesbury to a friend, 2 December 1704).

⁶³ Locke, *Reasonableness of Christianity*, 140.

Pierre Coste's critique of Locke's moral theory

In his letter to Shaftesbury, Coste claims that Locke, in defending the value of the Christian gospel, relies on the fatal concession that virtue and prosperity are not often found together in this life. As a result, the inconveniences of virtuous living are clear and because of that, Locke argues, virtue enjoyed little support before Christianity apart from threadbare commendations from ancient philosophers. Locke's position Coste once more compares with that of Sardanapallus. He adds that Locke shows his ignorance of ancient philosophy, a point on which Shaftesbury fully agrees. Part of what Coste owes to Shaftesbury is a new appreciation of what the ancient philosophical tradition has to offer, the Socratic tradition in particular, to a proper understanding of why one should live virtuously.

Coste wrote to Shaftesbury that he thought he would risk nothing in exposing 'une satire si scandaleuse'. He was confident that he would not attract adverse notice of his cause or person by adding two critical notes to the edition, whose text he also communicated to Shaftesbury. The text of these notes corresponds closely to that published in the 1715 and later editions of *Le Christianisme raisonnable*. He openly acknowledges to Shaftesbury that he would not even have noticed the difficulty in Locke's position had it not been for him.

In his translator's introduction to *Le Christianisme raisonnable*, Coste had already announced that he did not accept all of Locke's reasoning. The proof, he says, would be found in his notes.⁶⁴ He adds that he could easily have increased their number had he taken it upon himself to criticize Locke's interpretations of Scripture in the early chapters of *Le Christianisme raisonnable*, but readers could do that for themselves without his assistance. Coste's notes are in Chap. XIV, section 4, in the accepted division of the text for which he was responsible. The more significant note appears immediately after Locke's observation that since virtue and prosperity do not often accompany each other in our experience,

⁶⁴ *Le Christianisme raisonnable*, I, iii. See Goldgar, *Impolite learning*, 126, who cites this passage and the notes below and translates from the relevant passages. She does not analyze, however, the nature of Coste's disagreement.

James Dybikowski

virtue did not have many followers prior to Christianity.⁶⁵ Coste argues that to reason on Locke's principle implies that conduct diametrically opposed to virtue is the most advantageous in this world. Were it not for the hope of great happiness in an after life, it would be better to be a scoundrel rather than sincere, an ingrate rather than grateful, hard and lacking compassion rather than generous and benevolent. With all this Coste strongly disagrees. He is convinced that vice is less proper to render us happy than virtue. Christian revelation does indeed offer a powerful motive for virtuous living, but the point can be acknowledged without diminishing the motives to acting virtuously that are themselves sufficient and independent of these rewards. It is worth noting even if only in passing that this objection is independent of the one previously canvassed that he undermines any natural or objective foundation for virtue.

The second note relates to a passage in which Locke claims that while ancient philosophers praised the beauty of virtue, they left her essentially unendowed.⁶⁶ Coste argues that the ancient philosophical schools, notably the Socratic, the Cynic and the Stoic, esteemed virtue for itself, and moral integrity over utility. Quoting Horace and Juvenal, he claims that some ancients were prepared to choose virtue even unendowed by the goods of fortune, although he also argues that virtue pursued for its own sake is more advantageous even if an after life is not taken into account. His note's partiality for this ancient philosophical tradition strongly reflects Shaftesbury's influence on his ideas. In his early sketch of the history of philosophy that prefaced *Cours entiers de philosophie*, he had strongly attacked Stoic moral theory as altogether extravagant, being more subtle than right. Even in his sympathetic treatment of Socrates, moreover, he approved of his belief in a future state of rewards and punishments in view of the incapacity of human beings to be perfectly happy in this life. Indeed, his use of Horace and Juvenal to make his current point reflects his correspondence with Shaftesbury on Horace in particular and Shaftesbury's account of him as re-embracing Stoic

⁶⁵ *Le Christianisme raisonnable*, I, 320-22.

⁶⁶ *Le Christianisme raisonnable*, I, 326-27.

Pierre Coste's critique of Locke's moral theory

views after a flirtation with Epicureanism in his role at the court of Augustus.⁶⁷

Coste is on safer ground in the contrast he draws between an ancient view of virtue and Locke's than he had been in his complaints about Locke's Hobbism. That said, he does not manage his objection fairly. Locke's argument in *Reasonableness of Christianity* does not warrant Coste's inference that in this life vice is the most advantageous course to follow. Even if there are obstacles and inconveniences to living virtuously, it does not follow that being a scoundrel, an ingrate and devoid of compassion is the most advantageous way of living. Locke expressly rejects this view in the *Essay* where he argues that 'wicked Men have not much the odds to brag of, even in their present possession; nay all things rightly considered, have, I think even the worse part here.'⁶⁸ For Locke, the difficulty is that the this worldly incentives to living virtuously fall short and not that the incentives are loaded in favour of vice. Coste was so intent on showing Locke to be a fellow traveler of the infamous Sardanapallus that he attributes to him a view there is no reason to think that he held or to which he committed himself.

Anthony Collins and Pierre Des Maizeaux

On 9 February 1717 Anthony Collins' vast library was in the process of being shipped by water from London to his new residence in rural Essex. He wrote that day to his friend Des Maizeaux that he could not send him a promised paper because Bernard's journal had been sent with the rest of his books.⁶⁹ His reference is to Jacques Bernard's *Nouvelles de la république des lettres*. The significance of the reference becomes clear in a letter to Des Maizeaux, dated 28 February 1717.⁷⁰ Collins writes that he

⁶⁷ For this, see my forthcoming paper 'Letters from Solitude: Pierre Coste's Correspondence with the third Earl of Shaftesbury' in *Les Réseaux de correspondance en Europe (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles): matérialité et représentation*, ed. Antony McKenna, Jens Häselser et Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire, Publications de l'Université de Saint-Etienne, 109-33.

⁶⁸ Locke, *Essay*, II.21. §70.

⁶⁹ BL, Add.Ms. 4282/123-24.

⁷⁰ BL, Add.Ms. 4282/125-26.

James Dybikowski

had changed his mind about the promised paper. Instead he was sending remarks on Benedict Pictet's *Traite contre l'indifference des religions*, whose second edition targets Collins' *Discourse of free-thinking*, for publication in a Dutch based periodical to which Des Maizeaux was a regular contributor, *Nouvelles litteraire*.⁷¹ Collins changed his mind because, on reflection, he was unwilling to publish anything critical of Shaftesbury, which would have been unavoidable had he written the promised piece against Coste. These clues show that Collins had intended to respond to a letter from Coste published in *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* in which he comments on Shaftesbury's references to Locke in posthumously published correspondence. Shaftesbury's friends, Collins observes, would take such criticism 'very unkindly from me'. Collins had enjoyed Shaftesbury's regard and he, unlike Coste, had referred to Locke by name only in private correspondence.

Collins then adds:

Thus much I owe to the memory of M^r Locke, as to think of some plan of a vindication of him from the treatment of M^r Le Clerc & M^r Coste; who both servily flattered him during his life and made panegyrics upon him immediately after his death. M^r Coste not only in his Travels thro France & Holland, but in republishing works, which he thought it a glory to translate, has acted the part of a calumniator both in the manner of attacking him, and in the attacks themselves which are the efforts of a man who has Persons & not things in view. I think that deserves to be calld servile flattery, which is said to a man in his life time, & contradicted afterwards.

From this last, it is clear that Collins had not only Coste's letter to *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* in mind, but also his notes to *Le Christianisme raisonnable*, which, as Goldgar shows, is the

⁷¹ *Nouvelles litteraires* 5, 24 April 1717, 267-72. The published letter, identified as by the author of the *Discourse of free-thinking* is dated 28 February 1717. For Des Maizeaux's connection with this journal, see Almagor, *Pierre Des Maizeaux (1673-1745), journalist and English correspondent for Franco-Dutch periodicals, 1700-1720*.

Pierre Coste's critique of Locke's moral theory

only republished edition that could plausibly have occasioned his comments.⁷² Both reflect the influence of Shaftesbury's ideas and have their critical sights trained on Locke's moral theory. Since these ideas took their hold on him only after Locke's death, the charge of servile flattery that Collins entertains in passing is without substance.

As Goldgar has also observed, Collins' letter to Des Maizeaux set the stage and provided the model for the anonymous letter from the friends of Locke in Des Maizeaux's *A Collection of Several Pieces of Mr. John Locke* three years later.⁷³ That letter does not refer to Shaftesbury, although a draft accuses Coste of doing to 'the late Incomparable Earl of Shaftesbury' what he had done to Locke.⁷⁴ This passage, in any case untrue, was irrelevant and excised from the published version. This published letter, robbed of the context provided by Coste's letter to *Nouvelles de la république des lettres*, or any more immediate occasion, relies on the contrast between Coste's supposed dealings with Locke while he was still alive as well as his elegy, on the one hand, and his treatment of Locke, on the other hand, 'in several Writings, and in his common Conversation throughout France, Holland, and England'.

In February 1715 Jean Barbeyrac, the well-known natural law theorist, wrote to Des Maizeaux about Coste's new edition of Locke's *Essay* that was about to appear that year.⁷⁵ He notes that it was intended to include notes critical of Locke. He adds that while a book may be excellent, it, as with any other book, is bound to have weaknesses. It is no bad thing, he argues, to note objections politely, provided that they have some foundation. There is no way of knowing what criticisms Coste intended to publish at this time, for he instructed La Motte not to print his notes. Critical notes began to appear from 1729 onwards, albeit not in significant numbers and only on a restricted range of topics.⁷⁶ None of these

⁷² Goldgar, *Impolite learning*, 124 ff.

⁷³ Goldgar, *Impolite learning*, 124.

⁷⁴ BL, Add.Ms.4282/174-75.

⁷⁵ BL, Add.Ms.4281/28, Barbeyrac to Des Maizeaux, 15 February 1715 n.s.

⁷⁶ See Jørn Schøsler, 'Les éditions de la traduction française par Pierre Coste de l'*Essay concerning human understanding* de Locke', *Actes du*

James Dybikowski

notes relate to the passages in the *Essay* that Coste identified as the basis of Shaftesbury's critique of Locke and his comparison of his view with that of Hobbes. When Coste reprinted his elegy of Locke, in the 1729 edition of *Essai philosophique*, he did so without also including the critique of the *Essay*'s moral theory that had provoked Collins.

Conclusion

When the friends of Locke charged Coste with having 'aspers'd and blacken'd' Locke's character, they had in mind his attacks on Locke's moral theory initially reflected in his correspondence with Shaftesbury in 1709 and subsequently expressed in more muted tones in a string of publications. Locke's moral theory is certainly not beyond reproach or criticism, but the manner in which Coste managed the attacks he directed against it leaves much to be desired. For someone with his familiarity with Locke's text, it was not unreasonable for Locke's friends to suppose that as a critic, he should have done better and not unreasonable for them to conclude that there was a personal animus that helped to shape them. What Locke's friends failed to appreciate was that Coste's critique was not available to him while he lived with Locke and that it is inseparable from his conversion to Shaftesbury's approach to philosophy and its history. Indeed, Coste may well have encouraged Shaftesbury to be more open and transparent in his own critique of Locke.

James Dybikowski
University of British Columbia

VIIIe congrès des romanistes scandinaves, (Odense, 1981), 315-23; 'La diffusion de Locke en France', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 2001:04, (Oxford, 2001) for a succinct account of Coste's alterations from one edition to the next.

Richard Price and Francis Hutcheson – Does a Moral Sense Theory Make Ethics Arbitrary?

Nicholas Hunt-Bull

Moral sense ethical theories have been deeply unfashionable for at least two centuries. After a short heyday in eighteenth century Scotland, they largely disappeared from view, replaced by Utilitarianism and various forms of rationalism. The decline of moral sense theories explains the relative obscurity of their most prominent proponent, Francis Hutcheson. This essay is part of a project of reviving Hutchesonian sentimentalism¹ by pointing out its many virtues.

Before being discarded, the moral sense approach suffered considerable criticism. In this essay I will consider the objections raised by Richard Price, in his 1758 *Review of the principle questions and difficulties in morals*. Price's central and most interesting charge is that a moral sense theory makes morality arbitrary. By basing morality on certain facts of human nature – the responses of the moral sense and our benevolent instincts – it gives us, Price argues, an arbitrary and unjustified moral theory based on nothing more than passing taste.

Hutcheson's moral sense theory

Francis Hutcheson presents his moral sense theory in, *An inquiry into the original of our ideas of beauty and virtue* (1725) and *An essay on the nature and conduct of the passions and affections and illustrations on the moral sense* (1728). He begins by rejecting the psychological egoism of Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Mandeville, using arguments quite like those pressed a few years later by Bishop Joseph Butler. Like Butler, Hutcheson recognizes that human beings are frequently motivated by self-interest, yet that we also have significant concern for the happiness and flourishing of others. The most basic claim of egoism, that all our motives are essentially self interested, is falsified by obvious empirical

¹ I use 'sentimentalism' and 'the moral sense theory' as stylistic variants.

evidence.² In one of his more famous arguments, Hutcheson points out that if we were only motivated by self interest, then a man on his death bed would not care about what happened to his children or country after his death. Yet such people clearly care a great deal.

Hutcheson thus rejects the egoist's assertion that apparent altruism is really disguised selfishness. Hutcheson's distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding desires is reflected in his view that goods break down into two distinct classes: *natural goods* which we all desire as a means to pleasure, and *moral goods* which procure our disinterested approval whether or not they are advantageous to us.³ Our appreciation of the distinctly moral goods explains, for example, our stronger approval of a gallant enemy over a far more useful (and so more productive of natural good) traitor to the enemy's cause.

Hutcheson's theory is essentially epistemological. He wants to know how we *know* which actions are right, consequences are good, persons are praiseworthy, and so on. The long debate between sentimentalists and rationalists – reflected in the pages of

² *An essay on the nature and conduct of the passions and affections. With illustrations on the moral sense.* (3rd. edn., London, 1742, facsimile reproduction, with an introduction by Paul McReynolds, Gainsville, 1969), 22-6. For a further discussion of this argument see Thomas Mautner's editorial comments in his edition of Hutcheson's *On human nature: Reflections on our common systems of morality and on the social nature of man* (Cambridge, 1993), 74 & 120.

³ 'Had we no *Sense of Good* distinct from the *Advantage* or *Interest* arising from the external *Senses*, and the *Perceptions of Beauty* and *Harmony*; the *Sensations* and *Affections* toward a *fruitful Field*, or *commodious Habitation*, would be much the same with what we have toward a *generous Friend*, or any *noble Character*; for both are or may be *advantageous* to us: And we should no more admire any *Action*, or love any *Person* in a distant *Country*, or *Age*, whose *Influence* could not extend to us, than we love the *Mountains* of PERU, while we are unconcern'd with the *Spanish Trade*.' Francis Hutcheson, *An inquiry into the original of our ideas of beauty and virtue: In two treatises. I. Concerning beauty, order, harmony, design. II. Concerning moral good and evil* (5th. edn., London, 1753), 111.

Richard Price and Francis Hutcheson

the widely used *British moralists* anthology⁴ – concerns the ‘original’ (or origin) of our moral concepts.⁵ For Hutcheson, who accepted the empiricist science of his time, moral knowledge was the product of a sense analogous to our other senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch. He presumed that the senses are our means of gaining knowledge about the world, such that when working correctly they allow us to *get things right*. By analogy, he maintained, our moral knowledge is produced by a special mental faculty, the ‘moral sense’. Consistent with his rejection of psychological egoism, Hutcheson emphasizes the *disinterestedness* of the responses of the moral sense. It may well be in my interest to approve of a judge whose bias assists me, yet I find myself disapproving all the same. The moral sense is ‘*a Determination of our Minds to receive the simple Ideas of Approbation or Condemnation, from Actions observ’d, antecedent to any Opinions of Advantage or Loss to redound to our selves from them*’.⁶

When we analyse the responses of our moral sense, Hutcheson observed, we find it approves of benevolence. For Hutcheson the rightness of actions depends on the agent’s motives, and right actions are, as shown by the patterns of our moral approvals, those which display concern for the happiness of others. ‘If we examine all the Actions which are counted *amiable* any where, and inquire into the Grounds upon which they are *approv’d*,’ Hutcheson explains, ‘we shall find that in the Opinion of the Person who approves of them, they generally appear as BENEVOLENT, or flowing from *Good-will to others*, and a study of their happiness’.⁷

⁴ D D Raphael ed., *British moralists: 1650-1800* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1969; reprint Indianapolis, 1991).

⁵ Both Hutcheson and Balguy, his first significant critic who will be discussed later, use the term ‘original’ in the titles of their books, emphasizing the centrality of this issue.

⁶ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, 129.

⁷ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, 168. In his Latin textbook, translated into English as, *A short introduction to moral philosophy* (Glasgow, 1747), Hutcheson gives a more extensive list of ‘The Forms which move our approbation’. These include: ‘all kind affections...such propensions, abilities, or habits of mind as naturally flow from a kind temper,...or show a higher taste for the most refined enjoyments,...or lastly such dispositions as plainly

A sentimentalist such as Hutcheson has little trouble explaining the motivational force of moral judgements. This contrasts sharply with moral rationalists, for whom rightness is supposedly discovered by reason alone. Yet, how does having one's reason or 'understanding' discover the rightness of an action induce us to perform it, turning an 'is' into an 'ought'? As Hume more famously argued, borrowing extensively from arguments in Hutcheson's *Illustrations*, rationalists cannot explain our being motivated by our moral beliefs alone.⁸ We need desires as well as beliefs to move us to action. Contrary to rationalism, which standardly asserts that recognition of the right is sufficient motivation for doing it, Hutchesonian sentimentalism explicitly denies, given the motivational inertness of reason, what contemporary philosophers call 'motivational internalism'.⁹ People are motivated to do what they think is right not because of its rightness, but rather due to distinct desires we, as a matter of empirical fact, happen to have. One is our desire to be able to approve of our actions, and ourselves, which obviously motivates us to perform those actions we approve and avoid those we disapprove.¹⁰ A second is 'public spirit', our disinterested desire to promote public welfare. Since right acts are

exclude a narrow contracted selfishness aiming solely at its own interests or sordid pleasures.' 17.

⁸ Stephen Darwall, in 'Hutcheson on practical reason', *Hume studies*, (April 1997), XXIII, no.1, 73-89, shows that Hume's famous argument in the *Treatise* against rationalism, that reason can only be the slave of the passions, is borrowed from Hutcheson. 'Indeed, it is difficult to avoid the impression,' Darwall writes on page 73, 'that Hume had Hutcheson's *Illustrations*, as well as Hutcheson's *Letters* to Gilbert Burnet on his desk for easy reference while composing these sections.'

⁹ In this I disagree somewhat with Stephen Darwall, who discusses this issue at great length in chapter 8 of his *The British moralists and the internal 'ought': 1640-1740* (Cambridge, 1995).

¹⁰ See further John D Bishop, 'Moral motivation and the development of Francis Hutcheson's philosophy,' *Journal of the history of ideas*, 57, no. 2 (April 1996), 277-295, 285. Bishop discusses in greater detail the issues summarized in this paragraph, and traces a development in Hutcheson's later philosophy towards a more complex, and somewhat Stoical, account of moral motivation.

ceteris paribus ones that promote public welfare, we human beings are fortunately motivated to do them.

A first rationalist objection: Sentimentalism makes a category mistake

As its name suggests, sentimentalism derives our moral judgments from sentiments or feelings. Richard Price argues that this undermines the theory's ability to explain how moral judgments can apply to actions. When we make a moral judgment, we identify a particular action as right or wrong, good or bad, virtuous or vicious. As philosophers have frequently noted, the explicit content of moral judgments is quite clear: when we say, 'hiring scab labour is wrong', we assert that an action (hiring the replacement workers) has the property of wrongness. Price makes the striking claim that, were sentimentalism true, notions of right and wrong could not apply to actions.

If right and wrong denote effects of sensation, it must imply the greatest absurdity to suppose them applicable to actions: That is; the ideas of *right* and *wrong* and of *action*, must in this case be incompatible; as much so, as the idea of pleasure and a regular form, or of pain and the collisions of bodies. – All sensations, as such, are modes of consciousness, of feelings of a sentient being, which must be of a nature totally different from the particular causes which produce them. A *coloured body*, if we speak accurately, is the same absurdity with a *square sound*.¹¹

Price accuses the sentimentalist of making a category mistake by mixing objects of judgment (actions) with effects of sensation (pleasures and pains).¹²

Does the moral sense theory perpetrate a category mistake? Notice that sentiments, such as those generated by the moral sense,

¹¹ Richard Price, *A review of the principal questions in morals*, ed. D D Raphael (Oxford, 1948), 46.

¹² I borrow the term category mistake, of course, from Gilbert Ryle's *Concept of mind* (London, 1949), 16, where he explains that a category mistake 'represents the facts of mental life as if they belonged to one logical type or category (or range of types or categories), when they actually belong to another.'

are, in Price's terms, 'modes of consciousness'. That is, they are mental objects. Actions, on the other hand, are real things out there in the world. While we assume that there are certain relationships between our ideas and the world, they are clearly different kinds of things. Thus, if rightness is just a feeling, and feelings are just states of mind, then rightness is not some property out there in the world that we can meaningfully predicate of actions. 'Who can help seeing,' Price asks, 'that right and wrong are as absolutely unintelligible, and void of sense and meaning, when supposed to signify nothing true of actions, no essential, inherent difference between them; as the perceptions of the external and internal senses are, when thought to be properties of the objects that produce them?'¹³ Price claims that sentimentalism is senseless because it makes it impossible for us to recognize the 'essential, inherent difference' between right and wrong actions, which resides in the actions themselves, not merely in our minds.

A moral sense theorist can make an easy response to this objection. She does not equate responses of the moral sense with moral judgments. Rather, the role of the moral sense is to provide *evidence* for the moral judgments we make.¹⁴

What we perceive with the aid of our moral sense may or may not be a genuine property (such as the wrongness of killing innocent orphans), but it is not merely an emotive 'judgment' along the lines of 'killing innocent orphans – Yuck!' On Hutcheson's or any other plausible moral sense theory, moral judgments are said to rely upon experiences of responding to certain ideas (here the idea of killing the orphans) with certain sentiments (disapproval, I trust). Our moral judgments are built up using this evidence. Hutcheson

¹³ Price, *Review*, 47.

¹⁴ One of the reviewers for this journal asked the Euthyphro question—'do we have a feeling of approval for what we judge to be right or do we judge to be right what we approve of?' While a detailed answer would require considerable space, I take it that even my limited discussion of sentimentalist epistemology earlier in this essay should show that Hutcheson would probably grasp the second branch of the dilemma. For further consideration of suitable constraints on merely following one feelings, however, I recommend Adam Smith's *Theory of moral sentiments* (Oxford, 1976; reprint Indianapolis, 1982).

frequently states that the moral sense is ‘reflective,’ and this term makes obvious his debt to Locke who identified ‘reflection’ and ‘sensation’ as the only sources of our simple ideas.¹⁵ Working by reflection, the moral sense does not respond to external stimuli directly, but rather to ideas that are generated by the standard senses. Given an idea – to continue with the same example, the idea of a person killing innocent orphans for fun – we find in ourselves an immediate moral sentiment. These sentiments, which Hutcheson identifies as ‘approval’ and ‘disapproval’, are data from which we generate our (admittedly fallible) moral judgments. Thus, Hutcheson agrees with Price that the claim ‘a moral judgment is merely a certain sort of feeling’ is absurd, but can deny that he ever intended to suggest that view.

Hutcheson’s picture of moral judgment is reasonably complex. Furthermore there is an on going contemporary debate concerning whether Hutcheson is a moral realist or not. Were he a realist, then he would at least agree with Price that the world contains genuinely moral properties. While this is a complex question, I am inclined to take seriously Hutcheson’s assertion that when we approve of a virtuous person,

The admired Quality is conceived as the Perfection of the Agent, and such a one as is distinct from the *Pleasure* either in the Agent or the Approver...The Perception of the Approver, tho’ attended with Pleasure, plainly represents something quite distinct from this Pleasure; even as the Perception of *external Forms* is attended with Pleasure, and yet represents something distinct from this Pleasure. This may prevent many Cavils upon this Subject.¹⁶

Given this passage, I will assume that the relatively common interpretation of Hutcheson as a moral anti-realist (or ‘non-

¹⁵ John Locke, *Essay concerning human understanding* (Oxford, 1975), II, i, § 1-8, pp. 104-7.

¹⁶ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, 131.

cognitivist' in Frankena's terminology) is mistaken,¹⁷ and further assume that he and his rationalist critics agree at least on this.

A second rationalist objection: Sentimentalism cannot explain the reliability of our moral judgments

Hutcheson believes that our sensations of approval and disapproval are caused by our ideas, and that these responses provide evidence for our moral judgments. Especially when presented as a form of moral realism, this theory attracts some obvious objections. Perhaps the most serious problem concerns why, if we accepted Hutcheson's picture, we should consider our moral judgments reliable. My moral beliefs *might* happen to correspond to the moral facts of the world, but we want good evidence that they do.¹⁸ Imagine that I judge murder wrong, but a certain member of the Mafia judges it right. Perhaps this is a reflection, in each case, of our approvals: I happen to disapprove of murder, but the Mafioso approves of it. It may even be the case that we are each, given the sentimentalist's standards, well justified in holding to our conflicting moral conclusions. Our judgments differ, and while I may predict that one of us is mistaken, what grounds do I have for thinking that it is me who is right? A deeply repugnant form of relativism looms.

Price was not the first to identify Hutcheson's sentimentalism as a threat to the moral order. Hutcheson's first significant critic, John Balguy, writing only three years after the publication of Hutcheson's *Inquiry*, charged him with making moral judgment 'variable'. Consider what it means when I say an action is wrong:

Such an Action agrees not with my *Taste*; or is repugnant to my *Moral Sense*. What does this prove? Nothing more

¹⁷ This view is proposed most famously by William Frankena in his influential paper 'Hutcheson's moral sense theory', *Journal of the history of ideas* (1955), XVI, 356-375, and endorsed by many others, including Bernard Peach.

¹⁸ Price himself asks for a *guarantee* that our moral beliefs map onto the world. Here I consider a weaker – and so potentially more damning objection to sentimentalism if Hutcheson could not meet it – version of the objection.

Richard Price and Francis Hutcheson

than that the Action appears *wrong* to me. It is so far from proving it to be wrong in it self, that it does not prove the Action must have such an Appearance to any other Person. Another Man's *Moral Sense* may possibly be quite different from mine. And either his or mine may possibly be altered the next Minute. The bare Possibility of this, is an effectual Bar to such a Proof.¹⁹

Since our moral sense could vary so easily, Balguy thinks it obvious that such a sense could not be relied upon to tell us which actions are right and wrong.

How can Hutcheson, employing his epistemic methods, show that our moral judgments would be reliable? The easiest way to establish the reliability of our moral sentiments is to appeal to God. As long as an omni-benevolent God set up our sentiments as they happen to be, it is reasonable to assume that, if He selected one set of moral sentiments from the many of which human nature was capable, then He must have chosen the one (or ones, say benevolence and a moral sense) which it is best for us to have.²⁰ Price makes exactly this sort of appeal to divine benevolence himself to justify the reliability of our scientific beliefs. At times Hutcheson employs this reply himself, but it lacks a certain plausibility in our post-theistic times. Moreover, as Balguy notes, if God's having created the moral sentiments is used to establish the reliability of these sentiments, this just pushes the problem back a step. Now Hutcheson needs to explain how God could have discovered or decided which set of sentimental responses it is morally best for humans to have employing His own 'sentiments' (whatever these would be like). Balguy considers such a proposal obviously ridiculous, since God must be a being who makes decisions for good reasons. 'If no Reason can be given why the

¹⁹ John Balguy, *The Foundation of moral goodness* (2 vols., London, 1728-9; reprint, 2 vols. in 1., New York, 1976), vol.2, 58.

²⁰ Hutcheson makes this justificatory appeal to God most explicitly in his *Short introduction*, writing that part of God's work was 'granting to each being its proper nature, powers, senses, appetites, or reason, and every moral excellencies; and with a liberal hand supplying each one with all things conducive to such pleasure and happiness as their natures can receive', 73.

Deity should be *benevolently disposed* [to humanity], and yet we suppose him to be so; will it not follow, that he is influenced and acted by a blind, unaccountable Impulse?'²¹ While I am inclined to think that Balguy gets this conclusion too cheaply, I will turn to a different response Hutcheson could give to the reliability problem.

A more contemporary reply, one certainly consistent with Hutcheson's empiricist approach, is a direct appeal to the nature of the moral properties. Hutcheson argues that these properties (such as the rightness of giving to charity) are partly constituted by their tendency to produce certain responses in suitably situated subjects. As Price recognized, in this way they are rather like colour and flavour the standard 'secondary qualities' of matter. For Price, however, secondary qualities can play no explanatory role because they 'are not real qualities of bodies' and so are '*unintelligible*'.²² His language makes clear that Price fully embraces the primary/secondary distinction (and the lower status of the latter) for how else could he conclude that a 'coloured body' is an absurdity.²³

Giving moral properties the same ontological status as colours certainly demotes them from the higher status Price aspires to on their behalf, but I would argue that it is much too quick to say that this would make them 'unreal'. Human beings have genuine experiences of colour, and colour talk and colour judgments play a significant role in our lives. We also have well established methods for evaluating and correcting our colour perceptions. I judge that a particular apple is green when it appears green to me under normal lighting conditions, I have no reason to think my eyesight is muddled by tiredness, and I have checked my judgment against the responses of other people. As Hutcheson observes 'we denominate objects from the appearances they make to us in a uniform medium, when our organs are in no disorder, and the object is not very

²¹ Balguy, *Foundation of moral goodness*, 10.

²² Price, *Review*, 46 & 46n; in his footnote, Price describes the 'unintelligibility of colour and other secondary qualities'.

²³ Price, *ibid*. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this journal for his/her helpful comments on this section of the paper.

distant from them.²⁴ This is not yet quite enough. Can our colour judgments be in error, even when we correct for migraine, bad lighting, great distances, and so on? Of course they can. Fortunately, we do not live alone, but in society, and are in a position to appeal for the aid of our fellows when our sense-organs go awry. The inter-subjective agreement of what Plato and J.S. Mill both call the ‘competent judges’ provide a standard for correction, education and improvement.²⁵ To sum up, we know how to confirm the colour of things, if ever in doubt we can check with others, and colour is a real enough property for Hutcheson’s purposes.

Hutcheson suggest that we analyse our responses to actions to draw out three distinct elements:

- (1) the idea of external motion, known first by sense...
- (2) apprehension or opinion of the affections in the agent, [i.e. the agent’s motives] inferred by our reason. *So far the idea of an action represents something external to the observer, really existing whether he had perceived it or not, and having a real tendency to certain ends.*
- (3) The perception of approbation or disapprobation arising in the observer, according as the affections of the agent are apprehended kind in their just degree, or deficient, or malicious. This approbation cannot be supposed an image of anything external, more than the pleasures of harmony, of taste, or smell. But let none imagine that calling the ideas of virtue and vice perceptions of a sense upon apprehending the actions and affections of another, does diminish their reality, more than the like assertions concerning all pleasure and pain, happiness or misery.²⁶

²⁴ Francis Hutcheson, *Illustrations on the moral sense*, ed., Bernard Peach (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), 163.

²⁵ For the passages on competent judged see Plato, *Republic* Book IX and John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapter 2.

²⁶ Hutcheson, *Illustrations*, 163-4; italics and breaks added by this author.

The Hutchesonian response I have just sketched provides an ontological response to an epistemological problem. Asked to explain why we should believe that our moral responses (and by extension the moral judgments which depend on them) accurately reflect the moral nature of the world, Hutcheson suggests that this moral nature is partially constituted by its tendency to produce certain moral responses of approval and disapproval in normal human subjects. Of course, if part of what it is for an action to be right is its having the tendency to produce a sentiment of approval in those who acquire an idea of it, then we will expect the moral sentiments to track the moral properties of the world. In the same way that red objects are, at base, those objects which ‘seem red to me’ under appropriate circumstances, right actions are those which will trigger a response of approval in a sufficiently well informed and otherwise normal human being.²⁷

A third rationalist objection: Sentimentalism makes morality arbitrary

In trying to escape the reliability problem, Hutcheson opens himself to what is rationalism’s most interesting objection to sentimentalism: that sentimentalism makes morality arbitrary. While Balguy, Price, and others, frequently attacked sentimentalism for degrading morality by associating it with lowly human instincts,²⁸ the arbitrariness charge suggests a distinct and interesting problem for Hutcheson. Here again Balguy led the way, arguing that ‘it seems an insuperable Difficulty in [Hutcheson’s] Scheme, that Virtue appears in it to be of an arbitrary and positive Nature; as entirely depending upon *Instincts*, that might originally have been otherwise, or even contrary to what they now are’.²⁹

It is further worth noting that this objection applies equally to either version of the previous response, the appeal to God’s benevolence or the attempt to identify the moral properties with the

²⁷ I am well aware that the phrase ‘otherwise normal’ packs in a great deal in this context!

²⁸ Balguy wrote that ‘Virtue is depreciated and dishonoured by so ignoble an Original.’ *Foundation of moral goodness*, 20.

²⁹ Balguy, *Foundation of moral goodness*, 8-9.

Richard Price and Francis Hutcheson

responses they normally produce in us. I will emphasize the latter approach, but analogous arguments could be (and were) given for the 'Author of Nature' response.

John Taylor of Norwich, a follower of Price and emphatic eighteenth century critic of Hutcheson, presents one version of the commonly made arbitrariness charge:

*instincts, or inclinations and aversions, are of an arbitrary, various and changeable nature; and, being infused by the mere will and pleasure of our maker into the constitutions of animals, and into the human constitution among the rest, might have been so different from what they are now, that we might have been strongly inclined to such objects of instinct and sense as we are now very averse to; and very averse to what we are now strongly inclined. Hence...upon the scheme we are now examining, virtue is of an arbitrary, positive, uncertain and mutable nature, to be apprehended, judged of and measured by every person according to his particular taste, and turn of constitution; as flowing from, and constituted by instincts, which might have been different from, or directly contrary to, what they now are.*³⁰

In this passage Taylor reflects a standard rationalist objection to sentimentalism. He complains that the moral sense approach fails to provide the right sort of justification for the demands of morality, as, for example, Kantian rationalism is supposed to do by appeal to the commands of reason. Perhaps my current instincts lead me to judge and act well, but these instincts could very well have been different, and I would then have judged differently. Thus, even if (as seemed to be the case with the particular individual Francis Hutcheson) my sentiments led me to the correct moral conclusions, I could never properly justify these judgments.

³⁰ John Taylor of Norwich, *An examination of the scheme of morality, advanced by Dr Hutcheson* (London, 1759), 23-4. Taylor is surprisingly enough overlooked by Thomas Mautner in his otherwise remarkably careful discussion of Hutcheson's early critics, and in his bibliography for Hutcheson's *On human nature*.

Having rejected reason, the sentimentalists can only rely for his moral beliefs on the sentiments he happens to have, and that is a matter of chance. Thus, lacking universal justification, sentimentalism is revealed to be ersatz morality. In the *Groundwork*, Kant concurs, commenting, ‘for all...moral laws properly so called...the ground of obligation here must not be sought in the nature of man or in the circumstances in which he is placed but *a priori* solely in the concepts of pure reason, and that every precept which rests on principles of mere experience...so far as it leans in the least on empirical grounds...may be called a practical rule but never a moral law.’³¹

While many modern readers associate the rationalist critique of sentimentalism most closely with Kant, he was just one part of a robust tradition. The charge of arbitrariness in particular was explored by Richard Price. A Welsh-born Dissenting minister, Price wrote his *A review of the principle questions in morals* as an attack on empiricist ethics, principally that of Hutcheson and Hume. D O Thomas, in his biography of Price, emphasizes the link between Price’s antagonism to the moral sense school and his rejection of the voluntarist strain in Calvinism.³² Price mobilized the same argument against Hutcheson and Hume as he used against his voluntarist opponents. If morality were the result of a divine act of will, as voluntarism assumes, then morality would, Price argued, be wholly arbitrary.³³ In Price’s day the term ‘arbitrary’ was mostly

³¹ Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the metaphysics of morals*, trans., Lewis White Beck (2nd. edn., New York, 1990), 5, Ak. IV, 389.

³² D O Thomas, *The honest mind: the thought and work of Richard Price* (Oxford, 1977). Price responded to the Euthyphro problem – Are things good because God loves them, or are things loved by God because they are good? – by (I believe correctly) adopting the second option. Calvin famously went with the first, on the grounds that we insult the deity if we pretend that anything could be good independent of God’s will. Thus, as Price noted, Calvinism makes goodness and rightness arbitrary, in the sense that the decrees of a dictator (even a wise and benevolent one who makes the correct decisions) are arbitrary, depending on what she happens to command rather than what is right.

³³ ‘It has been said, that the *will of God* is the foundation of truth. This is asserting what no one can understand. It is sacrificing to the single

used as a critical term applied to rulers or other authorities.³⁴ Arbitrary rule was despotic, capricious or tyrannical. Samuel Johnson in his *Dictionary of the English language*, which came out three years after Price's *Review*, gives two related definitions of the term: '1. Despotick; absolute; bound by no law; following the will without restraint. It is applied to both persons and things'; '2. Depending on no rule; capricious'.³⁵ We can see that calling a view of morality 'arbitrary' was a fairly strong insult. By contrast, non-arbitrary things are those which are a particular way *for a reason*.

The Calvinists gave God conceptual and ontological priority over the moral law. Thus, they refused to restrain God by requiring that He have any prior reason for creating the world as He chose to. For a strict voluntarist, the wrongness of murder is legislated by God as an act of will, and not – whatever Socrates may have argued in the *Euthyphro* – for any prior-existing reason. Divine might establishes divine rightness. Reflecting a theme from John Taylor quoted earlier, Price attacks empiricist ethics for making a parallel mistake to Calvin, by having morality rest on contingent matters of fact, in this case about human nature rather than God's will. Whether or not the sentimentalists were theological voluntarists, their theory, just like voluntarism, makes ethics 'ultimately arbitrary'.³⁶

Price begins his assault on Hutcheson on the very first page of the *Review*, by challenging Hutcheson's use of the term 'sense' in describing the moral faculty.

attribute of *will* all the divine perfections; and even...subverting it, and taking away the very possibility of it.' Price, *Review*, 234. See further, *Review*, 52, 85-89 and 108. For an introduction to the intellectual history of Calvinism, see part III of Charles Taylor, *Sources of the self: The making of modern identity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989).

³⁴ This is clearly reflected in the passages collected by the editors of the *Oxford English dictionary*, where the term is usually paired with 'capricious' or 'tyrannical'.

³⁵ Samuel Johnson, *A general dictionary of the English language* (London, 1755; reprint on CD-ROM, Cambridge, 1996). Exactly the same definitions and citations appear in Johnson's fourth edition of 1773.

³⁶ Thomas, *The honest mind*, 20.

Nicholas Hunt-Bull

From the term *sense*, which he applies to it, from his rejection of all the arguments that have been used to prove it to be an intellectual power, and from the whole of his language on this subject; it is evident, he considered it as the effect of a *positive constitution* of our minds, or as an *implanted* and *arbitrary* principle by which a *relish* is given us for certain moral objects and forms and aversion to others, similar to the relishes and aversions created by any of our other senses. In other words; our ideas of morality, if this account is right, have the same origin with our ideas of the sensible qualities of bodies, the harmony of sounds, or the beauties of painting or sculpture.³⁷

What does it mean to charge moral sense ethical theory with making morality arbitrary? Perhaps what worries Price is the danger that sentimentalism will make all our moral judgments 'false and delusive'. As John Mackie famously argued in the 1970s, whenever we express a moral judgment we purport to be attributing an objective property to the thing we approve. Yet, Mackie believes, there are no such properties: 'The assertion that there are objective values or intrinsically prescriptive entities or features of some kind, which ordinary moral judgments presuppose, is, I hold, not meaningless but false.'³⁸

Mackie is not dismayed by this conclusion, proposing an 'error theory' to explain the delusion of objective moral properties built into our everyday moral claims. Price would find such an approach repugnant. His view, which fears rather than embraces an error theory, attacks the moral sense approach precisely for its alleged failure to acknowledge the objective moral properties presupposed by our moral judgments. Absent these properties, all our judgments will be false. What, according to Price, Hutcheson does not recognize is the 'natural and universal apprehensions of mankind, that our ideas of right and wrong belong to the understanding, and

³⁷ Price, *Review*, 14-15.

³⁸ J L Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing right and wrong* (Harmondsworth, 1977), 41.

Richard Price and Francis Hutcheson

denote real characters of actions'.³⁹ Thomas, who is generally charitable to Price, argues that in his attack on Hutcheson, Price uses a circular argument. Price first uses the assumption that moral concepts are products of the 'understanding' to justify their objectivity, then assumes that our moral judgments are objective to show that (since sentimentalism cannot account for this objectivity) our moral judgments must be the work of the understanding! Thomas concludes, 'What in effect Price's arguments for the objectivity of moral judgment amount to is showing how the belief that they are objective is implicit in the opinions which we hold about the nature of moral judgment. He does not succeed in showing, what for his larger purposes he needs to show, that this belief is well grounded.'⁴⁰

While Price's arguments are problematic, he is certainly right that we commonly *believe* that our moral judgments are objective in a way that our feelings are not. How could a reliance on feelings, which can differ radically among human beings within and across cultures, possibly avoid leading us into extreme relativism of the 'it is right for me, but wrong for you', and the 'the Nazis were right from the Nazi point of view' sort? Further, even if morality, or at least the morality of some portion of humanity, was able to avoid collapsing into relativism, it would still be arbitrary. Given that human perceptual capacities *could* have been different, any morality based on human-nature-as-it-is will be arbitrary. We might, by miraculous good luck or divine assistance, find that human nature grounded the best of all possible moral systems, but we would not have the moral sense that we actually have *for the right sort of reason*.

The charge of arbitrariness is an interesting one, and one which relates in complex ways to the characteristics of sentimentalism. Our moral reactions are, as a matter of fact, the ones that they are. We abhor cruelty and approve selflessness and benevolence. We root for the underdog and boo greediness. Do these responses represent the world accurately? Perhaps they do, but this is essentially a metaphysical question, one which distinguishes

³⁹ Price, *Review*, 46.

⁴⁰ Thomas, *The honest mind*, 61.

different possible versions of sentimentalism on the basis of whether or not they endorse realism. Yet the sentimentalist's metaphysical stance makes no difference in evaluating this objection. At either extreme of moral realism or anti-realism the epistemological problem would be the same: how does our (a) recognizing these properties, *or* (b) having these attitudes, *justify* our moral judgments? My own instinct, when considering the contribution of our actual human nature to our morality, is to grant the critic's point: if morality is based on human nature,⁴¹ and human nature could have been different, then morality could have been different.⁴²

Notice that the moral sense position, while it relies on 'arbitrary' facts of human capacities and dispositions, concedes less that it might seem. I agree with Peter Railton's fairly uncontroversial claim that morality has necessarily to do with human well being, impartiality of treatment, and co-operation.⁴³ Morality would still concern our well being, even if what constituted human flourishing and a good human life was quite different. Similarly, Philippa Foot (in her essay 'Virtues and vices') argues that morality has necessarily to do with human well being. She argues that virtues are '*corrective*', in that they serve to correct characteristic failings of human nature.⁴⁴ The virtue temperance, for example, is a corrective for the characteristic human faults of greed, gluttony and arrogance. Were our characteristic faults different, then our virtues might have the same formal relationship to our failings, but they would (like the failings themselves) be different. There is nothing 'special' about the human nature we happen to have which picks it out as the best or correct one. If human nature were different, then morality would be different as well,⁴⁵ precisely because of the

⁴¹ Which it is.

⁴² Thus I accept a point which Balguy introduces as an objection.

⁴³ Peter Railton, 'Moral realism: Prospects and problems', in *Moral knowledge?* eds., Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and Mark Timmons (New York, 1996).

⁴⁴ Philippa Foot, 'Virtues and vices', *Virtues and vices* (Berkeley, 1978), 1-18, 8.

⁴⁵ But it isn't.

corrective nature of morality. Yet the task of morality, and the possible forms of our moral sentiments, is severely restricted by the role that morality plays. We humans have certain actual capacities and traits, methods of reasoning and sympathetic instincts. Recognizing these facts, we should work to make moral theories and moral persons as good as we can within the limitations of our nature. This is all the task that morality could possibly take on, and so more than enough for this essay.⁴⁶

Perhaps the response so far does not really address the arbitrariness that worries Price and other rationalist critics. Perhaps what they think is (objectionably) arbitrary about sentimentalism is the elements of the world it picks out through its approvals and disapprovals. Thus the critic suspects that we human beings *could* have been made such that we approved of murder or cruelty. Just as ‘positive laws’ can be unjust, perhaps what John Taylor of Norwich calls ‘arbitrary, positive, uncertain and mutable nature’ could induce us to make fallacious moral judgments. If we hold the world constant, but change our responses so that we approved of cruelty, does this make cruelty right for the sentimentalist? Would she be justified in thinking it right? If so, her moral view would be repulsive, not just arbitrary.

I believe that the specific content of morality actually limits quite strictly even what we could plausibly imagine to be right. As Hutcheson notes, considering our basic moral sentiments, there are significant constraints on the sorts of things we can approve.⁴⁷ Hutcheson thought it significant, and in this he was certainly right, that a ‘*commodious Habitation*’ could never produce in us the same quality of approval as a ‘*generous Friend*’. More than advantage is involved in moral approval, since our moral approvals rely on a prior judgment of the agent’s motives. Unless we think that we

⁴⁶ At this point one might reasonably ask whether the argument here is one Hutcheson could have used in his own defense. While I have not shown that Hutcheson *did* develop such an argument, I believe he *could* have. Foot’s corrective concept of virtues is implicit in Aristotle’s ethical texts. Thus Hutcheson could hardly have referred to Foot, but could easily have made use of the master himself.

⁴⁷ George Pitcher recognized this phenomenon more recently. See his ‘On approval’, *Philosophical review* (April 1958) 67, 195-211.

could approve of malicious motives, morality is hardly variable at all. Morality serves to promote and protect welfare, human flourishing, and what the Ancients called 'the good life'. Morally right action, which Hutcheson identifies with benevolence, promotes these things.

A critic might well accuse me of being too charitable to humanity when I claim that we could not approve (in any reasonable sense of 'approve') of malice.⁴⁸ Can we not easily imagine creatures rather like us that do exactly that? In his *Ethics, evil and fiction*, Colin McGinn imagines a disease which 'causes intense pain in us and at the same time interferes with our rational faculties in such a way as to make us judge that pain is good (this might be seen as a very clever virus that discourages its victims from curing themselves).'⁴⁹ Given our (imagined) tendency to judge pain good, McGinn wonders, would pain now be good? Obviously not. Pain reflects damage to our bodies done by diseases or injuries that it would be in our best interest to remedy, and a mix-up in our rational or sensitive faculties does not change that. Pain would still be bad, even if large numbers of people were under the temporary delusion that it was good.⁵⁰ Hutcheson would presumably add that causing pain, that is being malicious, would still be wrong even if we perversely began to approve of it. The sentimentalist faces no special problem here. Either, as victims of McGinn's disease, we systematically make mistakes of moral judgment, or we judge (more or less) correctly. When we apply our approvals incorrectly, we make an epistemic mistake, but working out how to correct such errors is equally a problem for all moral theories.⁵¹

⁴⁸ John D Bishop makes the interesting suggestion that Hutcheson committed himself, except when the evidence was overwhelming, not to believe that a person was wicked. 'He suggests that we should always choose to suspend belief when confronted with non-conclusive evidence that other people are evil.' Bishop, 'Moral motivation,' 287.

⁴⁹ McGinn, *Ethics, evil, and fiction* (Oxford, 1997), 21.

⁵⁰ This may be the nature of the intermittent exercise mania in the United States.

⁵¹ An obvious, if at this point tangential, question suggests itself: what is the *standard* that the sentimentalist can provide for correct moral

Richard Price and Francis Hutcheson

The rationalist must explain, for example, why Kant mistakenly thought that suicide was wrong, even for the noble Stoic Cato about to fall into Caesar's hands.⁵² The possibility that people will make moral mistakes, or even that a few people will be systematically mistaken, is no evidence against sentimentalism. When, in normal cases, we judge rightly, approving of right actions and disapproving of wrong ones, what we respond to is their rightness or wrongness. The sentimentalist and the rationalist presumably agree that there is nothing 'arbitrary' about that.

Conclusion

It is often assumed that the rationalist objections to sentimentalism are persuasive enough to dismiss Hutcheson's work. I have considered three key rationalist criticisms of moral sense ethics: that it rests on a category mistake, that it makes morality dangerously unreliable, and that it makes morality 'arbitrary.' None tell seriously against sentimentalism. Hutcheson's ideas deserve to be revisited, and in many cases, revived.

Nicholas Hunt-Bull
Southern New Hampshire University

judgment, such that our sentiments under the McGinn malady could be rejected? The simple answer, which of course needs much further development, would be the same as the one John Stuart Mill employed to explain how we could distinguish among different qualities of pleasure – ask the competent judges.

⁵² Immanuel Kant, 'Suicide', *Lectures on ethics*, trans., Louis Infield, with a forward by Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis, 1963), 148-154, 149; Kant's example may have been taken from Addison's play *Cato* (1713) which dramatizes Cato's noble decision in 46 B.C.E. to commit suicide to escape dishonour after Pompey's defeat.

**JOHN BALGUY AND THE SENSE OF BEAUTY:
A RATIONAL REALIST IN THE AGE OF SENTIMENT***

Peter Kivy

‘The creative misunderstanding of another person’s doctrines is a well-known vehicle of philosophical progress.’

Catherine Wilson

An Autobiographical Introduction

My dissertation for the Ph.D. in philosophy, at Columbia University, 1966, was called *The seventh sense: A study in eighteenth-century British aesthetic theory*. It was meant to be a history of the sense of beauty, as a philosophy of art and the aesthetic, in Britain, covering the period from Shaftesbury, at the outset of the eighteenth century, to Dugald Stewart, at the outset of the nineteenth.

It was clear to me, however, when I considered the dissertation for publication, that the leading character in the drama, as well as my favorite one, was Francis Hutcheson. And so it became, in its published version: *The seventh sense: A study of Francis Hutcheson’s aesthetics and its influence in eighteenth-century Britain*.¹ It was then and remains still, so far as I know, the only book on Hutcheson’s aesthetics. (It is now in a second, enlarged edition.²)

What became Chapter VII of the published book was entitled Rationalist Aesthetics in the Age of Hutcheson and concerned three critics of Hutcheson’s sentiment-based theory of beauty: in chronological order, John Balguy, Bishop Berkeley, and Richard Price.³ Of the three, needless to say, Balguy is the least known,

* I am grateful to the co-editor, James Dybikowski, and the two referees for *Enlightenment and Dissent*, Dom Lopes and James Shelley, who have all provided useful and positive comments to which I have tried to respond.

¹ Peter Kivy, *The seventh sense: A study of Francis Hutcheson’s aesthetics and its influence in eighteenth-century Britain* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1976).

² Peter Kivy, *The seventh sense: Francis Hutcheson and eighteenth-century British aesthetics* (2nd edn., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

³ *The seventh sense*, 123-138.

Balguy and the sense of beauty

although hardly a stranger to students of eighteenth-century British moral theory. And that he is by no means an insignificant figure is attested to by the inclusion of selections from *two* of his moral treatises in L A Selby-Bigge's pioneering anthology, *British moralists*, first published in 1897.⁴ (Indeed, the only other author so 'honored' is Francis Hutcheson.)

In *The seventh sense* I averred that Balguy, in his criticism of Hutcheson's theory of beauty, had misunderstood him. 'It is,' I added, 'an instructive misunderstanding: but a misunderstanding nevertheless.'⁵ I then went on to spell out this mixed verdict in an account both of Balguy's criticism as well as, briefly, what little I thought there was, in his remarks, of a positive theory of his own.

Here matters rested with regard to my views on Balguy *v.* Hutcheson until chance intervened in the form of a copy of Balguy's *Collection of tracts moral and theological* (1734), offered for sale recently in the catalogue of an antiquarian bookseller, Rachel Lee of Bristol England, and purchased by me in a fit of untoward extravagance. Naturally I was keen to re-read the relevant portions of the book, which I had not held in my hands since the 1960s, as soon as it arrived from the UK, and in so doing I became convinced that Balguy's critical remarks anent Hutcheson's theory of beauty, as well as, more importantly, his own positive opinions, required re-interpretation, expansion, and reevaluation. It is that task that I undertake here.

I do not recant my general assessment of Balguy's criticism both as a misunderstanding and as instructive. But I now understand the misunderstanding in a somewhat different light and the instructiveness as more interesting as well as more valuable than heretofore. And overall, I think that Balguy's 'aesthetics' deserves more attention than it has ever received as an event in the history of that philosophical discipline.

⁴ See L A Selby-Bigge ed., *British moralists: being selections from writers principally of the eighteenth century*, with a new introduction by Bernard H Baumrin (Indianapolis, 1964), 3-58, and 186-201.

⁵ Kivy, *The Seventh Sense*, 129.

Peter Kivy

In the next section of my paper I will be obliged to give a brief account of Hutcheson on the perception of beauty, even though many of my readers will already be familiar with it. For my account of what Balguy has to say is parasitic on what Hutcheson has to say; and *my* account of what Hutcheson has to say does *not* conform in important respects to what many others take him to be saying. So *my* account is a necessary prelude to what follows.

When I am done with Hutcheson I will then go on to a discussion of Balguy, both as a critic of Hutcheson and as an aesthete in his own right whose positive views I failed to do justice to in my very brief discussion of them in *The seventh sense*.

First, then, to Hutcheson.

Hutcheson's Theory of Beauty

In spite of a favorable reference, in the Preface to his *Inquiry into the original of our ideas of beauty and virtue* (1725), to the sense of beauty in the writings of Shaftesbury, and no mention of Locke at all, it seems very clear, at least to this writer, that the perception of beauty, in Hutcheson's earliest and most extensive account of it, is modeled closely on Locke's account of secondary qualities, and how we perceive them. Indeed, it might well be claimed that Hutcheson's whole project, both in aesthetics and moral theory, of postulating 'inner' or 'reflex' senses, is founded upon Locke's statement, in the *Essay concerning human understanding*, that 'I have here followed the common Opinion of Man's having but five senses; though perhaps there may justly be counted more....'⁶

In any event, it appears to be on purely Lockean grounds that Hutcheson postulates, in the *Inquiry concerning beauty, order, harmony, design*, which is the first part of the *Inquiry into beauty and virtue*, a 'sense' of beauty. 'When two Perceptions are entirely different from each other,' Hutcheson writes, 'or agree in nothing but the general Idea of *Sensation*, we call the Powers of receiving those different Perceptions, *different Senses*.'⁷ The 'perception' of

⁶ John Locke, *An essay concerning human understanding*, ed. Peter H. Niddich (Oxford: 1975), 121 (II, ii, 3).

⁷ Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (4th edn., London, 1738), 2.

Balguy and the sense of beauty

beauty, on Hutcheson's view, is just such a unique, simple perception, or idea, and, therefore, on Lockean grounds, requires the postulating of an internal or reflex 'sense.'

Beauty, on Hutcheson's view, is a Lockean 'idea': 'the Word *Beauty* is taken for *the Idea rais'd in us*, and a *Sense of Beauty* for *our Power of receiving this Idea*.'⁸ What kind of an 'idea' is it? Hutcheson makes unmistakably clear that it is a close analogue to the idea of a Lockean secondary quality. Like the idea of a secondary quality, the *cause* of the idea is a complex quality not describable in terms of the idea itself. As the idea of redness, say, is not caused by redness in objects but by extended particles in motion, 'The Figures which excite in us the Ideas of Beauty, seem to be those in which there is *Uniformity amidst Variety*.'⁹ And like the relation of the idea of redness to its cause, the relation of the idea of beauty to *its* cause, *uniformity amidst variety*, is *non-epistemic*, which is to say we do not first perceive *that* an object possesses *unity amidst variety*, and then through the realization of that have the idea of beauty raised in us. Thus 'in all these instances of *Beauty* let it be observ'd, That the Pleasure is communicated to those who never reflected on the general Foundation; and that all here alleg'd is this, 'That the pleasant Sensation arises only from Objects, in which there is *Uniformity amidst Variety*:' We may have the Sensation without knowing what is the occasion of it; as a Man's *Taste* may suggest Ideas of Sweets, Acids, Bitters, tho' he be ignorant of the *Forms* of the small Bodys, or their Motions, which excite these Perceptions in him.'¹⁰

It should not pass without notice, however, that Hutcheson does not say, categorically, that men always have the sensation without knowing what is the occasion of it; only that we *may* have the sensation without the knowledge, suggesting that *sometimes* the causal relation may be epistemic.

As well, it is necessary to note that in the above-quoted passage, as elsewhere, Hutcheson refers to the idea of beauty as a 'pleasure,' and, in some places, as a pleasurable idea, or the pleasure *of* beauty.

⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰ Ibid., 29.

The most charitable interpretation to be put on this ambiguity of expression, as I argued in *The seventh sense*, is to ascribe to Hutcheson the view that the idea of beauty, like the idea of intense heat, in an example of Bishop Berkeley's, is inseparable from its hedonic tone. As Berkeley puts the point, in a passage from the *Three dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, regarding intense heat and pain, 'this same simple idea is both the intense heat immediately perceived, and the pain; and consequently...the intense heat immediately perceived is nothing distinct from a particular sort of pain.'¹¹ Substitute 'beauty' for 'intense heat,' and 'pleasure' for 'pain,' and you will, I believe, catch Hutcheson's thought in this regard.

Finally, it is well to point out that the account of beauty so far outlined here is Hutcheson's account of what he calls 'original' or 'absolute' beauty. This is distinguished from 'relative' or 'comparative' beauty, the former kind being what we would probably call formal beauty, or beauty of pure design, the latter, as Hutcheson characterizes it, 'that which is apprehended in any *Object*, commonly consider'd as an Imitation of some Original...', which is to say, beauty of representation. It is, Hutcheson continues, beauty 'founded on a *Conformity*, or a kind of *Unity* between the Original and the Copy.'¹² It is Hutcheson's theory of 'absolute' or 'original' beauty that we will be exclusively concerned with here, and which will be referred to as Hutcheson's theory of beauty *sans phrase*. This emphasis is fully justified by the fact that when Hutcheson's theory of beauty was discussed in the eighteenth century, it was almost exclusively his theory of absolute or original beauty that was intended.

Here, then, is what we have so far. The word 'beauty,' on Hutcheson's view, refers, in its basic, original sense, to a Lockean idea with a pleasurable hedonic tone inseparable and indistinguishable from the subjective experience of the idea. This idea is closely analogous to a Lockean idea of a secondary quality, in that it is caused, in the normal, ordinary case, to arise in a person due to

¹¹ George Berkeley, *Three dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, ed. Robert Merrihew Adams (Indianapolis, 1979), 12.

¹² Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, 39.

Balguy and the sense of beauty

the action of some *other* quality, namely, what Hutcheson calls *uniformity amidst variety*, upon an internal ‘sense of beauty,’ and about which the subject usually has no knowledge. It is, therefore, a non-epistemic theory of the perception of beauty that Hutcheson is advancing.

I said just now that the idea of beauty is, on Hutcheson’s view, *closely analogous* to the idea of a Lockean secondary quality. But the analogy is not, by any means, exact. So I must close this brief outline of Hutcheson’s theory of beauty by pointing out two crucial respects in which it breaks down.

As we have seen, Hutcheson analogizes *uniformity amidst variety* to ‘the *Forms* of the small Bodys, or their Motion, which excite these Perceptions [of secondary qualities]...,’ in other words, the forms and motions of atomic particles, as Locke understood them.¹³ But there are two crucial respects in which the analogy is infelicitous.

First, the forms and motions of the particles that cause us to experience sensations of secondary qualities are properties of the solid, extended external world, that causally interact with the external senses of taste, touch, sight, smell, and hearing. But *uniformity amidst variety* is a property *not* of the solid and extended external world at all; rather, a property of collections of ideas already delivered to consciousness by the external senses, and perceived by the sense of beauty, which is an ‘internal’ or ‘reflex’ sense, since its objects are internal, mental objects: in fact, ‘complex ideas.’

This disanalogy has caused considerable confusion among commentators on Hutcheson’s aesthetics due to the following passage in which Hutcheson writes: ‘The only Pleasure of Sense, which many Philosophers seem to consider, is that which accompanys the simple Ideas of Sensation: But there are far greater Pleasures in those complex Ideas of Objects which obtain the Names of *Beautiful, Regular, Harmonious*.’¹⁴

The confusion stems from Hutcheson’s seeming to acquiesce, in this passage, in the notion that the idea of beauty is a complex idea,

¹³ See *supra*, note 10.

¹⁴ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, 6-7.

Peter Kivy

whereas the sense of beauty is postulated, one must assume, just *because* the idea is a unique, *simple* one, like secondary-quality sensations. But the confusion is easily dispelled. For the word ‘beauty’ is, originally, a word for the simple idea of beauty, just as the word ‘red’ is, in Locke’s scheme, a word originally for the simple sensation of redness. But just as, according to Locke, people tend to transfer the words for secondary qualities, like colors and tastes, from the sensations to the powers that cause them — they ‘*are looked upon as real Qualities in the things thus affecting us*’¹⁵ — so too the complex idea of *uniformity amidst variety* ‘obtains’ the name of ‘beautiful,’ even though it is the quality that *causes* the (simple) idea of beauty, not the idea of beauty itself. The confusion arises, obviously, from the fact that in the case of beauty, the sensation and its cause are *both* ‘ideas.’ Keep that in mind and the confusion dissipates.

The second place where the analogy between the idea of beauty and the ideas of secondary qualities breaks down is where epistemic considerations come into play. Quite simply, the perceiver, on the Lockean model of secondary-quality perception, is *always* ignorant of the specific cause of the secondary-quality sensations, even though, if he is a scientist or philosopher, he may know *that* they are caused by some undetermined concatenation of particles in motion. But the perceiver of beauty, in contrast, if he is ‘in the know,’ can know not only that the idea of beauty is caused by something distinct from the idea; he can, on occasion, know *exactly* what it is, namely, the complex property of ideas called *uniformity amidst variety*. And as we shall see when we come to consider Balguy’s critique of Hutcheson, and his own positive theory, this epistemic fact about beauty and its cause will play a crucial role. That being said, it is now time to turn to what Balguy has to say on these matters.

¹⁵ Locke, *Essay*, 141.

A Note on the Text

Chambers Biographical Dictionary gives the following terse account of John Balguy's life: 'Balguy, John, a liberal divine, was born at Sheffield in 1686, and died at Harrogate in 1748.'¹⁶

The text on which the following account of Balguy's aesthetic views is based, as stated earlier, is his *Collection of Tracts Moral and Political*, published in London, in 1734. It comprises six works, all previously published, anonymously, between the years 1726 and 1733.

The first tract in the collection, *A Letter to a Deist*, is a critique of Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*. One would have expected, given the Third Earl's copious remarks on the nature of art, beauty, and taste, in that celebrated work, that Balguy would have had something to say with regard to them. Alas, there is nothing at all to that end in the *Letter*, although there is, in another of the tracts, a brief discussion of beauty in the *Characteristics*, which we will consider at the appropriate time.

Of more interest to the aesthetician are the second and third tracts, *The foundation of moral goodness*, Part I and Part II. They are, together, an extended critical examination of Hutcheson's *Inquiry into the original of our ideas of beauty and virtue*; and although the bulk of these treatises, not surprisingly, concerns Hutcheson's moral theory, there is, in Part I, a brief and *puzzling* passage on moral beauty that calls for discussion.

But it is in the fourth tract in the collection, *Divine rectitude: or a brief inquiry concerning the moral perfections of the Deity*, where we find sufficient pages devoted to what we would call 'aesthetics' for us to draw some conclusions of substance about what Balguy's 'aesthetics' was, in contrast to Hutcheson's—more specifically, what he was offering as an account of the perception of beauty, and its ontological place in the world.

Of the two remaining works in the collection, *A second letter to a Deist*, and *The law of truth: or the obligations of reason essential to all religion*, nothing need be said, as they contain nothing remotely related to our subject. However, Balguy puts a coda to

¹⁶ *Chambers Biographical Dictionary*, ed. William Geddie and J Liddell Geddie (Edinburgh, 1931), 64.

Peter Kivy

the *Collection of tracts*, in the form of a *supplement*, which does contain some aesthetic remarks relevant to present purposes.

In sum, then, the following remarks will be based on three sources: Part I of the *Foundations of moral goodness*, the *Supplement* to the *Collection of tracts*, and, most substantially, *Divine rectitude*.

So with the necessary background in place, it is now time to get down to the business of expounding and re-evaluating Balguy's position in eighteenth-century British aesthetics.

Moral Beauty

Balguy's first discussion of beauty, which occurs in Part I of *The foundations of moral goodness*, has to do with moral beauty, except for one crucial aside, in a footnote, which I shall get to by and by. He begins: 'Virtue, or moral Goodness, may be considered either under the Notion of *Pulchrum* or *Honestum*. As to the *Pulchrum* or Beauty of Virtue, it seems to me somewhat doubtful and difficult to determine, whether the *Understanding* alone be sufficient for the Perception of it, or whether it be not necessary to suppose some distinct Power superadded for that Purpose.'¹⁷

The question being raised here, through the concept, certainly strange, if not alien to us, of moral beauty, is the red thread that runs through the entire history of value theory in eighteenth-century Britain. It is, of course, the question of reason versus sense perception or 'sentiment' in judgments of moral goodness, beauty, and other forms of value, broadly conceived. And what we are looking at, in this instance, is a rationalist, realist critique of Hutcheson's sense-based value theory. But at this stage of his philosophical career Balguy was not an *entirely* committed rationalist. For because he made the distinction, already alluded to, between moral goodness and moral beauty, it left him the option, which he embraced, of being a rationalist with regard to the former, while at least a tentative defender of 'sentiment' with regard to the latter. As Balguy put his somewhat agnostic position: 'But when I consider what perhaps is the case, in fact, that Perceptions of the

¹⁷ John Balguy, *A collection of tracts moral and theological* (London, 1734), 60; and Selby-Bigge, *British moralists*, 70.

Balguy and the sense of beauty

Pulchrum and of the *Honestum*, seem not equally universal, or if universal, yet in very different degrees; that while every rational Creature clearly and uniformly perceives, in all ordinary Cases, what is *fit* and *just*, and *right*; many Men have little or no Perception of that *Beauty* in Actions with which others are wonderfully charmed: And when I further consider, that some Actions appear to all Men more *beautiful* than others, tho' equally *right* and *fit*; as in the Case of *Social* and *Self-Duties*; I find myself obliged to suspend, and to wait for further Evidence.'¹⁸

Agnostic though he may have been, however, at this point, it seems clear that Balguy was drawn strongly towards a 'subjectivist,' sentiment-based 'aesthetics,' if we may so call it, of moral properties. In the passage just quoted, he relies heavily on an argument from the supposed diversity of tastes, to support an anti-rationalist take on the perception of moral beauty. And he further reinforces this anti-rationalist stance by as much as identifying the perception of moral beauty with a kind of pleasure, and averring that 'If the purest Pleasures be *Sensations* of some kind or other; the Mind in receiving them, must be looked upon not as *intelligent*, but *sensible*.'¹⁹

Now the notion of moral beauty may, as I have said, seem strange and alien to us. But the description of an action as 'beautiful,' in a moral sense, was still part of idiomatic, if somewhat bombastic English in the nineteenth century. What is *truly* puzzling, therefore, about Balguy's discussion is not that he countenances the use of 'beautiful' as a term of moral approbation; it was common enough in his day. The puzzle is that he *distinguishes* the beauty of an action *from* its moral goodness, whereas it would seem, from general usage, that 'beautiful action,' in the moral sense, and 'morally good' or 'morally right' action, are synonymous: just two ways of saying the same thing. When I wrote *The seventh sense* this distinction completely baffled me. I still find it puzzling, but can at least suggest now two possible, not unrelated

¹⁸ Ibid., 60-61; and Selby-Bigge, 70-71.

¹⁹ Ibid., 61; and Selby-Bigge, 71.

Peter Kivy

ways of understanding it. Both involve the significance of Balguy's equating the experience of moral beauty with a kind of pleasure.

In a word, then, the difference between someone who perceives the rightness, the moral worth of an action, but not its beauty, and someone who perceives both is the difference between someone who doesn't and someone who does *enjoy* the contemplation of *performing* that action. And, furthermore, his enjoyment in contemplating the performance of the action is parasitic on his enjoyment of actually performing that action, or having enjoyed its performance in the past. So Balguy's 'aesthetic' distinction between the man who does, and the man who does not perceive the beauty in an action, while both perceive its rightness, can be seen to reduce itself to one we are quite familiar with, in Book I of the *Nicomachean ethics*, between the man who does and the man who does not enjoy performing the virtuous acts that he does perform, it being Aristotle's view that 'no one would call a man just who did not enjoy acting justly, nor any man liberal who did not enjoy liberal actions; and similarly in all other cases.'²⁰

Or perhaps another, related way of expressing the thought is in terms of Kant's well known distinction between the motives of duty and inclination.²¹ Expressed in that way, Balguy's 'aesthetic' distinction in morals becomes that between someone whose perception of his duty does, and someone the perception of whose duty does not, in some particular case, coincide with his felt inclination.

Of course, the role of 'moral pleasure' in Aristotle and Kant is quite different. In the case of Aristotle, the presence of the pleasure is part of what makes for a fixed and settled disposition to perform a moral act, and hence is a positive presence; whereas for Kant, if it becomes a *motive* for acting 'in accordance with the moral law,' it is a negative presence which destroys the moral value of the act,

²⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics*, trans. W D Ross (Oxford, 1931), 1099a.

²¹ See Immanuel Kant, *The moral law or Kant's groundwork of the metaphysic of morals*, trans. H J Paton (New York, 1950), Chapter I (and especially 64-67).

Balguy and the sense of beauty

since the act will not have been performed out of ‘respect for the moral law.’²²

In any case, whether or not we can make sense of Balguy’s ‘aesthetics’ of morals, it would be largely irrelevant to his later foray into what we would consider ‘aesthetics’ properly so-called, were it not for a crucial footnote, inserted in the third edition of our text (originally published in 1728) in which he recants his ‘aesthetic subjectivism’ (if that is its proper name) and first alludes to beauty in the non-moral realm. It deserves to be quoted in full:

Since the first Publication of these Papers, I have been convinced, that all Beauty, whether Moral or Natural, is to be reckoned and reputed as a Species Of Absolute Truth; as resulting from, or consisting in the necessary Relations and unchangeable Congruities of Ideas: and by Consequence, that in order to the Perception of Beauty, no other Power need to be supposed, than what is merely intellectual. And as to the Diversity of Perceptions above-mentioned, the natural or accidental Differences of Mens [*sic*] Understandings seem now to me sufficient to account for it.²³

Three points of vital interest to us are made, though not of course elaborated on, in this brief passage. (Elaboration was to come, as we shall see, in a later work.)

First of all, Balguy has now extended the scope of his remarks to apply not only to ‘moral beauty’ but to what he calls ‘natural beauty’ as well. And I take it that by ‘natural beauty’ Balguy not only intends what *we* would mean by that: the beauty of sunsets, mountains, and other of our natural surroundings. Rather, he intends to include all beauties evident to our senses, the beauties, as we shall later see, of works of art as well.

Second, he has now become an out-and-out rationalist, and realist, with regard to beauty and its apprehension. Beauty has ceased to be regarded as merely a pleasurable sensation but is now

²² I am grateful to an James Dybikowski, referee for *Enlightenment and Dissent*, for motivating me to make clearer my allusions to Aristotle’s and Kant’s moral theories.

²³ Balguy, *Tracts*, 61n; and Selby-Bigge, 71n.

Peter Kivy

become, like any *moral* property, a ‘real’ property of the world, consisting in relations of parts to wholes: ‘and by Consequence...,in order to the Perception of Beauty, no other Power need be supposed, than what is merely intellectual.’

Finally, since the perception of beauty is now relegated to the intellect, the argument from diversity of tastes to the sense-based, relative status of beauty must be rejected, and some other explanation for the diversity of tastes be found. It is now laid upon ‘the natural or accidental Differences in Mens Understandings....’

These seeds of an aesthetic theory lay dormant, apparently, in Balguy’s mind, when he came to write Part II of *The Foundations of Moral Goodness*. But they did finally germinate, and come to fruition in the work to follow, *Divine Rectitude*, in the form of a critique of Hutcheson’s theory of beauty, as well as at least the outline of a positive theory of his own. In the next section I will turn to Balguy’s critique of Hutcheson’s ‘aesthetics,’ and in the ones following to what there is of Balguy’s own.

Balguy v. Hutcheson

Balguy’s critique of Hutcheson’s theory of beauty is comprised of two separate arguments, the first basically theological, the second more or less epistemological; and, although the theological argument may seem, at first blush, of little interest to the contemporary philosophical aesthetician, it will come to be seen in a more favorable light when later considered as a part of Balguy’s positive aesthetics, and separated from its theological underpinnings.

According to Hutcheson, as we have seen, the pleasurable idea of beauty is caused to be excited in us by the complex property of *uniformity amidst variety*, in interaction with our internal ‘aesthetic’ sense. The property of beauty, like Lockean secondary qualities, is, *au fond*, not a property of the external world but a property of our own consciousness in its relation to that external world (although the ‘external world’ which the sense of beauty perceives is only ‘external’ in the sense of being ‘external’ to the sense of beauty, not external to the five external senses). As Balguy understands Hutcheson’s view: ‘*Order* and *Beauty* have been represented not as *real* and *absolute* in themselves, but merely

Balguy and the sense of beauty

relative to our Faculties, and as resulting entirely from the Constitution and Accommodation of a certain *internal Sense*.²⁴

The theological problem for Balguy lies with Hutcheson's postulation of *uniformity amidst variety* as the *cause* of the idea of beauty. Assuming, as both Hutcheson and Balguy do, that the Deity intended for us to have pleasurable ideas of beauty, presumably as, among other reasons, a contribution to human happiness why bother to fashion an external world of intricate order and design, chock full of *uniformity amidst variety*, to excite a sense of beauty, when 'a *Chaos* would have served just as well.' Indeed, 'how shall we avoid looking upon all this as mere Waste of Workmanship?' For, 'If an Agreement between Object and Sense be sufficient to produce a Perception of Beauty, it might be fully effected by an Accommodation of the Sense to any Object.'²⁵

Of course the unspoken assumption that makes Balguy's critique at all plausible, theologically, is that the order, the uniformity of the universe has, if Hutcheson is to be credited, its *sole* purpose, its whole *raison d'être*, the excitation of the sense of beauty. But no eighteenth-century philosopher or theologian, including Hutcheson, believed *that*. As Hutcheson himself says: 'how suitable it is to the *sagacious Bounty* which we suppose in the Deity, to constitute our *internal Senses* in the manner in which they are; by which Pleasure is join'd to the Contemplation of *those Objects* which a finite *Mind* can best imprint and retain the Ideas of with the least Distraction; to *those Actions* which are most efficacious, and fruitful in useful Effects; and to *those Theorems* which most inlarge our *Minds*.'²⁶ So given that the systematic order of the universe, and the pleasure it delivers to the sense of beauty, have other ends that require its creation, it is obviously an economic use of materials on God's part to give this systematic order, once it is in place, its aesthetic function as well. As for Balguy's account of how and why beauty enters the world, if not in the manner of a Lockean secondary

²⁴ Balguy, *Tracts*, 225.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 226.

²⁶ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, 101. I am grateful to James Shelley, referee for *Enlightenment and Dissent*, for pressing me on this point.

Peter Kivy

quality, we will have to postpone that inquiry until we come, in the next section, to his positive 'aesthetics.'

Balguy's epistemological critique of Hutcheson's aesthetic sense doctrine concentrates, as does the theological critique, on the complex property of *uniformity amidst variety*. And it is this epistemological critique that I described in *The seventh sense* as involving an instructive misunderstanding. In a word, Balguy took Hutcheson's non-epistemic model for the perception of beauty to be an epistemic model. It is on that misunderstanding that his critique was founded (as were the critiques, later on, of Berkeley and Price²⁷).

Balguy begins: 'The ingenious Author of the *Enquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, tho' he professedly maintains the contrary Opinion, yet has nevertheless fixed Beauty on such a Foundation, as seems to me entirely inconsistent with his own Notion.'²⁸ Wherein lies the inconsistency?

We can begin to answer that question with some questions of Balguy's own: rhetorical ones. 'For are not *Uniformity* and *Variety* real *Relations* belonging to the *Objects* themselves? Are they not independent on us, and our Faculties; and would they not be what they are, whether we perceived them or no?'²⁹ The answers to these rhetorical questions Balguy of course takes to be 'Yes.' But so, indeed, would Hutcheson. How, then, can Balguy think that they can provide the basis for a criticism of Hutcheson's position? Only, it seems, by *misunderstanding* Hutcheson to be saying that that beauty *is uniformity amidst variety*, whereas he was pretty clear in insisting that it is the *cause* of beauty in much the same way the atoms in motion are the cause of redness. In both cases, the property in question is a sensation or idea, the cause something else entirely, either atoms in the void, or a complex idea operating upon

²⁷ As has been pointed out to me by James Dybikowski, Price refers to Balguy's *Tracts* on numerous occasions. I don't know whether Berkeley ever does. On their critique of Hutcheson, see Kivy, *The seventh sense*, 134-142.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 226-227.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 227.

Balguy and the sense of beauty

an internal sense, which takes the name of the sensation or idea secondarily, as it were.

Once that misreading is in place, Hutcheson's project collapses. If the property of *uniformity amidst variety* just is the property of beauty, then it is not, like the property of redness, the product of human sensibility, a 'subjective' property, but a property 'out there in the world,' although it is a world, on Hutcheson's Lockean view, of relations between ideas already delivered to the perceiver by the external world through the external senses. Furthermore, it then follows that the perception of beauty, since it is a relational property, cannot be perception by sense but, rather, by reason. 'However Sense may convey to us the Ideas of external *Objects*, yet the *Relations* between them no *Sense* can reach. These are perceived by Intelligence only.'³⁰

Thus, by an initial misreading of Hutcheson, Balguy has turned what was a non-epistemic, causal theory of the perception of beauty into an epistemic one. As he puts the view, 'The Understanding is the sole Faculty by which we are capable of comparing one Idea with another, and discovering their real Agreements and Disagreements,' as in the case of our perceiving *uniformity amidst variety*. 'That in consequence of such Perceptions, our Minds are affected with pleasing *Sensations*, does by no means prove that such Perceptions [of *unity amidst variety*] themselves are *sensible*.'³¹

This then is Balguy's misreading of Hutcheson, and the subsequent critique of his position that it generates. I called it in *The Seventh Sense* an *instructive* misreading. How so?

For most of our mature, sophisticated perceptions of the beautiful, and other aesthetic qualities, Hutcheson's non-epistemic theory seems implausible. To stay with *uniformity amidst variety* as our example, there is nothing implausible about adducing its presence, say, in a symphonic movement, as an explanation for our finding the composition pleasing or, indeed, beautiful. What does seem implausible is construing the explanation as a causal

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

Peter Kivy

explanation analogous to one in which we ascribe our pleasant state of euphoria to the presence of alcohol in the bloodstream. One perceives *that* there are such-and-such relations between its themes; and in perceiving these things we are pleased by the movement and may come to perceive it as beautiful as well. This is *not* Hutcheson's view; but it is the more plausible view (which is not to say that we are not *sometimes* pleased, we know not why, by a work of art). And Balguy, quite understandably, interpreted Hutcheson in such a way as to make his view the more plausible view in this regard. That it also made Hutcheson's view inconsistent with itself was a small price to pay for a rationalist, since what had to go, the sentimentalist metaphysics and epistemology of beauty, was just the part that Balguy, the realist and rationalist, could gladly do without.

This brings us, then, to Balguy's own realist metaphysics and rationalist epistemology of beauty, which we have already seen lurking in the critique of Hutcheson. It will be the subject of the following sections.

Balguy's Aesthetics

Balguy's rationalist, realist aesthetics, as I suggested earlier, is expressed in distinctly theological terms; and those are the terms in which we must initially understand it. But once we do, we may then determine if it can be re-expressed in terms more congenial to contemporary sensibilities.

If, as Balguy believes, the existence of beauty in the world is not to be explained as the product of sense perception, in the manner of Lockean secondary qualities, what is its origin and ontological status? Obviously, it is a creation of God's. But what is his purpose in that creation? Balguy answers, to begin with, that 'it does not appear to me, that the *Order, Beauty, and Harmony* of the Universe are merely intended [by God] in Subordination and Subsistence to the Welfare of Creatures.'³²

The inference, apparently, that we are meant to draw from the premise that God did not intend beauty to be an instrument for the promoting of human happiness is that it was not intended as an

³² Ibid., 223.

Balguy and the sense of beauty

instrument at all, except in a *non essential* way. In other words, it is not *in essence* an instrumental good but an *intrinsic* one. ‘The more I consider this matter,’ Balguy writes, ‘the more I am convinced, that the *Grounds* of *Beauty* lie deeper than is here supposed [by Hutcheson]. That they are not to be sought for among our *Senses* or the *Agreement* between those *Senses*, and their respective *Objects*; but in the *Objects* themselves, and the *Relations* interceding between them. And by consequence that *Beauty* is of an *absolute* Nature, and a real, objective *Perfection*.’³³

It is not denied by Balguy, to be sure, that the beauties of the world exist in part for the benefit of humankind: ‘these Perfections of God’s Works are Additions to the Happiness of Intelligent Creatures, and may be considered as subservient to that purpose.’ That, however, cannot be their ultimate reason for being. For ‘surely, they were produced with a further View. If they have any real and intrinsic Worth, they must appear amiable in the Sight of the Creator Himself. And though, before the Creation, He had a clear and full Prospect of all that *Order* and *Beauty* which were afterwards diffused through the whole Universe; yet I humbly conceive that, in creating the World, He was under a Moral Necessity of suiting it to his own perfect Ideas, and the exact Model in his own Mind.’³⁴

So far, in Balguy’s statement of his views anent beauty, and its perception, we have heard nothing about beauty in the fine arts. The argument has been at a highly abstract level, with the beauty of the natural world obviously at the center of attention. But Balguy does have something to say about beauty in the fine arts, and it enters the argument in an interesting way.

As I said early on, in my discussion of the texts, Balguy does not, in the first *Letter to a Deist*, a critique of Shaftesbury’s *Characteristics*, pay any attention at all to the Third Earl’s extensive discussions of art and beauty. He does, however, give passing notice to Shaftesbury’s aesthetics in a brief passage in *Divine rectitude*, and, more importantly, brings art works into his own realist account. It is this sally into ‘philosophy of art’ that

³³ Ibid., 226.

³⁴ Ibid., 222.

Peter Kivy

deserves a look, and confirms the earlier suspicion that when he added Natural Beauty to Moral Beauty in the third edition of *The foundations of moral goodness*, Part I, he meant by Natural Beauty, beauty in all of its non-moral manifestations, artistic beauty included.

Not surprisingly, at least to a student of eighteenth-century British aesthetic theory, Balguy presents his observations on the fine arts in the context of the dispute that, one might fairly assert, defined the discipline: namely, the dispute over the diversity of tastes and the elusive 'standard of taste' that was supposed to rescue taste from the grips of 'subjectivism,' and its relativistic implications. The passage is important enough to quote in full. Balguy writes:

Whatever Diversity there may be in Mens [*sic*] Tastes, Fancies, or Perceptions; I presume the Essentials of Beauty are unconcerned therein.

Without Order, Symmetry, and Proportion, no Works of Art are, or can be, beautiful; and according to the Degree wherein these prevail, the Beauty of these is greater or less. Tho' in *Architecture* there are various Orders and Manners, yet *Uniformity* and *Proportion* are observed in all: even in *Gothick* Buildings; however they may be encumbered with inelegant Devices, and ill-chosen Decorations. However Men may differ about Circumstantial of Beauty, they are generally agreed as to the Essentials. And the Reason of it is, if I mistake not, because they are of a fixed, unalterable Nature; that is, absolute, intrinsic, and necessary *Relations*; and by consequence, Objects of the *Understanding* only. For tho' the Discernment of Beauty is clearer and quicker in some Men than others; this is no more than what may be said in respect of some other kinds of Truth. Experience shews, that the same Understandings which are very apt and quick in learning some Arts and Sciences; yet are taught others very heavily, and difficultly and perhaps not at all. What therefore the Author last mentioned [i.e. Shaftesbury] calls a *true Taste*, seems to be in reality nothing more than an *Understanding* fitted by Nature, and formed by

Balguy and the sense of beauty

Instruction, to perceive and distinguish the various kinds of *Beauty*. Nor can I see any Reason, why a Genius for *Mathematicks* may not as well be ascribed to a distinct Faculty; as a Genius for *Painting, Statuary, or Architecture*.³⁵

It is common, particularly in non-professional circles, to argue from the (supposed) diversity of taste in art to the subjectivity of artistic and aesthetic judgments. I say 'supposed' diversity because everyone, of course, agrees that people do have disagreements over the interpretation and evaluation of art works, just as everyone agrees that there are differences of opinion about 'matters of fact.' But few would argue from the diversity of opinion over matters of fact to the 'subjectivity' of factual judgments. So those who *do* argue from the diversity of artistic judgments to the subjectivity of taste must assume that the diversity of opinions about art does warrant *their* inference to subjectivity whereas diversity of judgments of fact does not. And the common way of doing that is to claim that judgments about works of art are widely, wildly diverse: so chaotically diverse, in fact, that subjective relativism is the only conclusion possible.

On the other side, for those like Balguy, who wish to defend some kind of realistic rationalism, the diversity of artistic taste is an embarrassment that must be dealt with, frequently in the form of damage control, granting diversity, but aimed at minimizing its extent, as Balguy does in his opening remarks. Yes, Balguy is willing to admit, 'Diversity there may be in Mens Tastes, Fancies, or Perceptions'; but 'the Essentials of Beauty are unconcerned therein.' In other words, we may disagree about whether a particular work is beautiful or not; we are in agreement, nevertheless, in what beauty consists. 'However Men may differ about the Circumstantials of Beauty, they are generally agreed as to the Essentials.' They are agreed, Balguy thinks, that 'Without Order, Symmetry, and Proportion, no Works of Art are, or can be beautiful.'

³⁵ Ibid., 229-230.

Peter Kivy

But *why* should human beings agree on the essentials and not on the particulars? Why *should* they agree that beauty consists in order, symmetry, and proportion, and not agree about whether or not ‘Gothick Buildings’ are beautiful? For, obviously, their builders thought that they were, and enlightened Englishmen think that they are not. The reason for the agreement is that beauty is a real property of the world, which is to say, order, symmetry, and proportion are ‘absolute, intrinsick, and necessary *Relations*; and by consequence, Objects of the *Understanding* only.’ And what the understanding apprehends, in principle if not in practice, converges on consensus: reason, unlike sentiment, holds out a realistic expectation of agreement.

Wherefore, then, the disagreement over particulars; wherefore disagreements in taste? The answer was already evident in the footnote to Balguy’s discussion of moral beauty, in Part I of the *Foundations of Moral Goodness*, quoted earlier, where he wrote that ‘as to the Diversity of Perceptions [of beauty] above-mentioned, the natural or accidental Differences of Mens Understandings is seen now to me sufficient to account for it.’ In other words, we differ in our intellectual abilities, here, as in other areas of human endeavor. ‘For tho’ the Discernment of Beauty is clearer and quicker in some Men than others; this is no more then what may be said in respect of some other kinds of Truth.’ And for all of his talk of a ‘sense’ of beauty, Balguy concludes, and correctly, I believe, as an interpretation of Shaftesbury, that what Shaftesbury ‘calls a *true Taste*, seems to be in reality nothing more than an *Understanding* fitted by Nature, and formed by Instruction, to perceive and distinguish the various Kinds of Beauty.’³⁶

Balguy, then, in his views on the fine arts, is steady to his rational realist text. Beauty in the fine arts as in the natural world is ‘of an *absolute* Nature, and a real, objective *Perfection*,’ an ‘intrinsick property’ that ‘appear[s] amiable in the sight of the Creator Himself.’

At this juncture, if not before, the philosophical reader is likely to have been put in mind of the ‘*Euthyphro* question,’ to wit: Is

³⁶ *The Seventh Sense*, 20-23.

Balguy and the sense of beauty

'Beauty ...a real objective *Perfection*' of 'intrinsic Worth' because it 'appear[s] amiable in the sight of the Creator Himself' or does beauty 'appear amiable in the sight of the Creator Himself' because it is 'a real, objective *Perfection*' of 'intrinsic Worth? Balguy's answer, I presume, if there is one, must lie in the assertion that God 'was under a moral Necessity' to beautify the world in accordance with 'his own perfect Ideas.' But whether this murky theology implies one answer or the other to the *Euthyphro* question I cannot make out. Nevertheless, we may at least form a conjecture and, into the bargain, cast further light on just *what* Balguy is really claiming about beauty, if we try to put his claim in a more contemporary context. I will try to do that in the next section.

The Intrinsic, the Objective, and the Real

Three words frequently appear both in Balguy's critique of Hutcheson's theory of beauty and in his own. They are the words 'intrinsic,' 'objective,' and 'real.' Furthermore, it seems as if Balguy treats them as more or less interchangeable. As well, the word 'perfection' forms part of the mix. Is it possible to bring some clarity to this *mélange* of terms? And will such clarity, if achieved, cast some light on the *Euthyphro* question? I think the answer to both questions is affirmative.

In contemplating Balguy's use of the phrases 'intrinsic property' and 'real, objective *Perfection*,' one is put in mind of the work of G E Moore, and, in particular, his essay, 'The Conception of Intrinsic Value,' first published in 1922, in that author's *Philosophical studies*. I think this essay can provide the needed clarification of what Balguy *might have* been trying to say.

Moore begins his essay with the following statement of purpose: 'My main object in this paper is to try to define more precisely the most important question which, so far as I can see, is really at issue when it is disputed with regard to any predicate of value, whether it is or is not a 'subjective' predicate.'³⁷ And he then goes on to locate a sense of what might be meant by 'subjective,' with regard to beauty, 'such that to say that 'beautiful' stands for a subjective

³⁷ G E Moore, "The Conception of Intrinsic Value," in *Philosophical Studies* (Paterson, New Jersey, 1959), 253.

predicate, means, roughly, that any statement of the form 'This is beautiful' merely expresses a psychological association to the effect that some particular individual or class of individuals either actually has, or would, under certain circumstances have, a certain kind of mental attitude towards the thing in question.'³⁸ It is in something like this sense of 'subjective' that Hutcheson can be described as holding a subjectivist view of the predicate 'beautiful.' And it is this Hutchesonian subjectivism that Balguy opposes.

Of the opponents of subjectivism, so defined, Moore writes: 'In the case of goodness and beauty, what such people are really anxious to maintain is by no means that those conceptions are 'objective,' but that, besides being 'objective,' they are also, in a sense I will try to explain, 'intrinsic' kinds of value.'³⁹ But what is the difference between being objective and being intrinsic?

As Moore analyses these two concepts, what is intrinsic is also objective, but what is objective is not necessarily intrinsic. 'The truth is, I believe, that though, from the proposition that a particular kind of value is 'intrinsic' it does follow that it must be 'objective,' the converse implication by no means holds, but on the contrary it is perfectly easy to conceive theories of *e.g.* 'goodness,' according to which goodness would in the strictest sense be 'objective,' and yet would not be 'intrinsic.'⁴⁰

To see this we can go straight to Moore's 'definition' of intrinsic value: '*To say that a kind of value is 'intrinsic' means that the question whether a thing possesses it, and in what degree it possesses it, depends solely on the intrinsic nature of the thing in question.*'⁴¹ In other words, if a thing has intrinsic value it is due to the 'internal' nature of the thing alone and not to any relation it may bear to anything else.

An example of Moore's will be helpful in nailing down this point. He writes, 'if you say, that to call type A 'better' than type B means merely that it is more favoured in the struggle for existence, it follows that being 'better' is a predicate that does *not depend*

³⁸ Ibid., 254.

³⁹ Ibid., 255.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 260.

Balguy and the sense of beauty

merely on the intrinsic nature of A and B respectively. On the contrary, although here and now A may be more favoured than B, it is obvious that under other circumstances or with different natural laws the very same type B might be more favoured than A....' But, nevertheless, "better' on this interpretation of its meaning, is in no sense a 'subjective' conception: the conception of belonging to a type which tends to be favoured by the struggle for existence more than another is as 'objective' as any conception can be.'⁴²

With these conceptual distinctions of Moore's in hand we can now return to Balguy's aesthetic realism and the *Euthyphro* question bearing the tools necessary for some needed clarification.

Let us suppose, for the nonce, Balguy's answer to the *Euthyphro* question is that beauty is 'a real objective *Perfection*' of 'intrinsic Worth' because 'amiable in the sight of the Creator Himself.' In that case, we would have to locate it, on Moore's conceptual map, either as subjective, or as objective but not intrinsic.

In a weird sort of way, under the present assumption, beauty would be subjective, since it would be dependent on some particular individual's having a certain kind of mental attitude towards it; for that, on Moore's view, defines subjectivism. That it is a 'weird' kind of subjectivism of course results from the fact that the individual in question is God. (Obviously the Deity was not on Moore's mind as one of the possibilities when he spoke of the state of mind of an individual or individuals.) And perhaps, at least for eighteenth-century theology and metaphysics, that would be bending the concept of subjectivism out of all recognizable shape.

So let us, instead, say that this answer to the *Euthyphro* questions amounts to a form of aesthetic objectivity. Nevertheless, it could not possibly make beauty an *intrinsic* value because, on Moore's definition, to say that beauty is an intrinsic value means that 'the question of whether a thing possesses it, and in what degree it possesses it, depends solely on the intrinsic [internal] nature of the thing in question.' But if the *Euthyphro* question is answered as above, it would depend, rather, on the state of God's consciousness, which could have been other than it is, on pain of negating his

⁴² Ibid., 256.

Peter Kivy

freedom of will, or omnipotence, or both. And if being beautiful depends on the circumstances – in this case, the will of God – then beauty cannot be an intrinsic value, which is to say, a value depending on the internal, intrinsic nature of the beautiful things themselves and nothing more. For they could have not been beautiful, even though their internal, intrinsic natures remained exactly the same, if something other than what is ‘amiable’ in God’s sight were amiable in his sight.

If, then, we are to take Balguy at his word, that beauty is an ‘intrinsic’ property, an ‘intrinsic’ good, which is to say an intrinsic value or ‘perfection,’ then we must say Balguy’s answer to the *Euthyphro* question has to be that beauty is ‘amiable in the sight of the Creator Himself’ because it is ‘a real [intrinsic] *Perfection*’ of ‘intrinsic Worth.’ And that indeed is what I propose. That it raises familiar problems about the attributes of God, notably, the problem of apparently negating his omnipotence, since He cannot change the nature of beauty, I will leave to the theologians to worry about.

Conclusion

At this point, I conclude my account of Balguy’s realist aesthetics more or less confident that it is more or less complete, Balguy’s place in the history of aesthetics more generously assessed than heretofore. To be sure, his reputation as a not insignificant figure in the history of the discipline rests not on any extended text, as does Hutcheson’s, nor even, as in the case of Thomas Reid, on a self-contained essay.⁴³ What he had to say exists, as we have seen, only in passing remarks in works devoted mainly to ethical and theological questions. Nonetheless, Balguy, as far as I know, was there first, both in the rationalist criticism of Hutcheson’s sentiment-based theory of beauty, and in his defense of beauty as an intrinsic value, in something akin to Moore’s sense of the term.⁴⁴ For these

⁴³ See Essay VIII of Reid’s *Essays on the intellectual powers of man*: ‘Of Taste.’

⁴⁴ One of the referees for *Enlightenment and Dissent* is worried that because Balguy thinks beauty is a “relational” property, and Moore defines intrinsic value as due to the internal nature of the thing, and not to any relation it may have to anything external to it, Balguy’s beauty cannot be intrinsic in the Moorean sense. But this is to ignore the distinction

Balguy and the sense of beauty

two accomplishments he deserves at least to be *noticed* in the history of modern philosophical aesthetics. I do not say that this requires us to re-write that history. But it does require, perhaps, more than just a footnote.

Peter Kivy
Rutgers University
New Brunswick

between “internal” and “external” relations. Balguy’s beauty is relational in the sense that it is supervenient on the internal relations of the parts of the beautiful thing, not on the beautiful thing’s relation to something *external to it*. And this is to say that its beauty depends on its inner nature alone, the inner relations of its parts to one another, which fulfills Moore’s requirement for intrinsic value.

**DID PAINE ABRIDGE HIS *RIGHTS OF MAN*?
TEXTUAL SCHOLARSHIP AND CONTROVERSIAL
CONTEXT***

Iain Hampsher-Monk

It is normally – and quite correctly – recognised that the establishment of the provenance, reliability and integrity of the text is a presupposition for worthwhile interpretative work, whether historical-contextual or philosophical. Peter Laslett’s work on Locke’s *Two Treatises* is probably the most famous case in point. Here our understanding of the historical context in which Locke wrote (and therefore the import, and possible intentions of his argument) was transformed by discoveries concerning the timing, provenance and socio-political context of the development of the text. However, the relationship between provenance and context can work both ways, they can be mutually self-supporting, and indeed occasionally the burden of the logic can work as easily the other way, and the historical context of the author and the import of a work and even its textual character can help in identifying the provenance of a text.

Recently, whilst preparing to excerpt Paine for a reader on the French Revolution debate in England,¹ my attention was drawn to the existence of contemporary abridgements of Paine’s *Rights of Man*. The decision to publish readers involving abridgements was seen by CUP to be an appropriate response to the emergence of ‘mass higher education’. It was a decision taken not without some deliberation, given CUP’s commitment in the ‘Blue Books’ to publishing whole and authentic texts, and given the commitment of the editors of that series to the interpretative respect for ‘authorial intention – a commitment moreover, which I shared.² Suppose,

* I am grateful colleagues in the Eighteenth-Century Seminar at Exeter where this paper was read, and in particular to Mark Philp for critical comments on an earlier draft. I’m aware that I will not have met all his objections, but the argument is at least stronger for his having raised them.

¹ *The impact of the French Revolution: texts from Britain in the 1790s* (Cambridge, 2005).

² Officially the ‘Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought’ Editors Raymond Geuss and Quentin Skinner. A brief statement of the

Did Paine abridge his 'Rights of Man'

however, Paine had *himself* abridged the *Rights of man*? This would provide the required shortened text, but one that departed least from authenticity in that that very abbreviation would embody the author's own intentions as to what could be cut and what should be left.

Such a version would of course raise its own questions. Even if it could be shown that Paine had created his own abbreviated text, to what extent could it be said to embody intentions present in the original? Or should the new version represent a new set of intentions deriving from the new context, and presumably embodying an authorial intervention of a different kind? These are questions to which we shall return in the course of the following discussion and which turn out to be inextricably entwined in the arguments about the provenance of the text itself.

Paine's *Rights of man* was published in two separate parts; the first on 16th March 1791, within three months of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, to which, of course, it was a reply. The second part continued the argument, and took on board Burke's *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, appearing a year later on or about 16 February in 1792. The publication of each part was impeded by government. The intended publisher of the first edition of part one, Joseph Johnson – frightened by the official response to announcements of the work – withdrew, and only a few copies of it exist. Jeremiah Samuel Jordan took over the printed sheets and published the work. Part two was originally to have been published by Thomas Chapman, but it seems likely that he was leant on by Pitt: first to try and buy the copyright from Paine (presumably so that the work could be suppressed without the publicity of a trial), and, when that failed, to refuse to proceed with the publication of the work.³ Jordan again stepped into the breach:

principles is included inside the fly of each title page. My own view is outlined briefly in my *A history of modern political thought. Major political thinkers from Hobbes to Marx* (Oxford and Cambridge Mass., 1992), x-xi, and the philosophical underpinnings of it in 'Prices as descriptions: Reasons as explanations', in Joseph Melling and Jonathan Barry eds., *Culture in history, production, consumption and values in historical perspective* (Exeter, 1992), 47-71.

³ Paine recounts his version of events (which does not involve directly

Iain Hampsher-Monk

Paine wrote to him enclosing a letter acknowledging himself as the 'author and publisher' of the work, and so presumably, deflecting the authorities from Jordan himself.⁴ Subsequent editions mostly published both parts together.

Rights of Man was the most popular title composed in English in the Eighteenth Century and there were numerous editions.⁵ Paine was active in promoting the work, writing early in 1792 to the Society for Constitutional Information informing them of his intention to publish the two parts 'in a cheaper manner than they have hitherto been' as a result of requests from 'persons to whom purchase at the present price [3/6d] was inconvenient.'⁶ Paine's intention was clearly to promote his ideas rather than to make money, and he is openly unconcerned about protecting his copyright (as opposed to the integrity of his text),⁷ famously

accusing Chapman – or Pitt) in the Appendix to *Rights of man*, see Thomas Paine: *Rights of Man*, ed. Gregory Claeys (Indianapolis, 1992) 229; Chapman gave evidence at Paine's trial *A complete collection of State Trials, and proceedings for high treason and other crimes and misdemeanors from the earliest times: compiled by T B Howell ... and continued ... by Thomas Jones Howell*, ed. by William Cobbett, London, 1817: Volume XXII, AD 1783-1794 [hereafter *State Trials*], Col. 401.

⁴ Paine to Jordan, Feb 16th, 1792, in *The complete writings of Thomas Paine*, [hereafter *Complete writings*] collected and edited by Philip S Foner, with a biographical essay, and notes and introductions presenting the historical background of Paine's writings (2 vols., New York, 1945), II, 1324.

⁵ Paine claimed half a million copies had been sold in ten years. 'A Letter to the Citizens of the United States' in *The National Intelligencer* Nov. 15 1802, in *Complete writings*, II, 910; a similar figure is offered by Carl Cone *The English Jacobins* (New York, 1968), 105, who however does not give a source.

⁶ Paine to the Chairman of the Society for Promoting Constitutional Knowledge [sic], May 12, 1792, in *Complete writings*, vol. II, 1325.

⁷ In recounting his refusal to assign copyright to Chapman, Paine wrote: 'I would never put it in the power of any printer or publisher to suppress or alter a work of mine, by making him master of the copy, or give to him the right of selling it to any minister, or to any other person, or to treat as a matter of traffic, that which I intended should operate as a principle. Appendix, in *Rights of Man*, ed. Claeys, 231.

Did Paine abridge his 'Rights of Man'

offering to sign over the book's considerable revenues to the Society for Constitutional Information.⁸ This was one feature of the publication that worried the government. As Sir Archibald Macdonald, Attorney General, and prosecuting counsel for the Crown at Paine's trial put it: 'in all shapes and sizes, with an industry incredible, it [*Rights of man*] was totally or partially thrust into the hands of ... subjects of every description.' It was particularly disturbing that 'all industry was used ... in order to obtrude and force this upon that part of the public whose minds cannot be supposed to be conversant with subjects of this sort and who can not therefore correct as they go along.'⁹ His characterisation of the distribution of the work was quite right and it was published in numerous forms, including not only cheap editions but abridgements for a popular readership.¹⁰ Some of these abridgements were clearly published without Paine's involvement, or even knowledge. One obvious candidate is *An abridgement of Mr Paine's Rights of man*, by John Thompson, printed for the author [!!] (Edinburgh, 1792). Such versions, if not blatantly pirated attempts to cash in on what was after all a huge publishing success, were, at the very least, not specifically sanctioned by Paine.

However, amongst these abridgements is one of particular interest, identified by Gregory Claeys as 'by Paine'.¹¹ It exists in two versions, one published in London by Daniel Isaac Eaton – himself a radical pamphleteer, as well as printer of other radicals' works – and a second by D Webster in Philadelphia.¹² The London

⁸ Privy Council Papers 1/44/A155 cited in Gregory Claeys, *Thomas Paine, social and political thought*, (London, 1989), 114. The Society declined.

⁹ *State Trials*, col 381.

¹⁰ E.g: *Paine's political and moral maxims; selected from the 5th Edition* by a Free-Born Englishman (London, 1792). Constitutional Societies also widely published cheap and excerpted versions such as the Leicester Constitutional Society's *Abstract of the Rights of man* (1792). For an account of the dissemination of the works see Albert Goodwin, *The friends of liberty* (London, 1979), 173ff.

¹¹ *The Rights of man*, ed. Claeys, xxix.

¹² There is no published study devoted to Eaton, who seems to have epitomised the flamboyant, irreverent and opportunistic radical printer-

version dates from 1795; the Philadelphia one from 1797. The titles of the two versions differ slightly: Eaton's is *The Rights of man, for the use and benefit of all mankind* whilst Webster's is *The Rights of man, for the benefit of all mankind*. Although paginated differently, the text is identical, and given the dates the assumption might be that Webster's derives from Eaton's. In this connection it is at least suggestive that Eaton emigrated to Philadelphia late in 1797. Claeys notes that the American edition 'lacks the preface'. But I think this may not be so. There are two examples of Webster's version in the British Library. One does indeed lack the preface, but it is not in its original binding, so it is quite possible that the fascicle containing the introduction has simply been lost.¹³ This is consistent with the fact that the first page of the (unpaginated) body text in each example is sig B, suggesting there were originally a similar number of run-in pages. The British Library's second copy of Webster *is* bound with the preface.¹⁴

Gregory Claeys acknowledged that he was unable to document his claim that the abridgement was by Paine,¹⁵ and although I think he is right, it is part of the purpose here to assess the evidence for this. Conway, Paine's great and careful nineteenth-century biographer, thought at least the preface, supposedly written and signed by Paine in the Tuileries Prison, was 'manifestly spurious'.¹⁶ However, this, even if true, is not inconsistent with Paine having made the abridgement.

Given the connections often alleged between the two men, the fact that Eaton published the work might be taken to support the case that the abridgement is Paine's own work. For example, the entry on Eaton in the *Biographical Dictionary of British radicals* claims that from 1795 Eaton was 'The official publisher of Paine's works in England'.¹⁷ Whatever that might mean in the 1790s

publisher of the time; but there is Daniel L McCue Jr. *Daniel Isaac Eaton and 'Politics for the People'* (unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Columbia University, 1974).

¹³ This version is bound in BL 8007.e.36 Not in original binding.

¹⁴ The version bound in 8135.c.1(2).

¹⁵ Private communication to the author.

¹⁶ Cited in the entry for this item in the *Union Catalog*.

¹⁷ *Biographical dictionary of British radicals*, Vol. I, 142.

Did Paine abridge his 'Rights of Man'

context of quasi-clandestine radical publishing activity, and however close Paine and Eaton were to become, the relationship appears, at least at this time, to have been decidedly equivocal. Eaton was certainly an indefatigable *seller* of Paine's work and was prosecuted more than once for doing so.¹⁸ But it's not at all clear – at least before December 1795 – that he did so at Paine's behest rather than from more mixed motives. However firm Eaton's radical convictions were, he also made a considerable amount of money from his bookselling and publishing activities.¹⁹ The repeated claim that Eaton was prosecuted for publishing *An address to the addressers*, Paine's response to attempts to prosecute him for *The Rights of man*, has perhaps bolstered this view of a close and early relationship between the two men.²⁰ But *The address...*, left behind when Paine escaped to France, was proofed by Paine on his arrival in France and published initially by H. D. Symonds and Clio Rickman, of whom Paine was an established client, and indeed a good friend.²¹ Eaton was indeed prosecuted for *selling* the work,²²

¹⁸ Eaton's prosecution in relation to *Rights of man* alleged that he 'unlawfully, wickedly, maliciously and seditiously did publish and cause to be published, ...Rights of man part the second, combining principles and practice, by Thomas Paine,' *State Trials*, col.755. However the prosecution then goes on to describe the work (as its title page describes it) as 'printed for J.S.Jordan' (*Ibid*). The title page is reproduced in Claeys, *Rights of Man*, facing 112. It is not clear what 'printed for J.S.Jordan' could mean if Jordan were not the publisher, and Eaton was selling it. What other roles are available? All the prosecution sought to establish in the trial was that the book was sold in Eaton's shop, not that he 'published' it in the modern sense (*State Trials*, *ibid*, cols. 766, 769). It is possible that 'publish' was being used here in the generic original sense, of 'put out', like 'broadcast'. Such an activity would imply no personal relationship.

¹⁹ At the start of his printing career in 1793 Eaton was said to be 'not worth 50L in all the world.' Yet in 1803 he is said to have suffered a loss of over £3,000 worth of stock in one shipwreck. *Dictionary of British radicals*, 140, 142,

²⁰ P A Brown *The French revolution in English history* (London, 1918), 95, repeated in the *Dictionary of British radicals*, 140.

²¹ *Complete Writings*, II, 469. The C18th. STC identifies as *publishers* only H D Symonds and J S Jordan: *A Letter addressed to the addressers*

Iain Hampsher-Monk

but this is no evidence of an author-publisher relationship, or indeed of any relationship at all. Even if Eaton had *printed* a version it would not show Paine was dealing directly with him. Eaton could simply have pirated it. Indeed the only evidence of communication between the two men at this time provides evidence that points precisely that way.

That evidence is a rather curt 1795 letter from Paine (then in France) to Eaton in which Paine complains that he had learned (from a press advertisement) that Eaton was intending to publish a second edition of the *Age of reason*, supposedly 'printed from the author's manuscript.' Paine points out this claim must be false since the original manuscript was still in his own possession.²³ The *Age of reason Part I* had been published by Paine in Paris in 1794, and a second edition of it already existed in London in 1795. The letter is formally addressed 'Sir' not 'Dear Sir' which Paine commonly used to those he knew somewhat, let alone the more familiar 'Dear Friend' which he had begun to use for example to Jefferson by this time. The form of address to Eaton doesn't suggest even acquaintance, let alone cordiality. So the Eaton letter does not suggest their even having been in contact, let alone in a publisher-author relationship hitherto; and given that the letter is dated 4th December 1795, any such relationship could scarcely have predated the publication of the 1795 abridgement of the *Rights of man*. This line of reasoning, by unpicking the supposedly close relationship between Paine and Eaton, demolishes *that* as a grounds for supposing Paine to have been involved in the abridgement.

However, the Eaton letter does provide an illuminating insight into Paine's attitude towards his own work, an insight which leads us to question the assumption underlying the above discussion, namely that showing a close or contractual relationship between Eaton and Paine would be necessary in order to establish Paine as the author of the abridgement that Eaton published. Those of us who are authors might think this so intuitive a presumption as to be

on the late publication... H D Symonds (London 1792), 8 vo.

²² *State Trials*, xxii, 755 and 785; and [D.I.Eaton] *The Trial of D. I. Eaton for selling a supposed libel A Letter addressed to the addressers* by T. (1793).

²³ Paine to Eaton, Dec. 4 1795, in *Complete Writings*, II, 1383.

Did Paine abridge his 'Rights of Man'

not worth arguing. However, in the letter cited above, Paine, having metaphorically rapped Eaton's knuckles over his false claim to be presenting a text as authenticated by Paine, next does an extraordinary thing – he sends Eaton a copy of the text in question with instructions to print a cheap and correct version of it!²⁴ It is even possible, despite the clear reference to 'edition' in the letter, that there is some confusion here between the second *edition* of the *Age of reason Part I*, and the *Age of reason Part II*. But the same pattern obtains – and the same argument –: *Age of reason Part II* was first published in London by one of Paine's usual publishers, H D Symonds in 1795, and by Eaton, in another edition in 1796. Either way, Paine's concern here – as with *Rights of man* earlier – is clearly not with revenue or protecting his intellectual property right, it is with getting his work circulated in cheap and accurate form. Given *that* motivation, it would not be necessary to presuppose any close relationship between the two men in order for Eaton to have been the publisher of an abridgement prepared by Paine.

This seems to be about as far as the contextual evidence will take us in establishing the integrity and provenance of this particular text. Normally, as stated at the outset, the establishment of these features has important implications for our interpretation of the text. However in this case there is an interesting interplay between the bearing of the context on the status of the text, the content (as we shall see) of the text itself, and of the implications of its status for the understanding of its meaning. First let us turn to the context – biographical and political – where, I suggest, there are further clues as to the authorship, provenance, and consequently possible intentions of the author.

It was in November 1794 that Paine emerged from prison, and

²⁴ 'I send you a printed copy, ... I wish you to make a cheap edition of it. ... If any person has made a manuscript copy I have no doubt but that it is full of errors.' The letter makes no mention of any financial arrangements. *Complete writings*. Ibid. Eaton did indeed publish a further edition in 1796. The *Dictionary of British radicals* entry is particularly misleading on this episode: 'he (Eaton) received gratifying recognition from Thomas Paine who wrote from Paris authorising Eaton to produce a cheap correct edition of the *Age of reason Part II*', 142.

from the threat of the guillotine that he had so narrowly escaped during Robespierre's terror.²⁵ That winter he was extremely ill and the American Ambassador and future president, James Monroe, took him into his house to convalesce.²⁶ It was at this time that Paine returns to political writing. He produced his *Dissertation on the first principles of government*, a work that Eaton was also subsequently to publish. The contemporary political contexts in both France and America are important in understanding the intentions behind Paine's renewed publishing activity at a time when he was still physically dangerously weak.²⁷

In France, the overthrow of Robespierre and the end of the terror, led to a debate on a new constitution in the National Convention. There were cries of 'the constitution of '93!' and the Abbé Sieyès propogandised on behalf of a return to a constitutional monarchy with a franchise limited to property-owners and veteran revolutionary soldiers. In the ...*First principles* Paine – although he had nearly lost his life pleading for that of the King – reiterated his implacable opposition to any kind of monarchy or to any restricted franchise.²⁸

²⁵ Paine himself recounted how he escaped execution only because his cell door had been marked when it was open and flat against the outside wall. The official charged with collecting the victims during the night consequently failed to see the mark, by then on the *inside* of the shut door. *To The citizens of the United States*, letter III, *Complete Writings* vol. II, 921

²⁶ So ill was Paine that Monroe wrote home to America in late 1794 that he expected Paine to die before the year was out. M Conway, *The life of Thomas Paine* (2 vols, 1892), 223 ff.

²⁷ As late as July 1795 Paine was still unable to speak when addressing the Convention, to membership of which he had been restored. Claeys *Paine*, 32

²⁸ 'There is not a proposition in Euclid more mathematically true than that hereditary government has not a right to exist.' And 'Every man has a right to one vote. ... Personal rights, of which the right of voting for representatives is one, are a species of property of the most sacred kind: and he that would employ his pecuniary property, or presume upon the influence it gives him to dispossess or rob another of his property or rights uses that pecuniary property as he would use fire-arms, and merits to have it taken away from him.' *First principles of government*, *Complete*

Did Paine abridge his 'Rights of Man'

But the American context is clearly also important here. America was undergoing its own minor Thermidor. Two parties, Federalists and Republicans, were emerging. The 'temporary' retirement of Jefferson had given the Federalists, led by Hamilton and Jay, the upper hand. They pursued a policy of appeasement with Britain and repression of the Democratic movement at home.²⁹ These were developments of which Paine, lodged as he was in the American Ambassador's house, could hardly have been unaware. Paine's political influence would clearly weigh in on the side of the Republican protesters and he had no reason to believe his influence in America was not still of some account. Unknown to Paine – and possibly to Washington too, although Paine suspected him of at least ingratitude – Gouverneur Morris, one of the anti-Republican group, and American ambassador in France during the terror, had, if not colluding in the planned guillotining of Paine, then at the very least schemed to keep him in prison, by telling Robespierre that he did not recognise Paine as an American citizen (a status which would almost certainly have led to his release).³⁰

Paine, newly restored to political circulation after his imprisonment, therefore had important reasons to remind two of his publics – the French and the American – about the core republican principles and values that were at risk. One obvious way to do this

Writings, II, 572, 578.

²⁹ A pro-republican movement known as the Democratic Clubs, were implicated in the anti-duty 'Whiskey Rebellion' of 1794 and were repressed by Hamilton and a citizen militia with Washington's acquiescence. John Adams, Washington's successor as president was more violently opposed to these groups, who many thought, aided by French emigrés, would introduce extreme demands for political equality which were associated with the excesses of the French revolution – and Paine. This led eventually to the Sedition Bill of 1798 which made criticism of the government punishable by fine or imprisonment. For a good brief account see Marchette Chute *The first liberty: the history of the right to vote in America*. (London, 1969), 263ff.

³⁰ D Walther, *Gouverneur Morris* (New York, 1934), 247-8. Indeed Morris may have been instrumental in securing Paine's arrest. Paine recounts how amongst Robespierre's papers was found a note calling for Paine's arrest 'pour l'intérêts de L'Amérique, autant que de la France.' Preface to part II of *The Age of reason*, in *Complete writings*, I, 516.

might have been to prepare a version of the *Rights of man* directed to meeting these needs. Given his frail health, Paine had every reason to adapt existing work to this purpose rather than set about writing something entirely new. There are other examples of this tactic at work: the *Dissertation on first principles of government* was itself adapted from an unpublished text originally intended for Holland. What more natural than that Paine should try to use the considerable *caché* of his most successful title by adapting the *Rights of Man* for the present political purposes? And given his unconcern about revenue from his texts, what more natural an outlet than the willing, opportunistic and bold Eaton? More especially so as his normal publishers, more gentle than Eaton, might have been more wary of publishing politically inflammatory works, in Britain's increasingly repressive political environment.³¹

If we now return from the political and personal context of Paine at the time to the internal textual evidence we find certain features of the text itself that encourage this hypothesis. Most of the abridgement derives from the original text of the full edition. Many of the cuts are what one might expect from someone seeking to 'slim down' a rhetorically embellished argument. However the abridgement both shows signs of great care (such as one might suppose only an author would devote to his own prose?) and of systematic abstraction from its original controversial context (which entirely fits the new purposes to which Paine wished to put his ideas).

For example the long passage³² in which Paine disputes Burke's account of events in Paris in 1789 is omitted in its entirety, although it contains some of Paine's best polemical writing – including perhaps his most famous taunt that Burke 'pities the plumage but forgets the dying bird'. This is not only the removal of work which might be thought mere rhetorical 'flourish' but a principled excision of any material which has reference to the

³¹ In the aftermath of the treason trials of 1794, and food shortages of 1795 'radicalism emerged as a serious movement of public protest against a whole series of urgent popular grievances.' Leading to Government repression and the notorious 'Gagging acts' of Dec. 1795. Goodwin, *Friends of liberty*, 360.

³² From 18 to 36 in Claeys' edition.

Did Paine abridge his 'Rights of Man'

original controversial context. The care with which this was done extends to very detailed changes to the text: for example by the systematic substitution of the single word 'parliament' by the word 'legislature' in the middle of otherwise untouched passages.³³

Moreover in some cases bridging passages have been *inserted*. Often these are not significantly shorter than the passages they replace indeed in some cases they are of considerable length. Moreover even where short they do not merely bridge ellipses. What they do is to replace passages that identify the context of the argument as one about *English (and French)* politics (just as Part 2 had left behind the detailed controversy over the events of the French Revolution), and as an argument between Burke and Paine, with a form of words that raises the argument to a more abstract and universal level. Thus, for example, in a well known passage where the original reads

Man has no property in man; neither has any generation a property in the generations which are to follow. The parliament or the people of 1688, or of any other period, had no more right....'

the abridged version reads: :

'Man has no property in man – neither has any generation a property in the generations that are to follow. A legislature, or the people of any antecedent period had no more right...'³⁴

Thus generalising the point from the particular case of 1688. And again, shortly after

'From what or whence, does Mr Burke prove the right of any human power to bind posterity forever?'

becomes:

'From what or whence is the right of any human power derived to bind posterity forever?'³⁵

The principle of excision, the character of the new passages and the careful emendation of details in the existing text, all re-enforce the perception that the editor's purpose in producing this version

³³ Thus for example *Rights of man for the benefit of all mankind*, (Eaton) 23, line 14, cf. *Rights of man*, ed. Claeys, 55 bottom para., line 1.

³⁴ *Rights of Man...* (Eaton), 1-2; *Rights of man*, ed. Claeys, 14-15.

³⁵ *Rights of Man...* (Eaton), 3; *Rights of Man*, ed. Claeys, 16.

Iain Hampsher-Monk

was not simply to shorten the original, but to recast the argument of the *Rights of Man* in a less forensic and polemical, and a more abstract and generalisable format.

Now one other possible reason for the reworking³⁶ which accepts the possibility of Paine's involvement, but locates it in a different context, is that the revision excises the kind of passages that were picked out as seditious in Paine's prosecution.³⁷ Was the retreat from the direct criticism of the British constitution to abstract argument an attempt to escape further legal action? Interestingly this turns out not to be the case. Indeed far from resting its prosecution purely on those parts of *Rights of Man* that specifically attacked the Glorious Revolution and positive elements of the English Constitution, the Crown prosecutor also drew attention to precisely those claims of Paine's that were cast in universal terms, and invited the jurors to opine that they were clearly intended to be taken to apply to England. In his opening statement the Attorney General, after identifying the work claimed that:

'In [the] said libel are contained, amongst other things divers false, scandalous, malicious and seditious matters. ...that is to say 'All hereditary government is in its nature tyranny'... An heritable crown (meaning amongst others, the crown of this kingdom)...have no other significant explanation than that mankind are heritable property.'³⁸

And again

[quoting Paine]: 'It is not because a part of the government is elective, that makes it less a despotism, If the persons so elected possess afterwards, as a parliament, unlimited powers; election in this case becomes separated from representation, and the candidates are candidates for despotism.'³⁹

³⁶ Suggested to me by Mark Philp

³⁷ Paine's indictment at the prosecution mentions both parts of the work, charging that he '...did write and publish...intituled Rights of Man Part the Second, and the First Part of Rights of Man, the Second Edition', [*State Trials* col 360] but the passages identified as seditious are all from *Rights of Man*, part II.

³⁸ *State Trials, loc. cit.* col 362.

³⁹ *State Trials, loc. cit.*, col 385.

Did Paine abridge his 'Rights of Man'

Indeed it is relevant to this point that the Crown chose to prosecute *Rights of Man part the second* which is a far more abstract work dealing with generic principles, rather than *part I*, where the argument proceeds in much more specific relation to the English Constitution.

So the desire to avoid prosecution seems an unlikely motive for retreating to more abstract formulations. Rather, the effect (and so perhaps the intention) of the abridger in casting the argument in this new form is not only to abridge it but to make it immediately applicable *wherever* it is published in France and America – and indeed in an England in which the focus of debate had moved on from the reception of *Reflections...*, and to the wider issue of reform, not only through being shorn of its parochial references to the attack on Burke and the English Constitutional context, but also, perhaps, by addressing political cultures now more used to conducting political argument in the language of abstractions.

If we ask who had an interest in undertaking an abridgement according to these principles, for these purposes, and of doing so with this extraordinary degree of care, the answer provided by the context seems to be only Paine himself, or at least someone working under his close instruction. Moreover, given his personal and the controversial context, ill and isolated in Paris but wanting to intervene in these two vital developments, and given also his unconcern with financial reward, all this would be quite consistent with his allowing (even if he did not send) the text to go to Eaton. After all, we know at least one other occasion on which this took place.

Iain Hampsher-Monk
University of Exeter

**‘PROBABLY THE MOST INDEFATIGABLE PRINCE
THAT EVER EXISTED’: A RATIONAL DISSENTING
PERSPECTIVE ON FREDERICK THE GREAT**

Anthony Page

Frederick the Great of Prussia was hailed by many as the model of an ‘Enlightened Despot’. Historians continue to debate both the concept of ‘Enlightened Despotism’ and Frederick’s credentials as an enlightened monarch. Should we talk in terms of ‘enlightened absolutism’? Of ‘reform absolutism’?¹ Or simply drop the use of any such terms for a monarch who used his enlightened philosophising and flute playing as window dressing for a system of governance that was essentially conventional absolutism?² In light of continuing debate about the nature of Frederick’s reign, it is worth revisiting the views of contemporaries. As a friend of Voltaire, Frederick’s place was well established in traditional depictions of the Enlightenment as centred on the French *philosophes*. In the past two decades, however, scholars have broadened and deepened our conception of Enlightenment by researching the ‘social history of ideas’ and illuminating Enlightenment in various national and cultural contexts.³ In this vein, an analysis of perceptions of Frederick the Great can shed light on the nature of Enlightenment in Britain.

Frederick’s popularity in Britain reached dizzying heights in the late 1750s as he won spectacular victories in the Continental campaign against Britain’s enemies in the Seven Years War. From the 1760s on, however, British opinion was generally critical of his regulated and militaristic state and his aggrandisement through

¹ T C W Blanning, ‘Frederick the Great and Enlightened Absolutism’, in H M Scott ed., *Enlightened Absolutism: reform and reformers in later Eighteenth-Century Europe* (1990), pp. 265-88. See also, Eckhart Hellmuth, ‘Enlightenment and Government’, in Martin Fitzpatrick et. al. eds., *The Enlightenment World* (London and New York, 2004), 442-56.

² See for example, M S Anderson, *Europe in the eighteenth century, 1713-1783* (London, 1961).

³ See for example, Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich, *Enlightenment in national context* (Cambridge, 1981); Thomas Munck, *The Enlightenment: a comparative social history 1721-1794* (London and New York, 2000).

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

diplomacy.⁴ While it is not within the scope of this essay to explore broader perceptions of Frederick II in late eighteenth-century Britain, it appears that writers who can be located within ‘conservative’ enlightened thought had a more positive perception of Frederick than dissenters. Samuel Johnson declared that the King of Prussia could get away with wearing plain cloths because ‘of the dignity of his character’.⁵ On separate occasions in 1780 Edmund Burke praised Frederick for the economy and efficiency of his royal court and for his religious toleration.⁶ An article is in preparation that will explore the range of British opinion on Frederick the Great at the end of his long reign. This essay, however, will focus on how some leading Rational Dissenters perceived the self-consciously enlightened King of Prussia, and provide an exposition of the *Memoirs of the life and reign of Frederick* (1788) by Joseph Towers.

Rational Dissent on Frederick the Great

During the Seven Years War, English adulation for ‘Fritz’ became so great that Horace Walpole was moved to quip: ‘the people, I believe, begin to think that Prussia is part of Old England’ – and Frederick’s face appeared on more pieces of pottery than had the Duke of Cumberland’s after the ‘45.⁷ In his boyhood Major John Cartwright, who became a cautious Unitarian and leading political activist and co-founder of the Society for Constitutional Information, was so impressed by Frederick the Great’s achievements that he attempted to run away from home to enlist in

⁴ For the strained diplomatic relations in this period see Richard Lodge, *Great Britain and Prussia in the eighteenth century* (Oxford, 1923), 139-65.

⁵ James Boswell, *Dr. Johnson’s table-talk: containing aphorisms on literature, life, and manners* (London, 1798), 223.

⁶ Edmund Burke, *Speech of Edmund Burke, Esq. Member of Parliament for the city of Bristol, on presenting to the House of Commons, on the 11th of February, 1780* (1780), 44; Edmund Burke, ‘Speech at Bristol, Previous to the Election, 1780’, in *The works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (3 vols., London, 1792), II, 308.

⁷ Kathleen Wilson, *The sense of the people* (Cambridge, 1995), 197.

the Prussian army.⁸ Several Rational Dissenters preached sermons praising Prussian victories, with the young Newcome Cappe making a name for himself with a very popular sermon on Frederick the Great's stunning victory at Rossbach in 1757.⁹ Ebenezer Radcliffe saw Frederick as an agent of the 'Protestant Interest', whose victories against incredible odds made it seem 'as if heaven had marked him out for the admiration of mankind'.¹⁰ Hannah Smith has convincingly demonstrated that this enthusiasm for a German absolute monarch in liberty loving England makes sense in light of the long-standing pan-national ideal of the Protestant soldier-king.¹¹

That said, even during the Seven Years War some Rational Dissenters displayed a dislike of the adulation heaped upon Frederick. Israel Mauduit argued that Britain should focus on fighting France in the Atlantic ('the British war') and keep clear of what was in effect a 'German civil war'. Should the French pursue their intervention in the German conflict, the British should leave the conflict to take its course and not act as a 'general Knight Errant of Europe, to rescue oppressed states'. On the question of supporting the 'Protestant Interest', Mauduit was sceptical. 'We happen now to have one nominal Protestant Prince on our side', he observed, and proceeded to remind his readers of their general

⁸ F D Cartwright ed., *The life and correspondence of Major Cartwright* (2 vols., London, 1826), I, 7.

⁹ Cappe's sermon went through thirteen editions and brought him to the attention of leading political figures. See N Cappe, *Discourses ... to which are prefixed memoirs of his life*, by Catharine Cappe (2nd edn., York, 1816), xxxiv, cited in John Seed, 'Rational Dissent and political opposition, 1770-1790', in Knud Haakonssen, ed., *Enlightenment and religion: Rational Dissent in eighteenth-century Britain* (1996), 162. For a concise assessment of the significance of Rossbach, see T C W Blanning, *The French revolutionary wars 1787-1802* (London, 1996), 1-12.

¹⁰ Ebenezer Radcliffe, *A Discourse occasioned by the glorious victory gained over the French by Prince Ferdinand of Brunswick, August 1, 1759* (London, 1759), 15, 13.

¹¹ Hannah Smith, 'The idea of a Protestant monarchy in Britain 1714-1760', *Past and Present*, 185 (Nov. 2004), 91-118; idem., *Georgian monarchy: politics and culture, 1714-1760* (Cambridge, 2006), 31-32.

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

opinion of Frederick II in the previous war: ‘this great champion of Protestantism was then universally decried by us, as a man devoid of faith, religion, and every good principle. Have his writings made us think better of his religion?’ In Mauduit’s eyes, the only recent ‘innovation ... made in the Empire in prejudice of the Protestant interest’ was ‘that the K. of P. had built a Popish church at Berlin, and had the foundation stone laid in his own name’.¹² We might have expected Richard Price to refer to Frederick in a sermon preached at the height of the Seven Years War. In November 1759 Price delivered a ‘national thanksgiving’ sermon in which he waxed lyrical about *Britain’s happiness* in being a free and prosperous country; ‘a land which has the best constitution of government, the best laws, the best king and the best religion in the world’, while others in Europe were suffering from the ravages of war and oppression. While its constitution could be improved, Britain’s ‘wealth increases continually; and it may be questioned whether any nation ever raised, with so much ease, such large expenses as have been laid out by this nation in the present war. Our commerce is extended from one end of the earth to another. Our naval force is unrivaled’. Declaring that ‘we are the bulwark of the Protestant interest in the world’, Price’s sermon makes no mention of Frederick II or Prussia.¹³

At the end of the Seven Years War relations between Britain and Prussia soured and remained rocky for the last two decades of Frederick’s life. During this late-Enlightenment period, the published writings of Rational Dissenters appear to contain relatively few references to the monarchical hero of the French *philosophes*.¹⁴ John Jebb, one of the leading political activists among the network

¹² Israel Mauduit, *Considerations on the present German war* (London, 1760), 132, 13, 17-18.

¹³ Richard Price, *Britain’s happiness, and the proper improvement of it* (1759), in Richard Price, *Political writings*, ed. D O Thomas (Cambridge, 1991), 5, 3, 12.

¹⁴ Key word searches for ‘Frederic’, ‘Frederick’, and ‘Prussia’ in the *Eighteenth-century collections online* yielded little or no results for the published works of the following leading Rational Dissenter and republican writers: John Jebb, Capel Lofft, Andrew Kippis, Richard Price, John Cartwright, and Catherine Macaulay.

of Rational Dissenters makes no mention of Frederick or Prussia in his three volumes of writings.¹⁵ He is almost absent from the writings of Richard Price, and as will be seen below, Joseph Priestley confines himself to a few very disparaging remarks. William Godwin, a student of the leading Rational Dissenter Andrew Kippis, wrote that like Alexander the Great, Frederick's character was 'mixed, and upon the whole vicious, though accomplished'.¹⁶ Overall, Rational Dissenters seem to have shared the opinion of the London based radical American painter, Patience Wright, for whom Frederick II and Joseph II were simply indistinguishable 'Germans'.¹⁷ If Dissenting and republican references to Frederick are few, efforts to engage with Frederick's political writings, which articulated a secular legitimation of absolute monarchy, appear to be nonexistent. This is less surprising when we consider that when President John Adams, a friend of English Unitarians, devoted a considerable amount of time to reading and annotating Frederick's *Works* he focused on the correspondence with Voltaire and wrote little on the political tracts.¹⁸ The few references in the writings of the leading lights of Rational Dissent represent Frederick as a deadly champion of absolute monarchy and an example of the debilitating moral effects of religious scepticism.

The relative lack of public comment on Frederick the Great by Rational Dissenters is not surprising. Aside from a general dislike

¹⁵ For Jebb's significant role as an activist, see Anthony Page, *John Jebb and the Enlightenment origins of British radicalism* (Westport, Conn. and London, 2003); and idem., "'Liberty has an asylum': John Jebb, British radicalism and the American Revolution", *History*, 87 (April 2002), 204-26.

¹⁶ William Godwin, *An enquiry concerning political justice* (2 vols., Dublin, 1793), 357-58.

¹⁷ Charles Coleman Sellers, *Patience Wright: American artist and spy in George III's London* (Middletown, Conn., 1976), 127.

¹⁸ Zoltan Haraszti, *John Adams and the prophets of progress* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), 101. During a time of political difficulties in early 1799, President Adams left the capital to spend several months at home in Massachusetts. People wondered what he was doing: he was reading Frederick II's *Works*.

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

of absolute monarchy amongst Dissenters, the affairs of Central and Eastern Europe did not loom large in the minds of late eighteenth-century Britons. While the public had many imperial links and read much about India and America, Eastern Europe seemed far off and very foreign to most Britons. The partition of Poland in 1772, for example, attracted relatively little attention until British trading interests in Danzig seemed under threat.¹⁹ Frederick II himself did much to construct an image of Eastern Europe as populated with barbaric people, from whom Western Europe could learn little.²⁰

There were many in the late eighteenth century, however, who were keen to sing the praises of the King of Prussia. None more so than Frederick's loyal and respected minister baron Hertzberg. With the end of his king's life nearing, Hertzberg delivered speeches to the Berlin Academy on the King's birthday in 1785 and 1786. In these he described Prussia as a land greatly increased in population and prosperity under the enlightened rule of Frederick. These two discourses were translated into English by Joseph Towers and published in London, where they were favourably received.²¹ The *Monthly Review* reflected on 'the high pleasure' gained from

contemplating a great character, attentive to the interests of humanity. As a hero and a statesman, the Prussian monarch has long been the object of our admiration. He is here exhibited in a point of view not less great, but more admirable – as the true father of his subjects, promoting ... the comfort and happiness of those classes which, though

¹⁹ D B Horn, *British public opinion and the first partition of Poland* (Oxford, 1945).

²⁰ Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: the map of civilization on the mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, Calif., 1994).

²¹ One very positive reviewer thought Hertzberg revealed himself to be 'a profound politician and well-informed historian'. The *Discourses* contained many 'political lessons' that should be followed, and 'we should be glad to see more of the Baron's valuable papers in an English dress: and we think the public indebted to Dr. Tower's, for the faithful and just translation of those before us'. *New Annual Register for ... 1786* (1787), 241.

Anthony Page

generally deemed the lowest rank, are perhaps the most useful and valuable to society.²²

A note of caution was sounded, however, in a review of Hertzberg's *Discourse read on the King's Birthday, concerning population in general* in the *Rational Dissenting New Annual Register*: 'The author is a well known panegyrist of his royal master, and therefore must be read with caution. He pretends that Frederick doubled the population of his hereditary dominions' and with new acquisitions, trebled the population of Prussia. 'But we presume he must date from' the Seven Years War, 'when the population of the Prussian territories was miserably decreased. This pamphlet should be read with infinite caution; it may otherwise induce people ... to believe that an absolute monarchy is the best of governments: a detestable opinion, destructive of mankind, and which we are always sorry when we find learned men endeavouring to propagate'.²³ Such a concern seems to have in part motivated Joseph Towers to compose a two volume *Memoirs of the life and reign of Frederick* (1788).

Joseph Towers

An age of polite sociability generated a great demand for conversational material. Indeed, judging by the expanding volume of printed matter, the 'Age of Reason' could be re-badged the 'Age of Anecdote'. The lives of great leaders proved one of the most reliable and popular sources of instructive and entertaining anecdote and none more so than Frederick the Great. 'It is said', for example, that on the evening after the battle of Rossbach, Frederick put on a supper for captured French officers. He told them that he would have liked to have hosted a more splendid dinner, 'but really, gentlemen, I did not expect you so soon, nor in such large

²² Translator's 'Preface' to 1786 English edition of: Baron Hertzberg, *Two Discourses delivered at public meetings of the Royal Academy of Sciences and Belles Letters at Berlin, in the years 1785 and 1786* (London, 1786). These discourses were delivered on the King's birthday.

²³ *New Annual Register for ... 1785* (1786), 325. This may have been written by Joseph Towers, as his friend Andrew Kippis was a co-founder of the *New Annual Register*.

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

numbers'.²⁴ A conversationalist could shine in the light of recycled snippets of Frederick's renowned repartee.

As such, the death of Frederick the Great was eagerly anticipated in the English press as a literary and commercial event as much as a political one. When his death was confirmed by the British minister in Berlin, the newspapers poured forth reflections on the King's character and achievements, along with serialised extracts from influential texts such as Samuel Johnson's biography of the young Frederick and Voltaire's memoirs.²⁵ These editions also often carried advertisements and calls for subscriptions to books and portraits of the late Prussian king that were already in preparation. *The Morning Chronicle* was moved to wryly observe: 'How friendly was his death to the Biographers!'²⁶

Rev. Joseph Towers (1737-1799) was well placed to join the race. An experienced writer of religious and political pamphlets, Towers had a well-established reputation as a leading voice of Rational Dissent. After running a bookstore and editing the first seven volumes of *British Biography* (1766-72), Towers was ordained as a minister and in 1778 became Richard Price's co-preacher to the Newington Green Presbyterian congregation.²⁷ At the same time, he began to help Andrew Kippis, another leading Rational Dissenter, to begin producing the *Biographia Britannica* (1778-1793), for which Towers eventually wrote nearly sixty entries. He was also an energetic pamphleteer for the Society for Constitutional Information, and regularly attended meetings²⁸

²⁴ Joseph Towers, *Memoirs of the life and reign of Frederick the Third, King of Prussia* (2 vols., London, 1788), II, 145n. Towers follows the English custom of referring to Frederick the Great as Frederick the Third rather than Second, defending the practice at vol. I, 69n.

²⁵ See the editions of *London Chronicle*, *Morning Post*, *Morning Chronicle* and *The Times* from the last week of August to mid-September 1786. An article on British press responses to the death of Frederick is forthcoming.

²⁶ *Morning Chronicle*, 31 Aug. 1786.

²⁷ Price preached in the afternoon and Towers in the morning.

²⁸ F K Donnelly, 'Joseph Towers and the collapse of Rational Dissent', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 6 (1987), 31-38.

Anthony Page

With the influential and affluent network of Rational Dissenters providing a core market, Towers could publish on this popular topic without needing to appeal for subscriptions. Towers clearly thought the example of Frederick the Great too important in the cultural politics of his day to be left in the hands of uncritical admirers. He planned an ‘accurate and impartial’ study, written in light of the principles of English Rational Dissent and Commonwealthman politics that would reveal Frederick as entitled to both praise and censure. After a discussion of the method and the structure of the *Memoirs of Frederick*, I will analyse the main themes and points of Towers’s representation of the King of Prussia.

‘Accurate and Impartial’

Towers thought Frederick II ‘superior to every other prince of the age in which he lived for the extent of his abilities, his talents as a statesman and general, his military exploits, and his literary attainments’. Ages may pass before Europe sees another monarch ‘equally active, able, enterprising and warlike, and in whom such various talents are united’. Naturally an object of curiosity, Towers declared the need to ‘become accurately acquainted with so extraordinary and so distinguished a character’. While there was ‘extreme difficulty’ in doing justice to the subject, Towers aimed to provide an ‘accurate and impartial account’ of Frederick’s life and reign, censuring ‘his actions where repugnant to justice and to humanity’. Towers was concerned that flattering representations of the king should not be ‘continued for the deception of posterity’.²⁹ Introducing the second edition in the shadow of government repression and the aftermath of the French Terror, Towers urged his readers not to be dazzled and deceived by ‘the splendour of heroic actions, or those which are so denominated’. While these appear ‘brilliant in the eyes of the multitude’, they are ‘repugnant to justice, to humanity, and to the common rights of mankind’.³⁰ Significantly,

²⁹ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, ‘Preface’.

³⁰ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (2nd edn., 2 vols., London, 1795), I, ‘Advertisement’.

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

except when quoting a source, Towers does not appear to have referred to him at any point as 'Frederick the Great'.

Towers claimed to have read every extant publication relevant to the subject. The second edition in 1795 was revised in light of the intervening publication of Frederick's *Posthumous works*, including his influential *History of my own times*, and 'some other publications which have appeared concerning him'. In particular, he praised the 1789 thirteen-volume English translation of Frederick's *Works* by Thomas Holcroft (an intimate friend of William Godwin)³¹ as superior to the French editions, in that it contained additional material and 'the letters are better arranged'.³² None of these recent publications, however, had 'in the least' changed his view of the King of Prussia.³³

The *Memoirs* is a conventional narrative of the life and activities of Frederick II. Most of it consists of slabs of text reproduced from literary sources and linked together by narrative and comment by Towers. It is very much a 'memoirs' in contrast to a modern biography, with Towers placing many of his reflections in footnotes (one critical reviewer branded the *Memoirs* a 'heterogeneous mass').³⁴ The by now familiar tale is told: Frederick born heir to a harsh and militaristic father who, ironically, managed to keep Prussia largely free of war, bequeathing to his son a fat

³¹ In the late 1780s Holcroft had become an intimate friend of William Godwin, who helped proof read and edit his translation of Frederick's *Works*. Godwin had been a student and then *New Annual Register* writer for Rev. Andrew Kippis, a close Rational Dissenting associate of Towers.

³² Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (2nd edn.), II, 440. Writing from Paris in early 1789, Thomas Jefferson expressed frustration with his difficulties in obtaining a good copy of Frederick's posthumous works for James Madison: they 'were a little garbled at Berlin before printed', and the French government 'lais [sic] its hands on all which come here, and change some leaves'. He doubted his chances of getting a good copy 'so vigilant is the government as to this work'. Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 12 January 1789, in James Morton Smith, ed., *The republic of letters: the correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison 1776-1826* (3 vols., New York, 1995), I, 583-84.

³³ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (2nd edn.), I, 'Advertisement'.

³⁴ *Critical Review*, 66 (1788), 473.

treasury and expanded standing army; the beheading of the young literary prince's close friend after their failed attempt to escape Prussia; the forced marriage to a niece of the Empress of Austria in 1733, with whom Frederick refused to cohabit for the rest of his life; the opening of correspondence with Voltaire in 1736, etc. Volume I ends with the 'diplomatic revolution' of 1756. Most of volume two is devoted to narrating the Seven Years War, with a few sections devoted to outlining life at *Sans Souci* and the major domestic and diplomatic developments of the last two decades of Frederick's reign. The work is rounded off with two chapters that assess Frederick's character and the nature of his reign.

Towers justified reproducing long extracts from other texts as a means to giving the *Memoirs* 'as much authenticity as possible'. An inductive empiricism is explicitly touted. Towers employs 'longer notes and more copious extracts' than usual as a means of 'communicating the most exact and satisfactory information'. Readers would be left to judge for themselves 'the facts that are related'.³⁵ Towers also included much information on 'men of letters' associated with the King of Prussia to please 'readers of a literary taste' who find anecdotes of writers more interesting than detailed military accounts.³⁶ As Frederick's *Works*, including his *History of my own times*, were published after Towers had completed his book, they are only drawn upon to make some additions to the 1795 second edition. Towers book, while quoting from some works Frederick had published in his lifetime, is mainly based upon periodical reports and the writings of those who knew the King of Prussia. This can be explained by the fact that the work is a *Memoirs* of the *life* and *reign*, and thus does not pretend to be a work of political philosophy.

In addition to Frederick's own writings, which Towers views with a cautious and critical eye, he uses all the main literary sources

³⁵ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 'Preface'.

³⁶ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 'Preface'. For each significant literary figure, Towers composed a footnote containing a detailed biographical sketch.

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

available in English and some in French.³⁷ For details of events such as battles, treaties and government reforms Towers often draws upon the leading British periodicals: *The Gentleman's Magazine*, *London Magazine*, *Universal Magazine*, *Literary Magazine*, *Annual Register* and *Monthly Review*. He also draws extensively upon the published memoirs of those who associated with Frederick, most notably: Baron Bielfeld's *Letters*, Voltaire and Hertzberg. Baron Bielfeld 'appears to have been a man of amiable character and manners and had a much greater aversion to war than his royal master'.³⁸ Count Hertzberg was a 'noble writer',³⁹ who appears 'upright, able and well informed' but with prejudices in favour of monarchy that are natural to the 'minister of a despotic prince'. That said, he did successfully urge Frederick's successor to 'confirm to the inhabitants of Eastern and Western Prussia their ancient rights and privileges'.⁴⁰ Information is also drawn from those who travelled through Prussia. While Riesbeck's *Travels through Germany* contained much interesting detail on various parts of Germany, it includes many 'injudicious and ill grounded reflections relative to the character, conduct and administration of the late king of Prussia'.⁴¹ Other notable primary

³⁷ Towers considered Frederick's accounts of the military detail of his campaigns was generally accurate. But in his account of facts and characters, he was at times unreliable. Most particularly, 'his conduct in Saxony, and respecting the partition of Poland, was too atrocious to be fairly represented by himself'. And he did not do justice to the character of some of the Austrian generals. Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (2nd edn.), II, 440. While Frederick's *Memoirs of the House of Brandenburg* were written with 'spirit and vivacity', they contain 'misrepresentations' and 'some very exceptional passages'. In particular, he is 'neither just nor candid' in his unfavourable account of the Protestant reformers, and his short description of William of Orange's 'usurpation' of James II's throne 'does not afford a very favourable specimen of the accuracy, or fidelity, of Frederick's narrations'. Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 267-68.

³⁸ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 284n.

³⁹ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 495n.

⁴⁰ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 504.

⁴¹ Johann Kaspar Riesbeck, *Travels through Germany, in a series of letters; written in German by the Baron Riesbeck, and translated by the Rev. Mr. Maty* (London, 1787); Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II,

sources include the *Life of Baron Trenck*, Charles Burney's *The present state of music in Germany, the Netherlands and United Provinces* (1775), and Comte de Guibert's, *Observations on the military establishment and discipline of His Majesty the King of Prussia* (London, 1787), who regarded Frederick as 'peerless' and 'much greater than Caesar'.⁴²

In addition to these primary sources, Towers used some popular memoirs and histories that contained information on Frederick's Prussia.⁴³ The pro-government writer Tobias Smollett wrote a useful *History of England from the revolution to the reign of George II*. While Towers thought Smollett often 'a very exceptionable historian', he has 'many just remarks' on the 'despotic conduct of the King of Prussia'. Having written much more than could be expected on the activities of Frederick in a *History of England*, Towers observed that perhaps Smollett 'thought the people of England paid so much for their connexion with the King of Prussia, they had the better claim to accurate information respecting his activities'.⁴⁴ Towers also drew on Samuel Johnson's recently republished and greatly augmented memoirs of Frederick II.⁴⁵ It may be to counter this last work (for which advertisements of a forthcoming expanded edition appear in the newspapers in the week after Frederick II's death) that Towers derived the idea of composing his own book on Frederick's reign.

498n. Also, being 'little acquainted with England' his comparative observations on English and Prussian farmers were often 'extremely absurd'.

⁴² Cited in Tim Blanning, review of Jay M Smith, *Nobility reimagined: the patriotic nation in eighteenth-century France* (2005), *H-France Review*, 6 (July 2006), no. 78.

⁴³ For example, *Memoirs of the life of Voltaire, written by himself* (1785); John Entick, *The general history of the late war: containing it's rise, progress, and events, in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America* (1763-64); Henry Lloyd, *The history of the late war in Germany* (1766).

⁴⁴ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 221n.

⁴⁵ Samuel Johnson, *Memoirs of Charles Frederick, King of Prussia. By Samuel Johnson, LL.D. With notes, and a continuation, by Mr. Harrison* (London, 1786). Johnson's memoirs were first published in *The Library Magazine* in 1756, and only amount to the first part of volume 1 in this two volume work.

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

Towers had earlier criticised Johnson's pro-government political pamphlets as full of 'bigotted prejudices' and 'Jacobitical principles'.⁴⁶

Monarchy

Frederick II was arguably the most talented and articulate monarch of his age, and in 1777 wrote his *Essai sur les formes de gouvernement* that replaced divine right with an Enlightenment natural-law legitimation of absolute monarchy. In the words of Hellmuth, under this contract 'the subjects had unconditionally and irrevocably ceded sovereignty to the ruler; in return, the monarch guaranteed external security, upheld peace and the law at home, and promoted general welfare'. This conventional natural law argument was unusual in that it was presented as a substitute for divine right by a ruling monarch.⁴⁷ Towers, however, does not directly engage with Frederick's political philosophy as articulated in his various political testaments – he does not even quote Frederick's famous description of a monarch as the 'first servant of the state'. Towers was aware of Frederick's 'Essay on the Forms of Government', noting that it was to be included in the forthcoming *Posthumous works*, but does not appear to have seen it before publication of his *Memoirs* in 1788, and does not engage with it in his second edition. Toward the end of the *Memoirs* Towers passes judgement on Frederick's form of government via comment on the lauding of absolute monarchy by Baron Hertzberg, Frederick's respected minister. Hertzberg echoed his aged and ailing master in speeches to the Berlin Academy, arguing that under an enlightened ruler absolute monarchy is the best system of government. As men are driven by self-interest, representative systems of government inevitably become factionalised and ineffective. Monarchy, by

⁴⁶ Joseph Towers, *A letter to Dr. Samuel Johnson: occasioned by his late political publications* (London, 1775), 2-3.

⁴⁷ Hellmuth, 'Enlightenment and government', in Martin Fitzpatrick et al. eds., *The Enlightenment World* (2004), 444-45; see also, Theodor Schieder, *Frederick the Great*, ed. and trans. by Sabina Berkeley and H M Scott, (London and New York, 2000), 182.

Anthony Page

uniting the state with the person of the monarch, was the best way to achieve happiness for a society.⁴⁸

Faced with Frederick's impressive example and new justification for absolute monarchy, Towers thought it important to highlight the defects of his life and reign. In this way Frederick, its most impressive representative in the eyes of Hertzberg and other admirers, could be used to highlight the weaknesses of absolute monarchy as a system of government. And against this, Towers could assert that 'a limited form of government, in which a proper attention is paid to the rights of the people, must ever be superior to any mode of despotic government, whatever may be the character or abilities of the prince'.⁴⁹ Considering the Prussian system of government 'in a very high degree despotic',⁵⁰ throughout his narrative Towers represents absolute monarchy as both a violation of natural and historic rights and also less effective than representative forms of government. 'The probability always is', he wrote, 'that this species of government will not be well administered', and 'it is a state of things in which human nature is degraded'.⁵¹

The last point echoes the political philosophy of his friend Richard Price, whose defence of civil liberty was based on the cultivation of individual autonomy and independent judgement. Most of 'mankind are *slaves*' and 'are subject to arbitrary and insolent masters', Price declared: 'how disgraceful to human nature it is, that men should be capable of enduring such encroachments on their natural rights; or that, in so many countries, such slavish forms of government should take place, human beings descend, by

⁴⁸ Hertzberg, *Discourses*, cited in Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 500.

⁴⁹ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 500.

⁵⁰ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 500. While Voltaire thought 'Turkey itself is a republic' compared to the reign of Frederick's father, Towers saw the son's system of government as essentially the same. Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 111n.

⁵¹ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 500.

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

hereditary right, like beasts, from one tyrant to another'.⁵² Similarly, Towers declared that:

In a despotic government ... human nature is always in a state of degradation; and ... however it is exercised, must ever be an irrational government. For it can never be reasonable that the lives, liberties, and property of a whole nation should be subjected to the will, pleasure, or caprice of a single man, whatever may be the compass of his knowledge, or whatever the extent of his abilities.⁵³

In contrast Joseph Priestley, who leant in the direction of 'utilitarian' arguments, allowed that a high (though insecure) degree of *civil* liberty could exist under absolute monarchy.⁵⁴ For Towers, the rise of the Hohenzollern dynasty was built on a 'usurpation not only of the natural rights of their subjects, but also upon their ancient and constitutional rights'. This example proved the necessity of vigilance on the part of people in 'nations who have yet some liberties remaining'. While the English are often accused of 'being alarmed for their liberties when their liberties are not in danger', Towers asserts that without such vigilance 'they will cease to be a free people'.⁵⁵

To support his contention that representative government is superior to absolute monarchy in fostering a good society, Towers quoted a full page from *Defence of the constitutions of government of the United States of America*, in which John Adams argues for the 'immense advantage' a prince in a 'free state' has over an absolute monarchy. Representative institutions act as a check on ministers and a means of communicating the wants and wishes of the nation; 'it gives a universal energy to the human character, in

⁵² Richard Price, *Britain's happiness, and the proper improvement of it* (1759), in Price, *Political writings*, 3. This view of absolute monarchy probably explains why Price makes no mention of Frederick II in his writings – including this sermon preached during the Seven Years War.

⁵³ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 504.

⁵⁴ Joseph Priestley, *Essay on the first principles of government* (2nd edn., 1771), in *Political writings*, ed. Peter Miller (Cambridge, 1993), 32-33.

⁵⁵ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 112-13n.

Anthony Page

every part of the state, which can never be obtained in a monarchy'.⁵⁶ For Towers, while the

English constitution is not without its defects, and though there are often errors and misconduct in the public administration, yet there is no despotic government upon earth in which the interests of the great body of the people is so substantially promoted as in Great Britain. ... In no country is the personal liberty and property of inhabitants better secured; the laws are there security; and they are not dependent on the will of the prince, or the caprice of his ministers ... the Englishman says, whatever may be the character of the prince, This is my property, these are my rights, and the king himself dare not take them from me.⁵⁷

Rather than being a shining example of the virtues of absolute monarchy, for Towers the tale of Frederick's reign was one of an exceptionally talented man distorted and limited by an inherently corrupt form of government.

Religion

Religious scepticism was the other great influence in shaping Frederick's conduct. If to an extent Frederick's despotism and militarism can be ascribed to the circumstances into which he was born, for Towers he would have been a better man and monarch had he not 'early imbibed the pernicious scepticism of VOLTAIRE'.⁵⁸ In light of this, Towers has more to say about Voltaire's religious attitudes than those of Frederick. Rational Dissenters saw the anti-Christian attitudes of the French *philosophes* as rooted in the fact that they were raised and writing in a Catholic country. Confronted by a superstitious and corrupt

⁵⁶ John Adams, *Defence of the constitutions of government of the United States of America*, cited in Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 501. As American Envoy in London from 1783, John Adams spent much time socialising with leading Unitarians such as Richard Price, John Jebb and Joseph Towers. See Page, *John Jebb and the Enlightenment origins of British radicalism*, 263-65.

⁵⁷ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 502-04.

⁵⁸ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 472.

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

version of Christianity, they reacted by completely rejecting revealed religion without a careful study of its 'evidences'. This attitude informs the way Towers represents Voltaire, who he thought possessed of 'extraordinary abilities', the 'universality of his talents excited astonishment', and no other writer had attained such celebrity in their own time. Having acquired a prejudice against revealed religion at a young age, however, Voltaire 'never examined its evidences with any degree of accuracy or candour'. Unfair in his reasoning, inaccurate in his citations, 'he often treated the most interesting and important subjects with a very indecent and censurable levity'. He did much to promote 'scepticism and infidelity', neither of which make individuals 'happier or better' and 'are injurious to the interests of society in general'.⁵⁹

Dr Johnson thought Frederick's prose 'poor stuff. He writes just as you might suppose Voltaire's footboy to do, who has been his amanuensis'.⁶⁰ Such criticism appears mild in light of Priestley's comments in his *Observations on the increase of infidelity* (1797). Much of this involves a stinging attack on the character of Voltaire, whom he considered the fountainhead of modern infidelity. Taken on the evidence of their published letters, Voltaire and d'Alembert appear as conceited, jealous and 'perpetually complaining of the world'. Their royal Prussian correspondent equally lacked 'moral respectability, or real happiness'. Unlike humble Christians, they lived without 'the great balm of life ... friendship, founded on real esteem and affection'.⁶¹ In contrast to the Christian doctrine of all being equal in the eyes of God, both infidels expressed contempt for the masses, with Frederick declaring that 'the vulgar do not deserve to be enlightened'.⁶² The fact that Frederick could flatter Voltaire with the title of 'divine patriarch of unbelievers' was, for Priestley, an 'indication of the low state of both their minds'.⁶³ At a

⁵⁹ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 34-39.

⁶⁰ James Boswell, *The life of Samuel Johnson* (2nd edn., 3 vols. London 1793), I, 399.

⁶¹ Joseph Priestley, *Observations on the increase of infidelity* (Philadelphia, 1797), in J T Rutt ed., *The theological and miscellaneous works of Joseph Priestley* (25 vols., London, 1817-33), XVII, 10-11.

⁶² Priestley, *Observations on the increase of infidelity*, 59.

⁶³ Priestley, *Observations on the increase of infidelity*, 49.

particularly precarious point of the war with Austria, Frederick had decided to kill himself if military disaster struck. Priestley saw this as an illustrative fruit of his gloomy philosophy; 'Gustavus Adolphus, a true Christian hero and warrior, would not have written in this manner, in such circumstances'.⁶⁴ That the King of Prussia in his infirm old age clung to *belles lettres* for solace and continued to treat theology with contempt was, for Priestley, 'like an emaciated horse rejecting the most nourishing corn, and feeding only on straw'.⁶⁵

Towers is not as harsh as Priestley. For example, in light of his customary firmness in the face of adversity, Towers did not take seriously Frederick's intimation in an epistle that he might commit suicide when surrounded by enemies – besides, 'when a man only talks of killing himself in verse it is probable that he is not very much in earnest'.⁶⁶ And Towers was willing to laud Voltaire for his zeal in promoting the cause of religious toleration throughout Europe and for exposing and opposing unjust decisions in the French legal system. Often defending 'oppressed innocence', Voltaire demonstrated on 'various occasions great humanity and generosity'.⁶⁷ As Frederick became a 'zealous disciple', it was probably from Voltaire that he imbibed a life-long attachment to religious toleration that brought great benefit to his subjects.⁶⁸

Frederick's diligence and intelligence are fully detailed by Towers. In common with other writers, Towers describes Frederick's rigorous daily routine of work and relates many anecdotes of the impressive industriousness and stamina that he combined with 'uncommon powers of understanding'.⁶⁹ Towers reproduces in full Frederick's 'extraordinary' introductory letter to Voltaire, which reveals his 'superior attainments' compared to the

⁶⁴ Priestley, *Observations on the increase of infidelity*, 67-68n.

⁶⁵ Priestley, *Observations on the increase of infidelity*, 74.

⁶⁶ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 130-32.

⁶⁷ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 427-29.

⁶⁸ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 34-39.

⁶⁹ See for example, the tale of the secretary who dropped dead while handing the elderly and ailing Frederick some papers. The body was removed, a replacement found and Frederick continued working. Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 458, 459n.

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

‘generality of princes’.⁷⁰ Enjoying the life of the mind and devoted to his duties, Frederick spent relatively little on courtly appearance. He dressed plainly and consumed ‘an immoderate quantity of Spanish snuff’, which dirtied his cloths along with the paws of his beloved greyhounds.⁷¹ ‘Generally parsimonious’ but ‘occasionally magnificent and liberal’, Frederick was ‘kind to his domestics, if they properly discharged the duties of their stations; and manifested great attachment to his generals’ and friends. He displayed a life long love of music and ‘attended his concerts with almost as much uniformity and exactness, as his military reviews’.⁷² His composition of poetry to Voltaire and others in the dark days of the Seven Years War was testimony to his love of literature and that ‘he possessed great tranquillity of mind in situations of extreme danger’.⁷³ ‘With all his faults’, Towers conceded, Frederick ‘was undoubtedly a great king, possessed of very splendid qualities; and, indeed, one of the most distinguished and extraordinary princes, of whom the records of history have preserved to us any memorial’.⁷⁴

Like Priestley, however, Towers saw the King’s irreligion as fostering an ultimately gloomy and cynical attitude in comparison to their optimistic Unitarian confidence in present progress and a happy afterlife. While friends thought Frederick ‘had a great deal of wit for a German’, this often displayed a cruel edge and reflected a cynical and fatalistic view of the world.⁷⁵ Frederick’s fundamentally gloomy philosophical attitude is reflected in the sceptical thinkers he patronised. Alongside Voltaire, Frederick was impressed at a young age by the determinist philosophy of Christian Wolff (or Wolfius as Towers refers to him). Banished from Prussia by his father, after he ascended the throne Frederick asked Wolff to return to Prussia, where he became Chancellor of the University of Halle. A ‘prolific and verbose (and ruthlessly boring) writer’, according to one modern philosopher, Wolff

⁷⁰ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 34-39.

⁷¹ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 490.

⁷² Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 473.

⁷³ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 134.

⁷⁴ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 473.

⁷⁵ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 99, 280.

established 'German as a language for philosophy'.⁷⁶ To Towers, Wolff was 'possessed of considerable talents' but 'much overrated by some of the German writers' – including himself.⁷⁷ To head his Berlin Academy, Frederick chose the French *philosophe* Maupertuis. Having introduced Newtonian thought to France, in 1736 Maupertuis led an expedition of French mathematicians to the Arctic in order to test Newton's calculation that the globe flattened slightly at the poles. A deist, Maupertuis saw the earth's species as produced by a 'blind destiny', and formulated ideas of genetic mutation and natural selection that anticipated Mendel and Darwin. In the eighteenth century, however, his ideas attracted little attention.⁷⁸ Again, Towers thought the talents of this intellectual associate of the King of Prussia 'much over-rated', and while 'a man of probity and of regular and virtuous manners ... his ideas of human life were very gloomy'.⁷⁹

Towers saw Frederick's irreligion as in part responsible for unscrupulous, cynical and ruthless behaviour as a monarch. Frederick's religious scepticism and lack of public worship drew criticism from many Prussian clergymen.⁸⁰ When campaigning in foreign territory, Frederick advised his generals to appear as champions of whatever happened to be the local religious prejudice.⁸¹ While some of Frederick's early writings indicate belief in an afterlife, later poems argue 'that man is wholly material and that his existence terminates with his death'.⁸² In conventional Christian terms, Towers saw Frederick's often uncaring and immoral behaviour as stemming from a lack of eternal prospects or fear of divine judgement. Throughout the *Memoirs* Towers seeks to reveal the combined corrupting effects of religious scepticism and the powers of absolute monarchy.

⁷⁶ Lewis W Beck, 'Christian Wolff (1679-1750), in Ted Honderich ed., *The Oxford companion to philosophy* (Oxford, 1995), 917.

⁷⁷ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 93-98n.

⁷⁸ Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment* (1968), 228-30.

⁷⁹ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 344n.

⁸⁰ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 278.

⁸¹ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 475.

⁸² Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 129n.

Diplomacy

Towers thought Frederick's diplomacy often immoral. He kept 'neighbours in continual alarm' because 'he seemed scarcely to scruple any means that would effectuate his principles'.⁸³ Towers thought overly positive assessments were grounded in a credulous reading of the King of Prussia's eloquent state papers. To some extent this was understandable, because Frederick's 'manifestoes were drawn up with ... superior art and dexterity' to those of his enemies.⁸⁴ In a criticism that echoes Rational Dissenting complaints about Voltaire, Towers declared that too few readers 'give themselves the trouble to examine the truth of his statements, or the justness of his reasonings, in his public manifestos'. When this is done, Towers argued, it becomes evident that wars Frederick claimed as necessary and defensive were actually instigated 'for the purpose of aggrandisement and ambition'.⁸⁵ While he wrote against Machiavelli in his youth, on the throne he practiced his principles.⁸⁶ Towers saw Frederick as often attributing threatening motives to his neighbours in order to rally the support of his subjects for war.⁸⁷ At the start of the Seven Years War, for example, Frederick published a lengthy account of the 'dangerous designs' plotted by the courts of Vienna, Petersburg and Dresden. This publication, composed with 'much art and address', had a great impact on popular opinion in England; but, according to Towers, 'it was not sufficiently considered that the formidable confederacy against him had been occasioned by his own conduct'. He had unscrupulously invaded Silesia and Bohemia in the 1740s, bullied Saxony and kept neighbouring powers in 'constant alarm'.⁸⁸

As with the system of absolute monarchy in general, Towers thought Frederick's conduct of diplomacy both a violation of natural rights and ultimately less effective than a more just approach. Frederick could have achieved even greater expansion of

⁸³ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 470.

⁸⁴ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 202.

⁸⁵ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (2nd edn., 1795), I, 'Advertisement'.

⁸⁶ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 472.

⁸⁷ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 235.

⁸⁸ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 33.

Anthony Page

his realm if he had not provoked a diplomatic revolution through unscrupulous diplomacy in the War of Austrian Succession in the 1740s. This saw him faced with a ‘formidable confederacy’ in the 1750s. Without both France and Russia against him, however, Towers thought he might ‘have totally crushed the house of Austria, and overturned the whole Germanic system’.⁸⁹

If Frederick’s conduct could have been more just and effective – more rational – with respect to advancing the interests of Prussia, Britain’s interests were also hurt by the will of its monarch. Towers took a dim view of the 1756 treaty between Britain and Prussia, concluded at the urging of George II with an eye to protecting Hanover – from Frederick as much as from the French. For Towers, it disrupted rather than preserved the balance of power in Europe, led to an immensely expensive war, ‘and did not even secure Hanover from invasion’.⁹⁰

The partition of Poland in 1772 was a prime example of Frederick’s unscrupulous foreign policy. A civil war started in Poland, according to Towers, because the ‘bigotry of the Romish clergy’ opposed a petition for religious liberty on the part of the Protestant nobility and Orthodox Church. While Frederick II supported the campaign of the dissidents for religious toleration, it is clear he did so with an eye to acquiring Polish territory. This was borne out when he cleverly negotiated with Russia and Austria to partition Poland, while strengthening the role of its monarchy. The aristocratic constitution of the Polish republic had many defects, Towers conceded, and needed to be reformed. But these were exacerbated by the partitioning powers in what remained of the country after they had carved off territory.⁹¹ Towers quotes a ‘contemporary writer’ in the *Annual Register* as declaring that in Poland traditional conventions have ‘been torn up and totally overthrown ... no attention is now paid either to the laws of nations or to the rights of individuals’.⁹² The King of Prussia’s claim to be

⁸⁹ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 470.

⁹⁰ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 391n.

⁹¹ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 380-81n.

⁹² *Annual Register for 1772*, 37-38, cited in Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 389n.

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

interested in the religious rights of Poles proved to be hollow, as following the partition Frederick refused to grant the Protestant city of Thorn the rights they had claimed as dissenters. He also imposed harsh regulations on the large number of Jews in the territories acquired from Poland; as a result many migrated to those provinces now part of Russia. At the same time, he informed the Pope that he was granting asylum to the Jesuits.⁹³

At first, few Britons showed much interest in the partition of Poland, but those who did were generally very critical. 'The King of Prussia, the hero of the last war, has only been a pickpocket in Poland', quipped Horace Walpole.⁹⁴ With no substantial continental ally after falling out with Frederick II at the end of the Seven Years War, and facing trouble in its North American colonies, the British government was powerless to assist the Poles. British politicians and press blamed Frederick as the main cause of the partition of Poland. But the real storm of criticism came in 1773 when his efforts to control the port of Danzig, through which most of Poland's exports and imports flowed, hurt well established British merchants. This affected British perceptions of Frederick throughout the 1770s.⁹⁵

The Dissenting *Monthly Review* demonstrated the most interest in and condemnation of the partition. Rational Dissenters such as Joseph Priestley watched the fortunes of Poland's Protestants and elective monarchy with an anxious eye. In the *Memoirs*, Towers reiterated the complaint that English merchants, who had traditionally enjoyed trading privileges in Danzig, suffered 'great violence and injustice from the King of Prussia' as he sought to exert control over the port.⁹⁶ In sum, for Towers,

A more flagrant act of injustice, oppression and tyranny has seldom appeared in the history of mankind, than the partition of Poland. It was unvarnished by any specious

⁹³ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 396. For a similar sentiment see Israel Mauduit, cited above (note 12).

⁹⁴ Cited in Horn, *British public opinion and the first partition of Poland*, 15.

⁹⁵ Horn, *British public opinion and the first partition of Poland*, 3-4.

⁹⁶ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 392.

Anthony Page

pretences or plausible appearances ... none of the claims had the least foundation in justice, truth or reason. They originated in unprincipled ambition and were enforced in a manner that ought never to be spoken of but in terms of indignation while any sense of vice or virtue shall remain among mankind.⁹⁷

In short, there was little to admire and much to censure in Frederick's foreign policy. Even the character of the much praised 1763 treaty between Prussia and the USA, including among its clauses just and humane treatment of prisoners in the event of war, could be attributed to 'the enlightened and benevolent mind of Dr Franklin'.⁹⁸

Military Leader

Aside from the published *Instructions to his generals of 1747*, Frederick's confidential military writings had limited circulation until the nineteenth century. Contemporaries were left to study his battlefield actions and imitate his 'techniques and the severe Prussian discipline without fully comprehending the creative and sceptical genius that produced them'.⁹⁹ For Towers, extraordinary ability and courage as a general was Frederick's greatest strength.¹⁰⁰ During the American and French Revolutions, the Rational Dissenters formed the intellectual backbone of anti-war protest. While Dissenters proved willing to beat the drum during a defensive war, Towers' book on Frederick reflects an enlightened dislike of war as savage and wasteful. In this light, the King of Prussia was open to censure for causing wars through the

⁹⁷ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 388-89.

⁹⁸ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 458. Franklin had been earnestly involved in assisting American prisoners in Britain during the War of Independence. See Sheldon S Cohen, *British supporters of the American Revolution, 1775-1783* (Woodbridge, 2004). Frederick II did, however, write the original draft of the treaty.

⁹⁹ Armstrong Starkey, *War in the Age of Enlightenment, 1700-1789* (2003), 49.

¹⁰⁰ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (Westport, Conn., and London, 1788), I, 221.

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

unscrupulous pursuit of territorial ambitions. The Seven Years War was 'one of the most sanguinary wars by which the world has been desolated'. While Frederick's achievements justly cause 'universal astonishment', his glory was 'trifling compensation to his subjects for the evils and calamities they had suffered'.¹⁰¹

Having discussed his defeat and near catastrophe at the battle of Kunersdorff, Towers wrote: 'Frederick never appeared greater than after any remarkable adverse stroke of fortune. In such cases, he generally excited the astonishment of mankind by the celerity with which he recovered his losses, by the wonderful resources of his genius, and the unconquerable fortitude of his spirit'.¹⁰² His great military knowledge is reflected in the 'Instructions' for his generals.¹⁰³ These include such detailed advice as the need to 'seize all brewers and distillers' when moving into an enemy's territory, and force them to supply your troops with liquor, especially gin, without which they 'cannot possibly exist'.¹⁰⁴

While talented and courageous, in the eyes of Towers Frederick's generalship was marred by occasions of dishonourable or brutal conduct. He proved willing to sacrifice the lives of his troops 'with a readiness that reflected no honour on his character'.¹⁰⁵ While discussing Frederick's heroism at the battle of Kundersdorff, Towers quotes at length from Smollett on the degree to which Frederick was also very 'free with the lives of his subjects' and had introduced an increased harshness to war in Europe. Not, according to Smollett, 'since the days of ignorance and barbarity were the lives of men squandered away with such profusion as in the course of this German war.' In addition to being sacrificed in 'exploits of no consequence', soldiers were 'lavishly exposed to all the rigour and distemper of winter campaigns, which were introduced on the continent, in despite of nature and in

¹⁰¹ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II,326.

¹⁰² Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 244.

¹⁰³ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 474.

¹⁰⁴ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 476.

¹⁰⁵ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 472-73.

Anthony Page

contempt of humanity. Such were the improvements of warriors without feeling! Such the refinements of German discipline!’¹⁰⁶

Towers is particularly critical of Frederick’s conduct in occupied territories where he inhumanely treated people exercising their right to self-defence. As an ‘impartial historian’, Towers found it impossible not to censure as ‘arbitrary and iniquitous’ Frederick’s proclamation on entering Bohemia, which threatened with ‘fire and sword’ anyone who did not submit and hand over their personal arms.¹⁰⁷ Among Frederick’s more ruthless actions one stood out for Towers for its ‘singular iniquity’. When finding it difficult to obtain intelligence while campaigning in an enemy country, Frederick would take ‘a rich burgher, possessed of lands, a wife and children’ and send him to the enemy camp to complain of harsh treatment. Accompanied by a spy disguised as a servant, if he did not return his house would be burned and family massacred. Towers believed that ‘to compel a peaceable citizen to act as traitor to his own country’ in such a way could only come to the mind of a man who thought ‘the most sacred ties, divine and human, were to be sacrificed to the ambition of princes’.¹⁰⁸

Law

Commentators who highlight Frederick’s enlightened credentials usually point to his legal reforms as among their main supporting evidence. In describing the Fredrician Code, which sought to create a uniform legal system for Prussia, Towers praised Frederick for reducing the use of capital punishment and abolishing torture.¹⁰⁹ Towers authored an influential tract championing the role of English juries, so it is not surprising that he disapproved of the way

¹⁰⁶ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 240-41n. Towers follows this with a quote from Voltaire’s *Age of Louis XV*: ‘What remains after so many battles? Nothing but blood spilt to no purpose in uncultivated and ruined countries, villages destroyed, and families reduced to beggary’.

¹⁰⁷ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 205-06.

¹⁰⁸ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 477-78.

¹⁰⁹ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 259-60.

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

Frederick diminished the influence of advocates and gave more power to judges.¹¹⁰

Of more significance for Towers, however, was the way Frederick's conduct in the 1770s case of the miller Arnold revealed the defects of absolute monarchy. This case earned Frederick international acclaim as an instance of his enlightened administration of justice. Towers provides a detailed description of the case, as printed in the first volume of the *New Annual Register*, in which Arnold represented himself as a victim of aristocratic injustice backed up by judges.¹¹¹ Frederick responded by arranging a personal audience with the judges and minister for justice, where he barely listened to their explanations before overruling the verdict and sending them to prison. It soon became obvious that Arnold had misrepresented the case, and Berliners petitioned for release and raised subscriptions to support the minister and judges. Frederick, however, after a half-hearted investigation refused to reverse his decision. For Towers, this case was a prime illustration of how even the most able and well-intentioned despot is unable to administer justice properly, and unwilling to lose face by acknowledging and reversing a bad decision.¹¹² While most historians have also seen this case as a 'judicial disaster', it can be argued that Frederick consciously set aside his genuine commitment to the rule of law in favour of promoting social equity and fostering broad support for reform.¹¹³

Towers detailed at length the imprisonment of Baron Trenck as an illustration of the dangers of absolute monarchy. Now universally considered to have been innocent of spying for the Austrians, Trenck's imprisonment was 'a striking proof that despotic power ought never to be intrusted to any man, however splendid his abilities'. Not only was Frederick wrong, he acted as a

¹¹⁰ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 456; Joseph Towers, *Observations on the rights and duty of juries, in trials for libels* (1784).

¹¹¹ *The New Annual Register, ... for the year 1780* (London, 1781), 'Principal Occurrences', 2-4.

¹¹² Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 430-39.

¹¹³ David M Luebke, 'Frederick the Great and the celebrated case of the Millers Arnold (1770-1779): a reappraisal', *Central European History*, 32:4 (1999), 379-408

Anthony Page

‘savage and unfeeling tyrant’, displaying ‘cool, premeditated, unrelenting barbarity’.¹¹⁴

Economy and revenue

Towers thought Frederick’s final two decades ‘more illustrious’ than his war years, as he ‘employed extraordinary assiduity in the promotion of agriculture, manufactures and commerce’.¹¹⁵ As a result, according to Hertzberg, during the famine of 1772 Prussia was able to export grain to more naturally fertile areas in Germany.¹¹⁶ The English Rational Dissenter John Jebb thought that one of the main ways of ‘co-operating’ with God was to ‘give being to numerous tribes of rational and irrational animals, and to make them happy’.¹¹⁷ Frederick was due some congratulation on the first, and less on the second of these aims. Towers observed that in the 1740s Frederick ‘adopted very judicious methods for increasing the population of his dominions’, in particular by clearing ‘waste lands’, building of canals, and encouraging French Protestants to settle in his realm. By such means, he ‘peopled the deserts of Pomerania’.¹¹⁸ While Towers applauded Frederick’s success in promoting the natural increase in population, he condemned that increase which was gained through annexation of territory or ‘by forcibly dragging away many thousand families from their native country, merely for the aggrandizement of the Prussian monarchy’.¹¹⁹ And as an advocate of free trade as a means of promoting international peace and prosperity, Towers thought Frederick’s efforts to promote commerce were retarded by ‘injudicious taxes, monopolies and various restrictions’.¹²⁰

In addition to state intervention in the economy, Prussia suffered from the burden of supporting a standing army that was too large

¹¹⁴ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 331-52, at 352.

¹¹⁵ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 448.

¹¹⁶ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 451.

¹¹⁷ Cited in Page, *John Jebb and the Enlightenment origins of British radicalism*, 31.

¹¹⁸ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 325.

¹¹⁹ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 455n.

¹²⁰ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 358.

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

for the size of the country. Prussians were so heavily taxed that even the people of 'Berlin are not able to support a tolerable theatre'. 'It has been pretended' by some such as Riesbeck that Frederick imposed high taxes to prevent the vice of luxury from spreading. While this had certainly prevented 'even the middling ranks of life' from obtaining many convenient commodities, Towers saw the real motive as Frederick's desire to 'support an enormous army' with which to 'enslave his own subjects and to keep his neighbours in perpetual alarm'.¹²¹ He had been accused of spreading 'false and adulterate coin' throughout Germany and Poland during the Seven Years War.¹²² Drawing on John Moore's *View of society and manners in France, Switzerland and Germany*, Towers observed that Frederick raised revenue by every possible means. In particular, he created many new titles while being careful to retain the 'real business of the office'. Thus, 'though his majesty scarcely ever consults with anybody, he has more nominal privy-councillors than any king in Christendom'.¹²³

Militarized society

Sensitive to the stereotype of Prussia as a highly militarised society, Hertzberg argued that the Prussian army had become a 'true national militia, such as the Romans had, and which the English have desired to have, but never had'. Towers flatly disagreed with this, considering Prussia's standing army as in no way like the Roman militia, and observing that while the English militia was 'too much in the power of the crown', it was nothing like the Prussian army. Even the English standing army differed from Prussia's in that it was under the power of Parliament.¹²⁴ A recent comparison of eighteenth-century Britain and Prussia has argued their states were more similar than once thought when the size, cost, administration and ideological role of the Royal Navy is taken into

¹²¹ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 493n.

¹²² Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 375n.

¹²³ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 492-93n.

¹²⁴ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 496n.

account.¹²⁵ Though a patriotic supporter of ‘blue water’ foreign policy for Britain, Towers was embarrassed by the existence of press gangs which he thought one of the ‘evils that most loudly call for redress in England’, being ‘a disgrace to the nation and totally inconsistent with the principles of the English constitution’.¹²⁶

Towers cited the *Observations on the military establishment*, which described ‘the leading principle’ of Frederick’s military system as ‘to reduce his troops to the nature of Machines, to teach them to have no will of their own, and to be as deaf and pitiless as their muskets’. According to Dr Moore, this was ‘worse than the state of slavery in Asia’.¹²⁷ While Riesbeck took ‘pains to convince his readers’ in *Travels through Germany* that Prussian soldiers were happier than generally thought, Towers was unconvinced, pointing to Frederick’s unparalleled efforts to prevent desertion.¹²⁸ Even some of Frederick William’s prized regiment of giants tried to escape, which Towers thought proof of harsh treatment.¹²⁹ Hertzberg claimed that an army ‘constituted and employed’ like Prussia’s was a benefit rather than a burden to the state, because it provides security and prevents wars, establishing ‘a kind of perpetual peace’. Towers thought the history of Frederick’s reign proved this wrong, with ‘long, repeated and sanguinary wars’. The ‘enlightened nations of Europe’ should abolish standing armies, as ‘no advantages resulting from a standing army can be a compensation for the evil of keeping so great a number of men in a state so servile, and so dishonourable to human nature.’¹³⁰

Frederick had come to the throne with the intention of making Berlin the Athens of Europe, but more than one commentator thought he had instead created a country more closely resembling Sparta, with absolutism and militarism constraining the cultural life

¹²⁵ John Brewer and Eckhart Hellmuth, eds., *Rethinking Leviathan: the eighteenth-century state in Britain and Germany* (Oxford, 1999).

¹²⁶ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 502n.

¹²⁷ John Moore, *View of society and manners in France, Switzerland and Germany* (1786 edn.), cited in Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 497.

¹²⁸ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 497n.

¹²⁹ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 81n.

¹³⁰ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 499-500.

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

of Prussia. Frederick modified the regulations drawn up by Maupertuis for the new Berlin Academy of Sciences and Letters, in order to give more power to the president than was 'consistent with those liberal sentiments which ought to prevail in an academy of sciences'. Indeed even with respect to regulation the academy 'his ideas seem to have been somewhat military'.¹³¹ While the Berlin opera was open to the 'well dressed' public free of charge, the King sat front and centre so he could watch the conductor's score and correct any deviations. Frederick favoured the work of what Burney considered a couple of the lesser lights of Augustan music, and he came away from Berlin disappointed: 'though the world is ever rolling on, most of the Berlin musicians, defeating its motion, have long contrived to stand still'.¹³²

Britain and Prussia

Towers published his *Memoirs* of Frederick at a significant moment in European history. During the period of the American rebellion, when George III appeared to 'Honest Whigs' to be exerting increased influence over Parliament, British radicals and Rational Dissenters worried that across Europe monarchy was advancing at the expense of people's traditional liberties and natural rights. Joseph Priestley saw Frederick as in the front rank of monarchs leading an ascendancy of absolute monarchy in the late eighteenth century. Writing during the election of 1774, and in the shadow of increasing coercion of the American colonies and the partition of Poland, Priestley warned that many previously restrained monarchies had become absolutist; and once Prussia, Austria and Russia had completed the partition of Poland, the partition of Switzerland and the United Provinces might quickly follow. 'Shall we flatter ourselves', he asked, 'that these islands will then remain

¹³¹ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 262.

¹³² Cited in Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 402. Frederick favoured the 'modern' gallant style of music, but by c. 1770 this was being superseded by classicism. See James Gaines, *Evening in the Palace of Reason* (London, 2005).

a sanctuary for the sons of freedom, and not ... become the last and most dreadful sacrifice to it?'¹³³

The *Memoirs* likewise reflects a concern that absolutism was on the march. William Coxe, in his *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden and Denmark* (1785), had claimed that the present Swedish monarch was limited rather than despotic. 'But the reasonings of this ingenious writer', Towers thought, 'appear to me extremely unsatisfactory', as 'the revolution of 1772' had 'completely overturned' the liberties of the Swedish nation.¹³⁴ With the current Queen of Sweden being a sister of Frederick II, Towers saw this as an example of why it is 'extremely unfavourable for the interests of free states that their princes should intermarry in the families of despotic monarchs'. Family connections could offer an excuse for monarchs with large standing armies to interfere in 'contests between free states and their princes; which is not often likely to prove beneficial to the rights of mankind'.¹³⁵ Frederick II's political interventions in the Netherlands further illustrated this point. Hertzberg claimed that Frederick interfered with an eye to preserve the *stadtholdership* for the family of his niece, the Princess of Orange. 'The count's statement is extremely honest', judged Towers, 'but the stadtholder of Holland was not instituted for the benefit of the niece of the king of Prussia'.¹³⁶ While the government of the United Provinces was 'too aristocratical', Towers thought it 'should be reformed by the Dutch nation themselves, and not by Prussian troops'.¹³⁷ The Dutch Patriots were

¹³³ Joseph Priestley, *An address to Protestant Dissenters ... on the approaching election* (1774), 8.

¹³⁴ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 296n.

¹³⁵ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 296-98.

¹³⁶ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 443.

¹³⁷ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 444. After sailing close to military catastrophe on more than one occasion in the Seven Years War, Frederick II focused on aggrandisement through diplomacy in the second half of his reign. In relation to the Dutch troubles he confined himself to political interference, and his heir did likewise until he felt it necessary to resort to military intervention in 1787. The reference by Towers to the intervention of 'Prussian troops' reflects developments in the United Provinces at the time he was writing the *Memoirs* of the late Frederick II.

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

seeking to 'introduce a greater mixture of democracy', and without foreign interference they would probably have succeeded in 'gradually and essentially' improving their system of government'.¹³⁸

Throughout the *Memoirs* Towers is keen to point out examples of how Britain's interests had been supposedly hurt by having its foreign policy bent to the interests of its reigning monarch. In his additions to the second edition, Towers included some of Frederick's observations on England that supported his own Commonwealthman views. Frederick thought that while the most prosperous nation in Europe, 'the English' had not obtained their proper 'rank among nations'. George II, Elector of Hanover, had governed England according to the interests of his electorate' (Towers thought 'this assertion of Frederick's too well grounded').¹³⁹ The first treaty between Britain entered into with Prussia in 1756 was 'injudicious and impolitic' and the second in 1758 worse. Both involved the payment of large sums of money to Frederick for no real benefit in return. Towers rejected the balance of power argument, as it was Prussia's behaviour and alliance with Britain that unhinged the traditional balance of power in the first place. Support for Frederick only hurt Britain's previously good relations with Austria, Russia and (Protestant) Saxony.¹⁴⁰ Despite this, Frederick became extremely popular in England following Rossbach, where he was viewed 'as the great defender of the Protestant religion in Germany; though the war ... had not in reality any connection whatever with religion'. Indeed, Towers thought no Catholic prince at the time caused German Protestants the magnitude of suffering Frederick caused.¹⁴¹ Frederick had great

On the character of the last half of Frederick II's reign see: H M Scott, '1763-1786: the Second Reign of Frederick the Great?', in Philip G Dwyer, *The rise of Prussia 1700-1830* (Harlow, 2000). For the role of the Dutch crisis in European diplomacy see H M Scott, *The birth of a great power system, 1740-1815* (Harlow, 2006), 236-43.

¹³⁸ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 444.

¹³⁹ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (2nd edn.), II, 443.

¹⁴⁰ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 169.

¹⁴¹ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 171-72.

popular support in England only because ‘the causes of the war ... were not sufficiently investigated or understood’.¹⁴²

Towers was concerned that following the end of the American war and the return of prosperity under the younger Pitt, the British people were becoming complacent. As a founding member of the Society for Constitutional Information, Towers had watched it stagnate following the death in early 1786 of John Jebb, its most active member. Towers marshalled Frederick II’s opinions to support his own Commonwealthman concerns about the danger of ‘luxury’ sapping Britain of civic virtue. With a decidedly classical mind, and influenced by Voltaire’s *Letters on England*, Frederick often mentioned ancient Rome and England in the same breath.¹⁴³ In his youth, the English were seen as modern exemplars of Roman civic virtue; in later life however, he saw the American Revolution as a time of British decadence and decay. Frederick thought the large sums voted for George III’s civil list were squandered in satisfying the ‘venality of the members of parliament ... and rob the nation of its energy’. Reflecting upon the defeat of General Burgoyne by the American Patriots, Frederick wrote that ‘such an event ... would formally have made the whole nation revolt against the government, and even caused a revolution. It produced nothing but a few feeble murmurs; so much more powerful was the love of riches than the love of their country’.¹⁴⁴ Luxury and representative government had, in Frederick’s eyes, created a nation lacking courage and riven with factional squabbling and potentially fatal political instability.

By the time Towers’ published the *Memoirs*, however, the political climate in Europe seemed to be turning in favour of the ‘cause of liberty’. With heated debate over its near bankruptcy the French state was teetering on the brink of reform, and a republican revolt was under way in the Netherlands. In Britain, Towers was

¹⁴² Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 170.

¹⁴³ In his introductory letter to Voltaire, Frederick praised his tragedy of *Caesar* as expressing ‘sentiments ... uniformly grand and sublime: we feel that Brutus is either a Roman or an Englishman’. Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 36.

¹⁴⁴ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (2nd edn.), II, 444.

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

active in helping to revive campaigns for political reform and wrote in support of repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. In particular, he was a key player in the revival of the London Revolution Society, which met in November 1788 to celebrate the centenary of the 'Glorious Revolution', and hopefully to revive the campaign for parliamentary reform.¹⁴⁵ His book on Prussia's late monarch, which appeared in the bookstores in the same year, was clearly designed to contribute to this revival of the reform effort.

Given his reformist activities, it is not surprising that Towers scatters reflections on British foreign policy and the need for revitalisation of the 'English constitution' throughout the *Memoirs*. Having criticised Frederick II's intervention in the Netherlands, Towers launched into a condemnation of Britain's defence of the Stadtholder. It was hypocritical for 'a nation who have cut off the head of one tyrant, and driven another from the throne, to tell the people of Holland' to submit to an unpopular Stadtholder. Foreign intervention in the domestic politics of a nation was a violation of the natural right to self-determination, and could not be justified by the need to preserve the international balance of power. The 'occasional improper interferences of France' were best countered by treating the Dutch 'with equity' and admitting their 'just

¹⁴⁵ Kathleen Wilson, 'Inventing revolution: 1688 and eighteenth century popular politics', *Journal of British Studies*, 28 (1989), 349-86. Perhaps Towers was aware that a 'Character of King William III' that was read at the meeting of the Revolution Society, and was claimed to date from the early eighteenth century, had been used to describe Frederick II in the British press in the late 1750s. 'A true character of the King of Prussia' appeared in several British papers September 1758, see Manfred Schlenke, *England und das Friderizianische Preussen 1740-1763* (München, 1963), 239. It is the same as the 'Character of King William' read at the Revolution Society anniversary dinner in London in 1788. The minutes of the Revolution Society imply that this 'Character' was read at earlier meetings and probably composed in the early eighteenth century. The use of this 'Character' to describe Frederick II is further evidence of the degree to which he was celebrated as a 'Protestant king' in Britain during the Seven Year's War. *Abstract of the history and proceedings of the Revolution Society in London* (London, 1789).

claims'.¹⁴⁶ While the balance of power in Europe needed to be preserved, that did not mean

That Great Britain should take an active, burthensome, and expensive part in every dispute upon the continent, in matters in which she is not at all interested, and in cases in which the acutest politician can hardly determine on which side the balance is likely to preponderate. Whenever she does take any part in continental disputes, it should be in support of general liberty. That is the part most suited to the genius of the nation, and which will ever be found in the result most conducive to its real interest and honour.¹⁴⁷

Throughout the *Memoirs* Towers displays a deeply ingrained patriotic ideology of English liberty. According to one anecdote, when discussing a period of 'violent opposition to the government' in Britain with an English gentleman, Frederick II began to talk in 'a very high tone' about the measures he would have taken in response. The Englishman replied: 'If your majesty were to be king of England, you would not continue in your office three days'.¹⁴⁸ In the course of his dissertation on laws, Frederick discussed Magna Charta and observed that while England had many good laws there

¹⁴⁶ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 445-46. For the difficulties and development of British policy in the Dutch crisis, see Jeremy Black, *British foreign policy in an age of revolutions, 1783-1793* (Cambridge, 1994), 130-55. With the question of future Dutch alliance with France or Britain at stake, Black endorses Lord Grenville's claim that the crisis was 'one of the most important that this country [Britain] has ever seen', cited at p.155. Richard Price was relieved that the British government had a 'happy escape' in avoiding a war with France over Holland. It would be a 'precarious and short-lived' peace, he feared, because while 'at present Holland seems conquer'd ... its submission will last no longer than while the King of Prussia's sword is held over it. When that is withdrawn the same disputes will return with increased violence; if not withdrawn ... a war must be inevitable unless indeed *France* is sunk beyond the possibility of recovering itself'. W Bernard Peach ed., *The correspondence of Richard Price: volume III, February 1786-February 1791* (Durham, N.C. and Cardiff, 1994), 153-54.

¹⁴⁷ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 446-47.

¹⁴⁸ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 481.

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

was 'no country in Europe where they are so badly executed', because crown and parliament were constantly clashing and laws being changed and multiplied by a 'restless and tumultuous' political process.¹⁴⁹ While Towers agreed that England needed law reform, he claimed that there was nothing inherent in the English constitution that prevented this. Also, while politics may be 'restless and tumultuous', there had been 'more tranquillity ... in England during Frederick's reign than in the Prussian dominions'.¹⁵⁰ Towers endorsed the public protests that greeted the stationing of a body of Hessian troops in Britain when invasion was feared in 1756. Britain need only rely on its navy and militia for defence, and 'hiring foreign troops ... is a measure always dishonourable and dangerous, and should ... be firmly and zealously opposed'.¹⁵¹ In his final footnote Towers urged vigilant support for the English constitution, lest it be 'over-turned'. Writing during a period of post-war prosperity under the younger Pitt, Towers warned 'that too implicit a confidence ought not to be placed in any administration whatever. A vigilant attention in the nation to the conduct of those in power is essential to the existence and continuation of public freedom'.¹⁵²

Sexuality and Frederick's Character

Towers wrote during what has been called an 'age of cultural revolutions', when modern conceptions of gender and race were being constructed.¹⁵³ An important part of this process, according to a growing body of research, was the construction of homosexuality as a fixed and deviant category.¹⁵⁴ Towers does not discuss Frederick's sexual conduct directly, but he does reproduce

¹⁴⁹ Frederick II, *Dissertation on the reasons for the enacting and repealing of laws*, cited in Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 258.

¹⁵⁰ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 259.

¹⁵¹ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 254-55n.

¹⁵² Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 503n.

¹⁵³ Colin Jones and Dror Wahrman, eds., *The age of cultural revolutions: Britain and France 1750-1820* (Berkeley, CA. and London, 2002).

¹⁵⁴ Dror Wahrman, *The making of the modern self: identity and culture in eighteenth-century England* (New Haven, Conn. and London, 2004).

material from which the reader is left to draw conclusions. After Frederick was forcibly married and swore to never ‘cohabit’ with his wife, Towers quotes at length from sources that describe her as ‘very beautiful and accomplished’.¹⁵⁵ She fully participated in the idyllic lifestyle at the crown prince’s palace at Rheinsberg in the 1730s, and Frederick ensured that she lived comfortably and provided ample support for her in his will. Alongside this, he reproduces some of Voltaire’s gossip. Refusing one of Frederick’s requests that he settle in Prussia, Voltaire claims he pointed to his relationship with du Châtelet, declaring that ‘between philosophers, I loved a lady better than a king’, and that Frederick ‘approved the liberty I took, though, for his own part, he did not love the ladies’.¹⁵⁶ Towers leaves the reader with an impression of a King devoted to his state duties and who cared little for female company. But interestingly, considering his desire to constantly point to the evil effects of Frederick’s irreligion and absolutism, Towers does not criticise his sexual conduct. In contrast, Joseph Priestley was keen to censure Frederick for sodomy. Priestley thought the practice of sodomy in the ‘heathen temples’ and the celebration of such ‘disgusting obscenities’ by poets ‘had a fatal influence on the public opinion and public morals’ of ancient Rome. Without belief in revelation, the ‘just abhorrence which all the Christian world entertain for these unnatural vices disappears; a proof of which might be given in some well authenticated anecdotes of the king of Prussia’.¹⁵⁷ This can probably be explained by the differing purposes of the tracts within which Priestley and Towers address the issue of Frederick’s sexuality. Priestley expressed this view in a work designed to demonstrate the evil effects of infidelity. Focused on revealing the defects of absolute monarchy, Towers seems to have been happy to pass over the fact that such a great warrior may not have been heterosexual – something that ran counter to the

¹⁵⁵ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 51.

¹⁵⁶ Voltaire, *Memoirs*, cited in Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 306.

¹⁵⁷ Joseph Priestley, *Discourses relating to the evidences of revealed religion* (vol. II, Philadelphia, 1796), 80, 81n.

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

English republican and Wilkite image of patriots as ‘manly’ heterosexuals.

Towers is content to use Frederick’s perceived faults as evidence to prove the inherent flaws in absolutism. Frederick’s strengths are recognised, but only with an eye to emphasising that these could be corrupted by absolutism, along with his faults being encouraged and magnified. Vigilant, industrious, decisive and with a keen attention to administrative detail, Frederick ‘was probably the most indefatigable prince that ever existed’.¹⁵⁸ Rational Dissenters were keen promoters of industriousness and improvement, and they clearly respected Frederick’s commitment to these values. ‘Notwithstanding the many faults in his character’, Towers wrote, ‘no prince then in the world employed so much time and attention as FREDERICK did, for the last twenty years of his life, in promoting the happiness of his subjects, and the general prosperity of his dominions, *so far as was consistent with his mode of government, and with the maintenance of his own power and authority*’ [my italics].¹⁵⁹ But among others, the case of Baron Trenck demonstrated that Frederick was occasionally ‘guilty of great cruelty’.¹⁶⁰ Towers devoted a chapter to the falling out of Voltaire and Frederick, concluding that ‘allowing for some exaggeration in the representations of Voltaire’ his arrest at Frankfort when fleeing Prussia ‘appears to have been totally indefensible’.¹⁶¹ Frederick’s ‘conduct and character were very various’, and his ‘predominant passion was the love of glory’.¹⁶² While he ‘loved fame more than virtue’, and proved willing to sacrifice ‘the principles of justice and humanity’ to the interests of state aggrandisement, Frederick nevertheless sought ‘the praise of virtue’. ‘Hence it arose, that his conduct was often variable and inconsistent; and that the same man sometimes appeared an unfeeling tyrant, and at other times mild, gentle and humane’.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 471.

¹⁵⁹ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 471-72.

¹⁶⁰ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 472.

¹⁶¹ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), I, 358.

¹⁶² Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 469.

¹⁶³ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 470.

Response to the Memoirs

Alexander Gordon, the influential nineteenth-century Unitarian historian, wrote in the *Dictionary of National Biography* that the *Memoirs of the life and reign of Frederick* was Towers's 'most respected single work', without citing any evidence of this other than the fact it ran to a second edition in 1795.¹⁶⁴ Contemporary responses to the *Memoirs* to some extent reflect political and cultural divisions. The *New Annual Register*, founded by a close friend of Towers, Andrew Kippis, not surprisingly published a very favourable review of the *Memoirs* as 'a judicious and faithful' account of Frederick's life and reign, in which the description of his private life and last twenty years was particularly good, being based on 'the most authentic sources'. While giving full credit to Frederick's military abilities, Towers also

points out and censures his faults with a freedom and severity to which he was compelled by the sacred obligations of truth. We are of the same opinion which he avows, that ambition and an unjustifiable love of fame were the ruling principles of his actions; and that in the gratification of these, he was frequently dead to all impressions of moral principle, and the feelings of humanity. And we think it much to the credit of Dr. Towers, that instead of being born away by the current of popular prejudice, or dazzled by the brilliancy of his exploits, he has impartially tried the merits of Frederick, by the immutable standard of rectitude.

The *Memoirs* deserve praise for their impartiality, 'rational and just sentiments', and the 'perspicuity of arrangement and correctness of style'. The notes on literary figures 'have the effect of agreeable and entertaining episodes'.¹⁶⁵ Elsewhere in the same volume of the

¹⁶⁴ Gordon errs in titling it *The life and work of Frederick the Great* – an error that has been carried over to the new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹⁶⁵ The review of Tower's book is followed by a short and dismissive comment on F A W's *Anecdotes and characteristics of Frederick the Great*, declaring that while it 'will afford much entertainment to admirers

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

New Annual Register Towers's account of the 'Character of Frederick' was reproduced.¹⁶⁶

In contrast to this glowing endorsement, the *Critical Review* was dismissive. Questioning Towers's credentials for the task of writing the life of a warrior, philosopher, 'statesman and man of genius'. For this task an author need have 'a depth of reflection, acute perception, acute judgement, and a brilliant imagination', and at this bar the 'great number' of Frederick's biographers have stumbled. Added to this, Towers had prematurely undertaken his task, as many important sources remained to be published at the time he composed the *Memoirs*. While the 'attention and the judgement' of Towers are undoubted, his lack of military experience and the German language were a problem, and he was apt to judge 'Frederick's conduct on the principles of the British constitution, rather than on the general views of the government of Prussia, or of society, in the situation in which the inhabitants of the continent are placed'. Towers is paid the backhanded compliment of having, 'with indefatigable industry', collected 'what was within his reach'. His accounts of 'some parts of Frederick's military conduct' are written with clearness, and 'if his reflections are not deeply acute, or refinedly political, as applied to Prussia, we ought to praise them as breathing the most rational and just dictates of civil liberty'. Such compliments out of the way, however, the reviewer proceeds to criticise 'this mass' as based on 'imperfect translation, crude compilations, and inaccurate descriptions'. In contrast to many other authors, Towers includes much material on Frederick's father and his youth. But while doing so, he reproduces 'the errors of Voltaire with the truths of baron Pollnitz', and does not 'add to the value of the narrative by a single reflection, or endeavour to draw a probable truth from a congeries of inconsistent error'. Reliance on 'Entick and the Magazines' has led to 'pretty numerous' mistakes in the accounts of Frederick's military exploits. Towers 'steps out of his way' to condemn the connection between

of that monarch', the best material is 'related in the preceding work of Dr. Towers'. *New Annual Register for 1788* (1789), 244.

¹⁶⁶ *New Annual Register for 1788* (1789), 'Biographical anecdotes and characters' section, 16-18.

Britain and Germany. While involvement in German affairs had been costly, it had distracted French resources away from expanding their fleet and thus checking British imperial expansion. Towers also 'often forgets the biographer in the moralist', condemning Frederick for actions that were necessary for defence of his state. While his method of discovering the intentions of the Elector of Saxony were 'criminal', once discovered Frederick had to act swiftly in self-defence. Frederick's political conduct in the last year of his reign are inadequately detailed, 'though the assistance of Hertzberg was at hand'. The review concludes: 'Of this heterogeneous mass, we can add little that is favourable, except we again praise the author's industry. His language is neat and correct; but it seldom rises to elegance; never to spirit or animation'.¹⁶⁷

At the *Monthly Review* the task of reviewing the *Memoirs* was placed in the hands of Andrew Becket, a keen proto-romantic admirer who reviewed several books on the 'Northern Hero' who should be likened 'above all others, to Trajan ... both for civil and military virtues'.¹⁶⁸ Becket opened his review by lamenting that it is the 'lot of greatness' to have 'every action' scrutinised, which exposes them to the censure that Towers 'very liberally bestowed' on Frederick II. While Towers does justice to Frederick's military skill, 'from the general tenour of his history, he seems to view him as Cromwell is viewed by the Pope', and Frederick's reign is characterised as largely 'composed of acts of violence and

¹⁶⁷ *Critical Review*, 66 (1788), 471-74.

¹⁶⁸ [Andrew Becket], review of *Memoirs of ... Frederick the Third* (1788), *Monthly Review*, 79 (1788), 485-94. Becket also reviewed, for example, Abbè Denina, *Essai sur la Vie et le Regne de Frédéric II, Roi de Prusse* (Printed at Berlin by authority, 1788), in the *Monthly Review*, 79 (1788), 671-76. He also reviewed [anon.] *The Life of Frederick II, King of Prussia* (Debrett, 1789) in *Monthly Review*, 1 (1790), 278-80. Originally printed at Strasburg, according to Becket it was 'produced almost immediately on the King's demise' and with the appearance of 'authentic and far more interesting memoirs' it had 'fallen into disrepute'. Having said this he observed in a footnote: 'It was from this publication that Dr. Towers collected the greater part of his materials for the *Life of Frederick II*'.

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

oppression toward his neighbours'. Becket proceeded to accuse Towers of a 'partial' account that omits important documents, and sections of documents, that prove he claims, for example, that Frederick II's advance into Silesia was a defensive move based on 'reason and justice', rather than being an 'invasion' driven by greed and ambition. The same could be said for his attack on Saxony in 1756.¹⁶⁹ Towers was likewise wrong to condemn with 'much vehemence' Frederick's role in the partition of Poland, when he had a just claim to '*Polish Prussia*'. Becket also objected to charges of brutality levelled at Frederick, claiming that no violence or injury 'was done to defenceless inhabitants of the conquered places, unless it were to occasionally carry off corn and cattle' to support the Prussian army. Towers' condemnation of this reveals a lack of knowledge of military practice, especially in frontier towns. In contrast, his description of the last twenty years of the reign reveals Frederick's love of literature and science, 'attention to the peaceful arts', and promotion of the 'well-being and prosperity of the Prussian nation'. A 'well qualified' writer, Towers should have delved more into causes rather than simply relating events, and not have relied so heavily on unreliable sources such as Voltaire. 'The

¹⁶⁹ Becket argued that Towers should have reprinted in full (rather than simply a few paragraphs confined to footnotes) Frederick's account of documents found in Dresden that supposedly proved a conspiracy between Austria and Saxony, as these demonstrates that Frederick could not sit on his hands while 'the principle powers of Europe were arming to dispossess him of his rights'. Towers, however, was not the only one to be sceptical of the propagandistic nature of Frederick's *Mémoire Raisoné*. And as Herbert Butterfield has shown, Frederick's desire to not provoke Russia and his desperate willingness to believe that Britain's alliance with St Petersburg would neutralise Russia, led him to focus on the 'Diplomatic Revolution' between France and Austria. Frederick's misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the situation, combined with limited access to diplomatic documents on the part of historians until the late nineteenth century, led to a century and more of confusion and debate. In essence Frederick was right about a conspiracy, but wrong about its prime mover. Herbert Butterfield, 'The reconstruction of an historical episode: the history of the enquiry into the origins of the Seven Years War', in *Man on his past* (1955), 143-70.

Anthony Page

grand, the principle object of the Historian is TRUTH', Becket observed; 'Dr. Towers seldom descends to the bottom of the well in search of it', and the memory of Frederick needs to be rescued from the 'obloquy' that a reliance on Towers's book would foster.

Conclusion

With hindsight, we know that when Towers sent his *Memoirs of Frederick* to the printers the 'age of absolutism' was about to end – but this was by no means evident at the time. In contrast to the late twentieth century image of an *Age of Democratic Revolution*, contemporaries could justifiably feel that, despite image and financial difficulties in France, monarchy was on the march in much of Europe.¹⁷⁰ With a growing print culture creating 'celebrities', the anticipated death of the aged Frederick would occasion many publications praising one of the most prominent of eighteenth century absolutists.¹⁷¹ A patriarchal society at the centre of a global empire generated a fashion for history paintings such as the *Death of General Wolfe*, and a robust market for books on 'Great Men' from both classical and modern times. Such books implicitly, and could explicitly, act as vehicles for promoting or criticising models against which Britain and its leaders could be compared. With life having gone out of the political reform movement, Towers and his friend Andrew Kippis, stalwart members of the limping along Society for Constitutional Information, found themselves writing about the lives of two 'great men'. Kippis produced what became a multi-edition *Life of Captain James Cook* (1788), which played an important role in shaping the image of Cook as a hero of empire and model enlightened Briton: a man from a humble background who, through skill and industry, rose through the ranks of the navy to become a talented explorer who significantly expanded knowledge and enlightenment. Anticipating the flood of books and memorial notices that would follow the death of Frederick the

¹⁷⁰ R R Palmer, *The age of democratic revolution* (2 vols. Princeton, N.J. and London, 1959-1964).

¹⁷¹ Stella Tillyard, 'Celebrity in eighteenth-century London', *History Today*, 55:6 (2005), 20-27.

A Rational Dissenting perspective on Frederick the Great

Great, Towers set to work constructing an account of his life that would voice a Rational Dissenting critique of a self-styled enlightened monarch whose example could seduce people to admire absolutism. In the second edition of the *Memoirs*, Towers responded to those who thought he had ‘treated the character of Frederick with too much severity’, unfairly judging him in light of ‘the principles of the English constitution’. Such a charge was ‘groundless’, he argued, as he had judged Frederick as he would have judged any ancient Roman leader, according to ‘the principles of eternal justice’.¹⁷² While in some respects Frederick had been enlightened, by its nature absolutism could not foster a fully enlightened society. For Towers and his fellow Rational Dissenters, the

great objects of the philosopher, and every enlightened legislator, should be the advancement of those sciences, and those arts, that tend to the true dignity and felicity of human beings; the promotion of universal peace and liberty; and communicating to men, throughout every quarter of the globe, the blessings of a mild, a just, and an equal government.¹⁷³

Anthony Page,
School of History and Classics,
University of Tasmania

¹⁷² Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (2nd edn.), I, ‘Advertisement’.

¹⁷³ Towers, *Memoirs of Frederick* (1788), II, 505-06.

ETHICS AND AESTHETICS IN THE BRITISH MORALISTS

D D Raphael

When I learned from issue number 21 of *Enlightenment and Dissent* that D O Thomas had died, I felt moved to pay tribute to him in academic fashion with an article about some philosophical topic that was of common interest to both of us. I had intended to do this in the Festschrift issue for him in 2000, but regrettably I failed to do so, and the editor has kindly invited me to make good my omission now.

I first met D O at the viva for his Ph.D. His thesis was on the political thought of Richard Price and I was asked to act as External Examiner, presumably because I had edited Price's *Review of the principal questions in morals*. The thesis was admirable, and before long D O came to know far more about Richard Price than I had ever known. Indeed his knowledge of Price's life and works exceeded that of any other scholar, present or past. I met D O on only one other occasion, at a philosophy conference in Wales, but we corresponded from time to time about articles and reviews in this journal. I had a great respect for his expertise, and an admiration for his zeal in continuing scholarly work despite his visual disability.

Enlightenment and Dissent grew out of *The Price-Priestley Newsletter*, expanding its scope to include philosophical and political thought throughout the period of the Enlightenment in the British Isles. I have been chiefly concerned with the British Moralists of the period. One topic that is found in a number of the British Moralists is the relation of ethics to aesthetics. As with much else of their thought, discussion of this issue arose from provocative remarks of Hobbes. The most prominent contribution was Francis Hutcheson's first book, *An inquiry into the original of our ideas of beauty and virtue*. He was following in the footsteps of the Third Earl of Shaftesbury and was himself followed by John Balguy, John Clarke, David Hume, Lord Kames, Richard Price, Adam Smith, and Thomas Reid. Before describing the individual views of these philosophers, I want to put forward a general

comment on their attention to the comparison.

It seems to me that the whole topic is an inheritance from Greek thought and Greek language. The usual word for 'good' in ancient Greek is *agathos* and the word for 'beautiful' is *kalos*. The two notions were frequently put together with an abbreviation of *kai*, the word for 'and', so as to produce the composite term *kalokagathos*. If you wanted to give the highest praise to someone, *kalokagathos* is what you would call him. So the two ideas of beautiful and good were felt to be very close to each other. The meaning of *kalos* is in fact wider than 'beautiful'; Aristotle uses it freely in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as a key term meaning something like 'noble'. We may trace a similar ambiguity in English with the word 'handsome', illustrated in the adage 'Handsome is as handsome does'.

Xenophon's *Memorabilia* is generally taken by scholars to be a reliable, though limited, account of the historical Socrates. In that work¹ Xenophon reports the view of Socrates about the relation between the beautiful and the good. Socrates is being questioned by his friend Aristippus. He does not say that the beautiful and the good are the same but he regards them as closely linked: he says that 'all things are both beautiful and good in relation to the same things.... Virtue is not a good thing in relation to some things and a beautiful thing in relation to others.... It is in relation to the same things that men's bodies look beautiful and good and that all other things men use are thought beautiful and good, namely, in relation to those things for which they are useful.'

Plato, in his dialogue *Gorgias*,² attributes to Socrates a somewhat similar view about beauty, but adding pleasure to utility as a possible ground of the beautiful.

When you speak of beautiful things,... do you not call them beautiful in reference to some standard:— bodies, for example, are beautiful in proportion as they are

¹ Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, III. viii. 5. I quote from the translation by E C Marchant in the Loeb edition.

² Plato, *Gorgias*, 474. I quote from the translation by Jowett.

useful, or as the sight of them gives pleasure to the spectators?... And you would speak of everything else ... as beautiful, either by reason of the pleasure which they give, or of their use, or of both?

If this view can properly be attributed to Socrates, as Xenophon's report can, we may contrast, as the view of Plato himself, accounts of the beautiful and the good in the *Symposium* and the *Republic*, where Plato's notion of ethics has a definite aesthetic slant. It comes out especially in the *Symposium*, where the love of beauty is given the highest value, but it also seems to attend the highest value of the *Republic*, the Form of the Good.

Aristotle distinguishes, in the *Metaphysics*,³ between the good and the beautiful, saying that the good always pertains to conduct while the beautiful can exist also in immobile things. But that does not preclude an affinity in meaning. Aristotle is criticizing the view of Aristippus about the relation of the good and the beautiful to the mathematical sciences, and earlier in the *Metaphysics*⁴ he refers explicitly to Aristippus as holding that the mathematical sciences 'take no account of goods and evils'. He is thus clearly implying that beauty is included among 'goods' in a broad sense of that term. His acceptance of an affinity of meaning between the good and the beautiful is also implicit in the prominence of the term *kalos* in his ethical theory.

Then the Stoics, we are told, often identified the good, *agathon* (neuter of *agathos*), with *kalon* (in the sense of honourable, similar to Aristotle's usage).⁵ Their view is reported in several places by Cicero, and this may well have influenced the British Moralists since Cicero's philosophical writings were much read by the intelligentsia of the eighteenth century.

³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1078a32-3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 996a34-6.

⁵ A A Long and D N Sedley, *The Hellenistic philosophers*, i. 374 and ii. 411, where Chrysippus, the third head of the Stoic school, is quoted as identifying *agathon* with *kalon*. I learned of the Stoic position on this topic from my daughter Dr Anne Sheppard.

Ethics and Aesthetics in the British Moralists

Apart from that, most of the British Moralists were well equipped in Greek and acquainted with the main works of Greek philosophy as well as with the Greek text of the New Testament. Some of them also knew enough classical Hebrew to read the Old Testament in its original language. It is unlikely that any of them would have seen scope for a comparison between ethics and aesthetics in the language of the Hebrew Bible, as there is in the language of ancient Greek.

One might say, at first sight, that when Lord Shaftesbury wrote of symposiasts agreeing that 'beauty and good are still the same',⁶ he could have cited affinity between the two notions in biblical Hebrew as well as ancient Greek. The Hebrew word for good, *tov*, is a general term of commendation and is translated in the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament, compiled in the third century B.C.) by different words according to context. When the first chapter of Genesis says that God saw his creation was good, the Septuagint translates 'good' by *kalon*; and it uses the same word again in the second chapter where God says 'It is not good that the man should be alone'. If Lord Shaftesbury was familiar with the Septuagint, he could have cited these usages as supporting his view that the good is akin to the beautiful, to what is satisfying in contemplation.

Elsewhere, however, the Septuagint recognizes a difference. For example, when Moses in Deuteronomy 30:15 reports God as saying that he has 'set before thee ... good and evil', the Septuagint does not use the word *kalon* for 'good', but instead has the normal Greek word for good, *agathon*. A different term again is used in Psalm 25:8, where the first word of 'Good and upright is the Lord' is translated as *chrestos*. I think these different renderings are due to the associations of the Greek words. *Agathon* carries with it a touch of 'advantage', and that does not suit the initial statement of Genesis that God saw his creation as good. Nor does it suit the

⁶ Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *The moralists*, III. ii; quoted from L A Selby-Bigge, *British moralists*, § 67.

ensuing statement of God in the second chapter that it is not good for the man to be alone; for that does not mean simply that it is not good (advantageous) for Adam, but rather that it is not satisfactory in the sight of God surveying his work of creation. The word *kalon* is therefore more appropriate than *agathon*. On the other hand, the statement in Deuteronomy that God has given us the possibility of choosing between good and evil can perfectly well be understood as a choice between advantage and disadvantage; hence *agathon* in this context. But the connotation of 'good' in Psalm 25 ('Good and upright is the Lord') is different from both of the two senses of 'good' described just above. The word *chrestos* indicates that God is benevolent, but with an aura of respect and thankfulness, not with the self-interested thought of 'good for us' nor with any notion of aesthetic pleasure.

There is at any rate one place in the Hebrew Bible where the word *tov*, like the Greek *kalon*, is used to mean beautiful: Genesis 6:2 says that 'the sons of God' saw the daughters of men that they were fair' (*tovoth*, feminine plural of *tov*). Also in Genesis (24:16 and 26:7), Rebekah is described as 'good to look upon'. The Hebrew phrase is *tovath mareh*, translated in the Authorized and Revised Versions as 'fair to look upon', and in the modern Revised English Bible as 'beautiful'. The Hebrew phrase literally means good to look upon, joining 'good' to a form of the verb 'to see'.

Elsewhere, however, the Hebrew Bible finds it more natural to use the specific word for 'beautiful', *yafeh*, rather than *tov*. For example, in Genesis 12:11 Abram's wife Sarai is said to be *y'fath-mareh*, which the Authorized and Revised Versions translate as 'a fair woman to look upon'; and a couple of verses later she is *yafah meod*, 'very fair'. Likewise in Genesis 39:6 Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph because he was 'of beautiful form and fair to look upon', *y'feh-thoar viy'feh mareh*; and in Kings 1:3-4 the young woman brought in to care for King David is described as 'a fair damsel', *naarah yafah*. So the general tendency of the Old Testament goes against an assimilation of the beautiful with the good.

As for the notion of virtue, in the Old Testament this

usually takes the form of 'righteousness', a word sharing the same root as 'justice' and quite unconnected with the word for good. The noun goodness occurs at times but never, I think (judging from the list in *Cruden's Concordance*), with the meaning of virtue: in some instances it means the benefits bestowed by God, and in others it means God's benevolence. Cruden's entries for 'virtuous' and 'virtuously' consist of references to women in the Books of Ruth and Proverbs, but the pair of Hebrew words there, *esheth chayil*, are translated in the modern Revised English Bible as 'a fine woman' or 'a good wife', and in Jewish translations as 'a woman of worth' or 'a woman of valour'. The second of the two words, *chayil*, does normally mean 'valour', though the associations of that word in English with heroic prowess make it unsuitable for proverbial praise of women. However, the Authorized Version's rendering of Proverbs 31:10, 'Who can find a virtuous woman?', should certainly not be taken to imply that most women lack virtue.

Let us now see what the British Moralists have to say about ethics and aesthetics. I begin with Hobbes.

In *Leviathan*, chap. 6, Hobbes writes of the close relationship that the words 'good' and 'evil' have to the Latin *pulchrum* and *turpe*. He defines 'good' as the object of appetite or desire, and 'evil' as the object of hate or aversion. He then turns to Latin and, with no mention of *bonum* and *malum*, writes of *pulchrum* and *turpe*, saying: 'The Latin tongue has two words, whose significations approach to those of good and evil; but are not precisely the same; and those are *pulchrum* and *turpe*', which he defines as promising good and promising evil. He then adds that in English we express the notion of *pulchrum* in some circumstances by the word 'fair', in others by 'beautiful' or 'handsome, gallant, honourable, comely, amiable', and the notion of *turpe* by 'foul, deformed, ugly, base, nauseous, and the like', all of them basically meaning that which promises good or promises evil.

The comparison throughout is between beauty and good; nothing is said about virtue. Hobbes discusses virtue in chapter 8, where he writes of the intellectual virtues (wit,

good judgement, prudence, and craftiness) and ‘their contrary defects’. He begins the chapter by defining ‘virtue generally’ (as ‘somewhat that is valued for eminence’) and then distinguishes the class of ‘virtues intellectual’, leading one to suppose that he will deal later with virtues practical; but in fact he says nothing about them.

An earlier version of Hobbes’s thought takes a somewhat different view, both of good and evil, and of *pulchrum* and *turpe*. The work in question is Part I of *The Elements of Law*. Part I carries the specific title *Human Nature* and had initially been published separately, without Hobbes’s authorization. That separate publication was what provoked Bishop Butler’s criticism of Hobbes in the first of Butler’s *Three Sermons upon Human Nature*. Hobbes, in *Human Nature*, chap. 7, defines good and evil in terms of pleasure and displeasure:

Every man, for his own part, calleth that which pleaseth, and is delightful to himself, GOOD and that EVIL which displeaseth him.... And as we call good and evil the things that please and displease; so call we goodness and badness, the qualities or powers whereby they do it. And the signs of that goodness are called by the Latins in one word PULCHRITUDO, and the signs of evil, TURPITUDO; to which we have no words precisely answerable.

It seems odd that Hobbes should, at this earlier stage of writing *Human Nature*, have thought that *pulchrum* and *turpe* are so very closely allied to good and evil, and that they cannot be precisely translated. We should not dismiss his view as ill-informed, for he was exceptionally well versed in Latin and seems to have used it in his writings almost as easily as he used English. However, he had evidently changed his mind about the relation between good and *pulchrum* by the time he came to write *Leviathan*.

Lord Shaftesbury’s view of the relation between virtue and beauty, given in his *Inquiry concerning virtue*, is intricate. He distinguishes both virtue and beauty from ‘mere goodness’ in that they go beyond good in depending on ‘reflection’. Let us consider virtue first,

Ethics and Aesthetics in the British Moralists

According to Shaftesbury, a simple judgement of good or ill is the result of 'affection', feeling. If such a judgement is made about a human being, its meaning is that he (or she) contributes to the well-being or ill-being of the community of which he is a member. The notion of virtue is applied to actions or feelings that we get to know by reflection, a second-order form of thought about the first-order knowledge acquired from sense-perception, including internal sensation. Thus we can reflect upon motives, feelings, such as love or hatred, that are judged good or bad because of their contribution to the weal or woe of the community. Such reflection brings second-order feelings that are given expression in the ideas of virtue and vice.

Shaftesbury has a similar analysis of aesthetic ideas. When we reflect upon the arrangement of shapes, colours, and proportions in the objects of sense-perception, we are liable to experience favourable or unfavourable feelings, which we express by judgements of 'fair and foul', 'harmonious and dissonant'.

A later work, *The moralists*, gives a more succinct account of Shaftesbury's view. It takes the form of a dialogue, and the main point, for my present purpose, is the conclusion that I quoted earlier. The two participants in the discussion, while noting wide differences of opinion about the degree of virtue or beauty in particular examples, are ready to relate the two notions in the description of morally good actions as handsome, so that 'beauty and good are still the same'.

Francis Hutcheson went into much greater detail in pursuing the analogy between beauty and virtue. Most of the philosophers who followed him were chiefly concerned with the character of virtue itself and treated its relation to beauty as an incidental matter. Hutcheson himself, however, in his first book, *An inquiry into the original of our ideas of beauty and virtue*, was just as much interested in aesthetics as in ethics. The first of the two treatises in his *Inquiry* is something of a landmark in the history of aesthetics, a subject whose quarry is highly elusive. Hutcheson's work is a landmark because it presents and defends a definite formula

for the essence of beauty, uniformity in variety.

The formula is too wide to be sustainable: uniformity in variety can be seen in all organisms except perhaps the simplest forms, but we do not find all of them beautiful. Some animals are especially beautiful, and notably so when young; that cannot be explained by uniformity in variety. Even so, Hutcheson merits praise for working out a detailed hypothesis.

He illustrates it primarily with examples from mathematics, saying, reasonably enough, that simplicity will aid understanding. He holds that beauty consists in 'a compound ratio' of uniformity and variety, and explains what he means as follows. Where two things have the same degree of uniformity, the one that has greater variety is more beautiful; and conversely, where two things have the same degree of variety, the one that has more uniformity is more beautiful. A square and an equilateral triangle are equally uniform, but the square is more beautiful because it has greater variety. A pentagon is more beautiful than a square for the same reason, and so on. But when the number of sides in a uniformly shaped geometrical figure has increased so far as to escape observation, the difference in beauty ceases to occur. A parallel process yields an increase of beauty where two things have the same degree of variety but one has greater uniformity: an equilateral or an isosceles triangle is more beautiful than a scalene triangle, and a square is more beautiful than a rhombus. One may reasonably wonder whether Hutcheson's judgement of greater and lesser beauty in geometrical figures would have been the same had he not already adopted his theory of unity in variety.

Hutcheson does not neglect other fields of knowledge and activity. He writes more briefly of scientific and metaphysical theorems and of architecture. He also distinguishes absolute beauty from 'relative or comparative beauty' found in objects that imitate an original. Relative beauty mainly concerns works of art, including literature. Hutcheson brings relative beauty under his theory by saying that it is founded on 'a *Conformity*, or a kind of *Unity* between the Original and the

Copy'.⁷

Hutcheson's concern in this treatise is not entirely aesthetic. He ends up with a form of the design argument for the existence of God: the extent of beauty (unity in variety) in the universe is strong evidence of divine design. And in the preface to the *Inquiry* as a whole he says that his principal purpose is to show that the Author of Nature has supplemented the slow-moving powers of reason with swifter feelings, 'having made Virtue a lovely Form' which we know by a 'Moral Sense of Beauty in Actions and Affections.'⁸

In his second treatise he turns to virtue itself, identifying it as the object of approval by the moral sense. Always eager to make theory a method of unifying diverse data, Hutcheson proposes the thesis that the object of moral approval is always a form of benevolence. The simple act of doing good to others is, of course, normally motivated by a wish to benefit them and is approved as morally good. If the beneficiary feels gratitude, that normally goes along with a readiness to reciprocate if the need arises; the readiness is a form of benevolence and is approved as morally appropriate. The example of gratitude, however, shows that Hutcheson's theory is too simple to cover the facts. Gratitude is not only a readiness to confer benefit but also an appreciation of the original goodwill, and the moral approval of gratitude is directed upon that appreciation as well as on the conferring of benefit. So it would be more accurate to say that the approval of gratitude is directed partly on benevolence and partly on something else.

In other examples of approval there may be no benevolence at all. The imposing of deserved punishment on a wrongdoer is commonly approved as morally right, but there is no obvious benevolence in the object of approval. You could say that the imposition of penalties on wrongdoing is socially useful and is practised for that reason, so that there is a general will for social good underlying the practice. That is

⁷ Francis Hutcheson, *Inquiry into beauty and virtue*, I. iv. 1. I quote from the fourth edition (London, 1738), 39.

⁸ *Ibid.*, preface; 4th ed., xiv.

indeed Hutcheson's position: he notes that the effects of benevolence lead to 'the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers', so that his theory of moral approval turns into the first explicit statement of utilitarianism. But that is not what is meant by his initial thesis that moral approval is always for a form of benevolence: punishment for wrongdoing is approved as *just*, not as useful, even though it is (generally, not always) useful as well. If utility were the criterion for imposing unpleasant measures, we would have to approve of imposing them sometimes on people who have done no wrong. That does indeed happen, but we have to defend it on grounds of utility, not on grounds of justice.

John Balguy's treatise, *The foundation of moral goodness*, is a criticism of Hutcheson's *Inquiry* and contains a paragraph about the beauty of virtue simply because Hutcheson had dealt with the topic. Balguy is a firm rationalist who thinks that virtue and vice, right and wrong, are objective facts and that moral judgement expresses a rational understanding of such facts. What he has to say about beauty concerns, in the first instance, the beauty of virtue, not beauty generally.

It is a mark of his open-mindedness that, in the original text of his treatise, he did not take for granted, as some other rationalist theorists did, that aesthetic judgement must resemble moral judgement and so be a function of reason. He wrote: 'As to the *pulchrum* or *beauty* of virtue, it seems to me somewhat doubtful and difficult to determine, whether the *understanding* alone be sufficient for the perception of it.' He noted that while there is usually universal agreement on what is morally right, there is vast disagreement about the beauty of actions: some people have little or no perception of beauty in virtuous actions, and all people consider that actions that are equally right can be unequal in their beauty.

This judgement does not necessarily imply a view about beauty in general. But in a note added to a later edition of his work Balguy declared decisively for a fully rationalist view.

Since the first publication of these papers, I have been convinced, that all beauty, whether moral or natural, is to be reckoned and reputed as a species of absolute

Ethics and Aesthetics in the British Moralists

truth.... And as to the diversity of perceptions above-mentioned, the natural or accidental differences of men's understandings seem now to me sufficient to account for it.⁹

John Clarke of Hull wrote a sustained criticism of Hutcheson's *Inquiry* in his tract *The foundation of morality in theory and practice*. His main object is to refute Hutcheson's belief in truly disinterested benevolence, and one small part of his discussion concerns the comparison of virtue with beauty. Clarke welcomes Hutcheson's statement 'That the Author of Nature has made Virtue a lovely Form, to excite our pursuit of it', but rejects the idea that our intention in such pursuit excludes self-interest. It is impossible, he says, for beauty to allure if we do not at the same time have the intention to obtain the pleasure that beauty gives us.¹⁰

David Hume's writings on the topic of virtue and beauty are much better known than those of other British Moralists of the time. He deals with the matter both in the *Treatise of human nature* and in the *Enquiry concerning the principles of morals*. His thoughts on our topic no doubt began with his reading of Hutcheson, but he is more emphatic than Hutcheson in comparing virtue with beauty, and more explicit in that he attributes both concepts to a common source, sympathy.

To have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to feel a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. The very *feeling* constitutes our praise or admiration.... The case is the same as in our judgements concerning all kinds of beauty, and tastes, and sensations.¹¹

Our sense of beauty depends very much on this principle [of sympathy]; and where any object has a tendency to produce pleasure in its possessor, it is always regarded as beautiful; ... The same principle

⁹ John Balguy, *The foundation of moral goodness*, Part I; Selby-Bigge, § 537; D D Raphael, *British moralists 1650-1800*, § 443.

¹⁰ John Clarke, *The foundation of morality in theory and practice*; quoted from Selby-Bigge, § 103.

¹¹ *A Treatise of human nature*, III. i. 2.

produces, in many instances, our sentiments of morals, as well as those of beauty.¹²

These quotations come from the *Treatise of human nature*. The later *Enquiry concerning the principles of morals* goes a little further, projecting moral approval onto its object so as to speak of ‘moral beauty’ comparable with ‘natural beauty’.¹³

Henry Home, a Scottish judge with the title of Lord Kames, covered a wide range in his *Essays on the principles of morality and natural religion*, extending the subject-matter of the title to include jurisprudence and aesthetics. He is especially keen on aesthetics and regards aesthetic judgement as more basic than ethical. He holds that the primary reaction to human experience is a feeling of pleasure or pain, virtually universal in its scope. It is most notable with the objects of sight: those that give pleasure we call beautiful and those that give pain we call ugly. We then apply these term metaphorically to almost anything that is pleasant or painful.

Kames posits three levels of beauty and ugliness. The lowest affects objects that are not related to an end or a purposive agent; he gives the example of a flowing river. The second level concerns objects, such as works of art, that *are* so related. Appreciation of their beauty or ugliness includes approbation or disapprobation. The approbation is not directed upon the end served; it simply expresses the pleasure of perceiving that the object succeeds in serving a purpose. If we do also approve of the end served, then our appreciation is of the highest form of beauty, the third level. Conversely, if we disapprove of the end served we are experiencing the highest form of ugliness.

Virtue and vice come into the picture if the third stage of beauty and ugliness is concerned with thought about human actions; there the factor of deliberate intention gives rise to a special form of beauty and deformity. If you think about an action of filial piety, for instance, or gratitude, it will appear

¹² *Treatise*, III. iii. 1.

¹³ Hume, *An enquiry concerning the principles of morals*, Appendix I.

Ethics and Aesthetics in the British Moralists

not only pleasant and beautiful but ‘as fit, right, and meet to be done’, and that special feature ‘intitles the beauty and deformity of human actions to peculiar names: they are termed moral beauty and moral deformity. Hence the morality and immorality of human actions; and the power or faculty by which we perceive this difference among actions, passeth under the name of the moral sense.’¹⁴

Richard Price, with his usual robust common sense, draws a firm distinction between moral and aesthetic judgement. His *Review of the principal questions in morals* is concerned to defend a rationalist view of ethics especially against Hutcheson and Hume, and it includes a chapter about ‘our ideas of the beauty and deformity of actions’ simply because those two thinkers make much of an analogy between virtue and beauty. Price allows that value judgements about conduct often include an aesthetic element, noting that we commonly describe actions, not only as right or wrong, but also as ‘amiable’ or ‘odious’. He takes these terms to be variants of ‘beautiful’ and ‘ugly’, but they show up more obviously their reference to the feelings of the speaker and of people generally. Price thinks that this aesthetic element is an accompaniment, not the essence, of the reference to virtue and vice in moral judgement. He gives a persuasive argument for his view by observing that the aesthetic element is added only when we speak of especially high or especially low moral worth. Actions that are routinely right or wrong would not be called amiable or odious.¹⁵

Adam Smith, sharing the empiricist stance of Hutcheson and Hume, has quite a lot to say, in *The theory of moral sentiments*, about the analogy between virtue and beauty. He claims originality for one element of his contribution, dealing with the role of utility in moral judgement as adding ‘beauty’ to human action and character. He points out that we often

¹⁴ Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Essays on the principles of morality and natural religion*, II, ii; quoted from Selby-Bigge, §§ 913-921.

¹⁵ Richard Price, *Review of the principal questions in morals* (ed. Raphael), chap. II, 57,64.

value the utility of a means more than we value the end served by the means. He gives the example of selling for a pittance a watch that loses a few minutes a day, and then paying a high price for a watch that loses only one minute in a fortnight. The motive is not really a felt need for accurate knowledge of the time, but rather the pleasure of having an almost perfect machine. Smith then goes on to say that the same motive is responsible for more serious matters. We are tempted to pursue power and riches because we are 'charmed with the beauty of that accommodation which reigns in the palaces and oeconomy of the great'. We fail to see that as much or more happiness can be found in a simple life.

Confusingly, however, Smith then adds: 'And it is well that nature imposes upon us in this manner. It is this deception which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind.' The paragraph proceeds to enlarge upon the benefits of this 'deception', and includes one of Smith's famous references to the invisible hand that produces unintended consequences. The invisible hand in this context leads the rich to share the necessities of life with the poor.¹⁶

A prominent feature of Smith's thought on virtue and beauty is his belief that ethical and aesthetic judgement both use two standards of evaluation, one ideal, the other more practical. When we praise or blame actions, he says, we sometimes use as our standard a notion of perfect propriety that cannot be attained in actual practice; but at other times our standard is the level of moral propriety that is commonly reached by most people. Smith then goes on to say that the same thing happens in judgements of the arts: a critic of poetry or painting may use a criterion of perfect beauty surpassing any achievement possible in the work of man, so that his verdict is bound to find fault; but at other times he might take as his standard the finest works actually found in that particular art, and then he may well give high praise to the work being considered.

Thomas Reid's comment on 'the analogy between moral

¹⁶ Adam Smith, *The theory of moral sentiments*, Part IV, chap.1.

Ethics and Aesthetics in the British Moralists

beauty and natural, between moral sentiment and taste,' is a small element of his reply to Hume's attack on ethical rationalism in the *Enquiry on morals*. It comes in Reid's *Essays on the active powers of man*.¹⁷ Hume infers from the analogy that 'virtue and vice are not qualities in the persons to whom language ascribes them, but feelings of the spectator'. Reid queries Hume's assumption that beauty is not a real quality. This, he says, is a paradox of philosophical theory, 'a paradox so contrary to the common language and common sense of mankind, that it ought rather to overturn the theory on which it stands, than receive any support from it.' Reid often relies on 'common language and common sense' and thinks that a departure from them cannot be justified simply to satisfy a philosophical theory adopted for extraneous reasons. He goes on to refer to a specific point made by Hume, that 'Euclid has fully explained all the qualities of the circle; but has not ... said a word of its beauty', from which Hume inferred that beauty is not a quality of the circle. Reid replies that the true reason is that Euclid's purpose is to demonstrate the mathematical properties of the circle, and since beauty is not a quality demonstrable by mathematical reasoning, it is not relevant to his subject.

Much of the general character of the British Moralists of the eighteenth century is repeated in the twentieth century. G E Moore's *Principia ethica* is, I think, the most influential work of British moral philosophy in that period, and it is a Platonic book. The chief values for Moore in that book are the appreciation of beauty and love (he uses the term 'personal affection'). To place these far above, say, happiness and virtue is a Platonic stance. Moore does not, however, join beauty with virtue. The twentieth-century philosopher who does do that is A J Ayer in *Language, truth and logic*. It goes without saying that Ayer's first book is a brilliant contribution to the theory of knowledge, but ethics was not his forte. To stave off criticism, Ayer included a chapter on ethics and theology, in

¹⁷ Thomas Reid, *Essays on the active powers of man*, essay v, chap.7; Raphael, *British moralists*, § 937.

D D Raphael

which he put forward the so-called emotive (or expressive) theory of ethics, and simply took for granted that moral and aesthetic judgements are in the same boat. He might well have repeated Shaftesbury's dictum, 'Beauty and good are still the same'.

I should add finally that those British philosophers of the twentieth century who made a signal contribution to aesthetics had no inclination to align aesthetics with ethics. They are E F Carritt and R G Collingwood. Carritt published *The theory of beauty* in 1914 and followed it up later with *Philosophies of beauty* (1931) and *What is beauty?* (1932). He demolished Ayer's facile comparison between ethics and aesthetics with a trenchant article in *Philosophy*, 1938. Collingwood's book *The principles of art* (1938) is, I would say, the most distinguished contribution to aesthetics by a British philosopher. There is not the slightest suggestion in it of a comparison with ethics.

D D Raphael
Imperial College of Science and Technology

**‘A REGISTER OF VEXATIONS AND PERSECUTIONS’:
SOME LETTERS OF THOMAS FYSHE PALMER FROM
BOTANY BAY DURING THE 1790S**

Michael T Davis

In the eight months between August 1793 and March 1794, the British government initiated a series of show trials in the courts of Scotland in an effort to suppress the radical enthusiasm that had risen in the country since the outbreak of the French Revolution. Thomas Muir, Thomas Fyshe Palmer, William Skirving, Maurice Margarot and Joseph Gerrald were brought separately to trial on charges of sedition, their crimes being the advocacy of parliamentary reform and opposition to the war against France. They were each found guilty and sentenced to transportation to Botany Bay, in what was intended to be a clear message to their Jacobin colleagues about the consequence of embracing reformist ideas. By the 1830s, however, the story of the so-called Scottish Political Martyrs was being used to herald a very different kind of message. During the Reform Bill campaign of 1832, banners were emblazoned with their names and popular songs honoured their contribution to the cause.¹ Still later, the Chartist press invoked their memory by publishing short biographies and letters of these men,² and, at much the same time, Joseph Hume, a radical Member of Parliament, led a campaign to have monuments erected in Edinburgh and London to commemorate the Scottish Martyrs.³

Through the efforts of men like Hume, the trials and transportation of Palmer and his associates re-entered the world of political discourse. One anonymous writer published an account of *The Political Martyrs of Scotland; Persecuted during the Years 1793 & 1794* in which their prosecutions were seen as the ‘blackest page in the recent annals of the Criminal Court of Scotland’.⁴ The

¹ See Christina Bewley, *Muir of Huntershill* (Oxford, 1981), 185.

² See, for example, *The Chartist Circular*, 23 May 1840, 144.

³ See Alex Tyrrell with Michael T Davis, ‘Bearding the Tories: The Commemoration of the Scottish Political Martyrs of 1793-94’, in *Contested sites: commemoration, memorial and popular politics in nineteenth-century Britain*, ed. Paul A Pickering and Alex Tyrrell (Aldershot, 2004), 25-56.

⁴ *The political martyrs of Scotland; persecuted during the years 1793 & 1794* (Edinburgh, [1837?]), 1. An abridged version of this pamphlet

Michael T Davis

author goes on to suggest ‘that Botany Bay is now a comparative Paradise to the penal colony then in its miserable infancy ... then the harbour of the off-scourings of British society, and of them alone’.⁵ The sentences handed down to the Martyrs was ‘the most shocking species of transportation; transportation – not to America, not to a cultivated society, to an easy master, and to kind treatment – but to an inhospitable desert in the extremity of the earth – condemned to live with ruffians, whom the gibbet only had spared, and under a system of despotism rendered necessary for the government of such a tribe’.⁶ How much of this dismal portrait of the Martyrs’ fate was sensationalism and did they find themselves living in an ‘inhospitable desert’?

In the time leading up to the departure of Palmer, Muir, Skirving and Margarot on board the *Surprise* transport in May 1794,⁷ the public debate on their sentences reached as far as Parliament.⁸ The trials captured the people’s imagination, so much so that the *Morning Post*, in reference to Muir’s case, asserted how it ‘is as much a topic of conversation as the War’.⁹ A large part of this discourse focused on the notorious conduct of the presiding judge, Lord Braxfield;¹⁰ the prejudicial conduct of the prosecutions before

was early issued as ‘Memoirs and Trials of the Political Martyrs of Scotland; Persecuted during the Years 1793-4-5’ in *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 4 (1837), 1-20.

⁵ *The political martyrs of Scotland*, 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Gerrald, who was tried in March 1794, was originally detained in the Edinburgh Tolbooth before being removed to Newgate prison in October 1794. He was held there until May 1795 when he was placed on board the *Sovereign* to await transportation to Australia.

⁸ For a discussion of the trials see Michael T Davis, “‘The Impartial Voice of Future Times Will Rejudge Your Verdict’: Discourse and Drama in the Trials of the Scottish Political Martyrs of the 1790s’, in *Hélio Osvaldo Alves: O Guardador de Rios*, ed. Joanne Paisana (Braga: Instituto de Letras e Ciências Humanas, 2004).

⁹ *Morning Post*, 10 September 1793.

¹⁰ On Braxfield see Brian D Osborne, *Braxfield the Hanging Judge? The life and times of Lord Justice-Clerk Robert McQueen of Braxfield* (Argyll, 1997).

Letters of Thomas Fyshe Palmer from Botany Bay

packed juries; and the dubious legality of the punishment of transportation for crimes of sedition.¹¹ Amidst discussion of the latter topic there was surprisingly little thought given to the place they were being sent. Perhaps this was because Botany Bay was an infant colony, established little more than five years when the trials began. The Scottish Martyrs were the first prominent political transportees to Australia, so in the years 1793 and 1794 British reformers had no first-hand accounts from colleagues of the penal colony. Perhaps, too, there was an assumption about the finality of the sentences and the harshness of the colony made up of rogues and thieves. There could even have been a predominant concern with what the reform movement had lost with the banishment of these men, rather than what fate awaited them in a distant land, as an address from the Sheffield Constitutional Society expressed: 'At this mournful moment of separation, though we sympathize, though we feel your sufferings, yet pardon us, we weep not for you, but for ourselves, for our children, for our Orphan-country, thus suddenly deprived by a tyrannical decree, of four of its Fathers, at one rending pang'.¹²

Extant documents show the Martyrs, as they awaited transportation, were also surprisingly reticent about their future at Botany Bay and what the place would be like. Muir, for example, in a letter written to a friend in Cambridge before the *Surprise* sailed, looked to 'the hope of immortality, founded upon our common Christianity' and kept faith that in 'solitary exile there is a dignity, there is a conscious pride, which, even independent of philosophy, may support the mind'.¹³ At around the same time, in a letter to the Society of United Irishmen in Dublin, Muir lamented that he was 'perhaps for ever, separated from this country and from civilized life', but was more concerned with offering his encouragement to pursue reform: 'I depart in the firm conviction, that your future proceedings, will be corresponding to the preceding,

¹¹ For a discussion of this debate see Henry Thomas Cockburn, *An Examination of the Trials for Sedition which have hitherto occurred in Scotland* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1888), I: 221-92; II: 1-149.

¹² *Morning Chronicle*, 21 March 1794.

¹³ *The political martyrs of Scotland*, 16.

Michael T Davis

that your conduct will be marked by that calm but dignified fortitude, which becomes the adherents of freedom, that, trampling upon intrigue, and triumphing over despotism you must finally accomplish the emancipation of Ireland'.¹⁴

By the time the convicted men reached Australia their thoughts had largely turned away from political reform in Britain and towards more immediate concerns in their new homeland. Each of them had vastly different experiences at Botany Bay: Skirving and Gerrald died within days of each other in 1796 and Muir escaped the colony that same year on board an American trading ship. Margarot, who had been marginalised by his fellow radicals after allegedly siding with the captain of the *Surprise* when he accused Palmer and Skirving of leading a plot to mutiny the ship, lived a turbulent existence before returning to England in 1810.

Of the five Martyrs, Palmer was the most successful in New South Wales. He acquired a cottage and four acres of land from John White, chief surgeon of the colony,¹⁵ and established a trading company with his companion, James Ellis, and John Boston, who travelled on the *Surprise* as a free settler. The following documents provide a snapshot of his life in New South Wales as well as some rare insights into the early political, economic and racial milieu of the penal colony. Palmer's correspondence with his friends is distinctly devoid of comments on or inquiries about politics in Britain, but he has a seemingly insatiable appetite for reform publications. In some senses, the letters are 'a register of vexations and persecutions'¹⁶ and, although Palmer distanced himself from political activism in Botany Bay, the documents offer criticism of the governors, the economic monopoly of the officers of the New South Wales Corps, and the treatment of local Aborigines. Despite the difficulties of life in the colony, what is most apparent from these letters is that Palmer did not consider himself to be exiled in an 'inhospitable desert'. Indeed, the letters consistently offer

¹⁴ *Society of United Irishmen of Dublin* (Dublin, 1794), 203.

¹⁵ *The Monthly Repository*, 12 (1817), 576.

¹⁶ See Document 2.

Letters of Thomas Fyshe Palmer from Botany Bay

favourable images of the Australian natural environment – it was, to use Palmer’s words, a ‘wonderful country’.¹⁷

Despite his admiration for the environment of Botany Bay, Palmer seemed to entertain no thought of permanently settling in Australia. In one letter he says ‘I hope we shall not return to Europe poorer than we came’.¹⁸ Palmer perhaps yearned to be reunited with his friends and family in Britain or to again be able to practice his Unitarian faith. Whatever his motivation to leave Botany Bay, he did so as soon as his sentence had expired. In 1801, he sailed for home with Ellis and Boston, but the vessel was wrecked at Guam, where Palmer died of fever in 1802.

Michael T Davis
University of Tasmania

DOCUMENT 1.

Palmer to Jeremiah Joyce,¹⁹ 15 December 1794.²⁰

I wrote you an imperfect account of myself by the ‘Resolution, Capt. Locke’, about a month ago.

I write now to show you that I cannot forget you, but you must not expect a long letter. Mr. Muir, at whose house I write (our three houses are contiguous), and honest Mr. Skirving, are both well, and, I think, as easy and cheerful as myself.

The reports you have had of this country are mostly false. The soil is capital, the climate delicious. I will take upon me to say, that it will soon be the region of plenty, and wants only *virtue* and *liberty* to be another America. Nature possibly has done more for this than the last. I never saw a place where a man could so soon make a fortune, and that by the fairest means – *Agriculture*. The officers have already done it, and this (I can scarcely expect to be

¹⁷ See Document 3.

¹⁸ See Document 3.

¹⁹ Jeremiah Joyce (1763-1816), political reformer, was a member of the Society for Constitutional Information.

²⁰ Source: Thomas Fyshe Palmer, *A narrative of the sufferings of T.F. Palmer, and W. Skirving, during a voyage to New South Wales, 1794, on board the Surprise transport* (Cambridge, 1797).

Michael T Davis

believed) in 18 months; yet it is absolutely fact; till then (the period of -----'s government)²¹ all private industry was repressed; every one was obliged to labour for what he hated. Governor Grose²² totally reversed the whole system – he gave land not only to officers and freemen, but to convicts: he gave all convicts half of every five days, and the whole of Saturday. By a little longer continuance of good sense, *transportation here* will become a blessing. I heartily wish that all the paupers of Great Britain could make interest to be sent here.

To a philosophic mind it is a land of wonder and delight; to him it is a new creation: the beasts, the fish, the birds, the reptiles, the plants, the trees, the flowers, are all new – so beautiful and grotesque, that no naturalist would believe the most faithful drawing, and it requires uncommon skill to class them. This comes by a most valued friend. It is to him that I am indebted, possibly more than my innocence, for my present comforts, and that my situation is not most wretched. He had the courage to avow himself the friend of a man covered with infamy. He produced a character attested by some of the most respectable of our countrymen, as an argument of the falseness of the charge against me. His kindness, his feeling, his incessant plans and study to serve me demand my acknowledgements, and will secure your approbation and applause. He has given me a house and four acres of land. I cannot read this from an inflammation of my eyes; I do not believe that you can. God bless you, my dear sir. While I have life I trust you will have the love and gratitude of Your sincere Friend,

T.F. Palmer.

²¹ A reference to the government of Captain Arthur Phillip (1738-1814), the first governor of New South Wales.

²² Francis Grose (c 1758-1814) served as Lieutenant Governor of New South Wales between 1792 and 1794.

DOCUMENT 2.

Palmer to John Disney,²³ 13 June 1795:²⁴

When Mr. White,²⁵ the principal surgeon of this settlement, sailed last December in the *Dædalus*, I entrusted him with what is dearer to me than life – my character. I was under the necessity of defending this against the infernal machinations of [Patrick Campbell],²⁶ master of the *Surprize* transport, who had hired and suborned some of the outcasts who sailed with him, to swear away my life by the accusation of mutiny, and the intended murder of him and his principal officers. Of this murderous attempt of [Campbell] I sent the most indubitable evidence of many depositions made before a magistrate. In the hurry, Mr. Ellis²⁷ sent the attested copies, as well as the originals, so that my character depends on the safe arrival and honesty of Mr. White. They were accompanied with the dismal narrative of my sufferings²⁸ (of which last I have a copy) and entrusted to the care of Mr. ----- . I am extremely anxious for the fate of them.²⁹ My history since then is little else than a register of vexations and persecutions.

The officers have monopolized all the trade of the colony. They suffer no one but themselves to board any ship that may arrive. They alone buy the cargo, and sell it at 1, 2, 3, 400, and even 1000

²³ John Disney (1746-1816), Unitarian minister, theologian and antiquary. See D O Thomas, 'Preface and Introduction to John Disney's Diary, *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 21 (2002), 1-41,

²⁴ Source: *The Monthly Repository*, 12 (1817), 262-64.

²⁵ John White (c. 1750-1832) arrived in Australia in 1788 with the First Fleet as surgeon-general of New South Wales.

²⁶ Patrick Campbell was employed by the shipping and slave trading company, Camden, Calvert and King as captain of the *Surprise*.

²⁷ James Ellis accompanied Palmer on board the *Surprise* as his companion.

²⁸ Published by Benjamin Flower as *A narrative of the sufferings of T.F. Palmer, and W. Skirving, during a Voyage to New South Wales, 1794, on board the Surprise transport* (Cambridge, 1797).

²⁹ In an editorial note, John Towill Rutt noted: 'These numerous documents came safely to my hands, and from there Mr. Joyce compiled his *Narrative*'.

Michael T Davis

per cent profit. Mr. Ellis and Boston³⁰ were ordered into confinement for entering a ship and endeavouring to purchase things, not prohibited, for their use. With great respect, but firmness, they remonstrated against this invasion of the common rights of British subjects. This was construed into an audacious attack upon the privileges and interests of these military monopolists. And from that time (now many months ago) they have set their faces against them and me. They have had no grants and no servants. Mr. Boston, though sent out by government principally to cure fish and make salt, has been the whole time unemployed. My men, which I bought at a monstrous rate, with a farm, have been taken from me. A message has been sent me to pull off my hat to the officers, or I should be confined in the cells, and punished. Public orders have been twice given for no soldier to speak to me, under the penalty of 100 lashes. Now I never had omitted the ceremony of capping the officers, and never conversed with the soldiers. The most impudent claims on my property from the most unprincipled thieves were listened to, and enforced, without deigning to hear a single word I had to say.

The situation the colony is in at present is dreadful. It is put on half allowance, and even at this rate there is not enough in the stores to last three weeks. They have begun to kill the live stock. The cows are condemned, but all the stock in the colony will not last a month. The only resource is about three months provisions of Indian corn, a food inadequate to labour. In this state Mr. Boston wrote to the commanding officer that he was sent out by government on purpose to make salt and cure fish, and that he would undertake, with the assistance of boats and men, to supply from Lord Howe's Island,³¹ in the neighbourhood, a full or even a double allowance of well cured fish, at a third of the price of beef and pork. Can you conceive that little or no notice was taken of this, and nearly a flat denial given?

³⁰ John Boston (d. 1804) sailed on board the *Surprise* with his wife as a free settler.

³¹ Lord Howe Island is located approximately 700km north-east of Sydney.

Letters of Thomas Fyshe Palmer from Botany Bay

Yesterday a large ship came from India, the Endeavour, Bampton, with the company's colours flying. These were called American, by others the colours of Britain – of a frigate sent to fetch us over. Good heavens! What were my sensations! mocked with groundless joy to be plunged again into melancholy. She brings live stock, arrack, tea, sugar, muslin, buffalo-fat, but only fourteen barrels of provisions. Fowls sell at 5s. each; cabbages 6d.; pork 1s.6d. per pound. I have never accepted any provisions of any kind from the stores, that no pretence might be made to demand my labour, and find living enormously dear. Mr. Muir, myself, Mr. and Mrs. Boston, and Ellis live together, and are all well.

It gave me great pleasure on landing to see the harmony between the natives and whites. This was owing to the indefatigable pains of Governor Phillips,³² to cultivate a good understanding with them. When himself was speared he would suffer no vengeance to be taken, and on no account an injury to be done them by a white man. The natives of the Hawkesbury³³ (the richest land possibly in the world, producing 30 and 40 bushels of wheat per acre) lived on the wild yams on the banks. Cultivation has rooted out these, and poverty compelled them to steal Indian corn to support nature. The unfeeling settlers resented this by unparalleled severities.³⁴ The blacks in return speared two or three whites, but tired out, they came unarmed, and sued for peace. This, government thought proper to deny them, and last week sent sixty soldiers to kill and destroy all they could meet with, and drive them utterly from the Hawkesbury. They seized a native boy who lived with a settler, and made him discover where his parents and relations concealed themselves. They came upon them unarmed, and unexpected, killed five, and wounded many more. The dead they hang on gibbets, *in terrorem*. The war may be universal on the part of the

³² See note 21 above.

³³ The Hawkesbury region is located approximately 55km north of Sydney. The local indigenous people of this district were known as the Darug.

³⁴ The first European settlers in the Hawkesbury region arrived in January 1794. Two families were granted farms at Bardenarang (now called Pitt Town Bottoms) and for the following ten years frequent conflicts arose between European settlers and the local Aborigines.

Michael T Davis

blacks, whose improvement and civilization will be a long time deferred. The people killed were unfortunately the friendly of the blacks, and one of them more than once saved the life of a white man.

Governor Hunter,³⁵ whose arrival is so anxiously expected, will come out with just and liberal ideas, I trust, of policy, and correct the many abuses and oppressions we groan under, as well as those of the poor natives. It seems a strange time to drive these poor wretches into famine, the almost certain consequence of driving them from their situation, when we are so near it ourselves.

Ever since I landed I have been attacked by the malady of the country, sore eyes; so that I have been obliged to give up writing and reading. I have now blisters behind my ears, from which I find some relief. Some lose their sight, but, in general, after the first attack, their vision is as good as ever.

You may be sure I am all anxiety concerning the fate of those men, who are suffering for the welfare of others. Remember me to them, if you have opportunity, with all the sympathy they deserve; and to those friends endeared by distance, who are pleased to interest themselves about me.

DOCUMENT 3.

Palmer to John Disney,³⁶ 14 August 1797:³⁷

I beg leave to return you my warm thanks for your most friendly and consoling letter. It would be the severest drop in my cup to be forgotten by such men. The esteem and approbation of the worthy are next to that of one's own mind.

I received two or three little pamphlets, with all the Morning Chronicles to April, accompanying your letter. We have read over and over all our little stock of books, therefore any celebrated pamphlets that our friends have done with, it would be charity to send. Your noble gift of the Encyclopaedia has been of infinite use

³⁵ John Hunter (1737-1821) was second governor of New South Wales.

³⁶ See note 23 above.

³⁷ Source: *The Monthly Repository*, 12 (1817), 264-66.

Letters of Thomas Fyshe Palmer from Botany Bay

and entertainment to us.³⁸ It has instructed us in arts necessary to a livelihood: an interested and powerful monopoly of trading officers, who have the art to persuade an old man to just what they please, have thrown every impediment possible to our getting an honest one. But, in spite of all, we have weathered our point. In a great measure owing to the help of your Encyclopaedia we have built and navigated a little vessel. We meant it for fishing, but as we could not have the smallest encouragement for what was so evidently for the public good, we have made it a mercantile vessel, and trade from hence to Norfolk Island, a thousand miles distant. To be sure we are obliged sail without licence or certificate (which the governor, poor man, positively refuses), and are liable to be hanged as pirates by any body that chuses to give himself that trouble. If paper should continue of value, I hope we shall not return to Europe poorer than we came.

The short allowance in 1795, that poor Skirving thought was the cause of his death, brought a rupture on me, and otherwise disordered my frame. The quick and extreme vicissitudes of the climate are rather possibly too much for a broken down old man like me. To the young and the robust they are nothing, who lie out in the woods without harm. My fellow-sufferers laugh at me, but I have no scruple in saying it is the finest country I ever saw. An honest and active governor, who could administer an equal government, might soon make it the region of plenty. In spite of all possible rapacity and robbery, I am clear that it will thrive against every obstacle. There may come a time when the settler shall reap what he has sown; at present, from necessity, he is obliged to sell to an avaricious huckster his wheat at 3s. per bushel, who turns it into the stores at 10s. the price which government gives for it. He buys liquor at 3s. per gallon, and charges it at £3. £4. and perchance five pounds per gallon. Tobacco he buys at 15d. and sells it to the poor farmer and labourer at 7s. and 10s a pound. The same of every thing else. If he raises Indian corn, or wheat, it is of little use to him. He must sell it for what he can get to these hucksters. He

³⁸ Editorial note states: 'As many volumes of the Scotch Encyclopaedia as were then published, were presented to Mr. Palmer, by the joint contributions of a few friends, before his departure from England'.

Michael T Davis

cannot, like them, turn it into the stores. This is a matter of interest. We have laid out what would sell here for £300 on a farm, and we never could have interest to turn only forty bushels in, from the time we have been in the island. If, like other settlers, from necessity we have been driven to deal with these hucksters, nothing so easy then as to turn in to the amount of the debt, be the stores shut or open, but not one farthing on our own account.

By these means the colony is ruined. All the necessaries are double the price they were when we landed. Every farmer and settler is only a tenant at rack rent to the officers. Government is at an immense expence for no other purpose than to put money into the pocket of these officers. All of them keep hucksters' shops, where you may buy from a dram to a puncheon of spirits – from a skeign to a pound of thread. I cannot affirm it to be with – I hope that it has been without – the governor's knowledge, but the greatest and most extortionate shop in the colony has been that of government house. They sell indigo at this moment for its weight in silver. In short, reformation may long be in vain expected in these remote dependencies so far removed from the eye of control. Such a man as Capt. King,³⁹ however, late governor of Norfolk Island, would do much. I have reason to think him as honest as he is active and enlightened. Such a man with a fourth, I believe a tenth, of the present expence, might make this the cheapest and most plentiful market, and most plentiful country in the empire of Great Britain.

Of this wonderful country we have little or no knowledge, except a small portion of the sea coast of a corner of it. With two armed ships and a schooner, on purpose for the use of the colony, no discovery has been attempted. Such things are never thought of; and if a private adventurer undertakes them, he is discouraged. Chance however has done something. The Sydney-cove, a large ship from Bengal to this place, was wrecked on this coast in lat. 41. 47.⁴⁰ The mate and others left the wreck in the long boat

³⁹ Philip Gidley King (1758-1808) served as governor of Norfolk Island between 1791 and 1796.

⁴⁰ In February 1797, the *Sydney Cove* was wrecked on Preservation Island, between the Australian mainland and Tasmania.

Letters of Thomas Fyshe Palmer from Botany Bay

unfortunately in the tempestuous winter season, and this was again wrecked on the coast. But the supercargo and two others, after innumerable hardships, arrived safe.⁴¹ By this means we learn, that where the Sydney-cove was wrecked, there is an archipelago of islands, with a strong tide and current from east to west, and *vice versa*; from which a rational conjecture may be formed that there is a passage quite through the island. Should this conjecture be true, and this passage should be navigable, the passage to India would be very considerably shortened. The country is described as totally different from this, very rich and fertile, abounding in pines and firs, of which there is not one here. In all the intercourse of whites with the uncorrupted natives of this country, they have found them most kind, humane, and generous. Where the mate and supercargo were wrecked, no civilized Europeans could exceed them in kindness. They supplied them in abundance, and successive parties of fresh natives, equally kind, shewed them the way. The mate, represented to be an amiable man, walked till he could walk no longer. Unfortunately, the carpenter staid to keep him company, and the rest proceeded and arrived safe. The carpenter churlish and avaricious, and without sense or foresight, seized their fish, would give them nothing in return and offended them so much, that the first mate, whom they were fond of, fell a victim to his folly, and they both perished. My most worthy friend Mr. Bass,⁴² surgeon of the *Reliance*, went out on purpose to find these two. He found only their bones. He was accompanied by the most scientific people in the language, though by none more than himself; and natives of his acquaintance told him the above. He returned only yesterday. He confirms the above account of the country. He says there are several species of trees not found here. But, what is more important, he has discovered a seam of coal, seven miles long, great part of which, by the inequality of the ground, is above ground. He has brought home three bags, it burns capitally, some

⁴¹ The men walked from somewhere near 90 Mile Beach on the Victorian coast to Port Jackson in New South Wales, travelling through the Ulladulla district.

⁴² George Bass (1763-1803?), explorer, arrived in Australia in September 1795.

Michael T Davis

of which the governor sends by this ship (the *Britannia*, Capt. Dennet) to Sir Joseph Banks.⁴³ The coal is not distant twenty yards from the sea, and about 45 miles distant, by sea, from hence.

We are told by people who have been there, that in the tropical regions of this country all kind of tropical productions abound. A little beyond port Stephens,⁴⁴ about a degree and half north of this, the country and its productions change. There is a sort of apple of a deep red, both within and without, with four pips. It grows to the height of 80 feet, without branches. The fruit is represented as large and luscious, and highly nutritious. The country producing more, the natives are larger and more numerous than here.⁴⁵ Seven convicts lived five years among them. I have repeatedly conversed with them. They were received and supported with singular kindness and hospitality. If these people are to be believed, they took the whites to be the ghosts of their departed friends, whom death had made white. They inquired very particularly after their fathers, mothers, and all their relatives, and how they employed themselves. I believe this account, because when Capt. Broughton,⁴⁶ of the *Providence* sloop of war, took these convicts away, the natives brought two dead young men on board, begging Capt. Broughton to bring them back again in a year or two.

Two or three natives of my acquaintance have begun to cultivate the ground, and, with a little attention on the part of government, they might soon be civilized. Ellis and I staid with them a week, and we promised to return to hoe up the ground and plant it for them. But I am now too infirm. They are quick, ingenious, vivacious and happy, read countenances and characters with singular penetration, and take them off with great humour.

It is singular that no dialect, or rather language, reaches above forty miles extent, some not half so far, so that a native of one

⁴³ Joseph Banks (1743-1820), naturalist and botanist.

⁴⁴ Port Stephens is located approximately 50km north of Newcastle and approximately 220km north of Sydney.

⁴⁵ The local Aborigines of Port Stephens were known as the Worimi tribe and at the time of European settlement they numbered around 400.

⁴⁶ Captain W R Broughton on board the *Providence* was forced by bad weather to take shelter at Port Stephens in 1795.

Letters of Thomas Fyshe Palmer from Botany Bay

district is totally unintelligible to another. They are as free as the air they breathe, and pay respect only to bravery and talents. They have no chief or priests. They have a discipline by which every member of the commonwealth is coerced into good order. For slight offences so many spears are thrown at the offender, which he may ward off, if he can, with his shield. For great offences these spears must not only be thrown, but broken. If the offender is wounded, and justice be satisfied, nothing can equal their care and kindness to the wounded person.

If I should not have time, being taken by surprise by the ship sailing, will you tell our common friend, Mr. Rutt,⁴⁷ that, with no little difficulty, I obtained a large deal box, which came in the Ganges, directed for Messrs. Muir, &c. It contained some brown paper parcels from you and Mr. Rutt, some newspapers, and a large deal box and some letters directed to Mr. Muir, and two counterpanes. Mr. Muir's letters and box, indeed the whole contents, I opened before the governor. The last mentioned deal box contained private property from Mr. Muir's father;⁴⁸ this was given to the provost-marshal to be sold for the benefit of his creditors. The letters I opened before the governor, and, by his permission, burnt. The only property from the committee, the two counterpanes, I kept.

I have been so often defrauded of boxes and parcels, that unless they are booked in the log-book, or mate's book, they may be reckoned as lost. Between the rogues on ship-board, and on shore, a convict is sure not to get them, because he has no redress. Excepting books, I beg nothing more may be sent me. There are some modern publications, which I will not mention because expensive; but such smaller books or pamphlets which my friends

⁴⁷ John Towill Rutt (1760-1841), politician and reform enthusiast. A Unitarian and future editor of Joseph Priestley's works.

⁴⁸ James Muir (c.1730-1803) was a hop merchant and grocer who became the owner of a small property at Huntershill, Glasgow.

Michael T Davis

have done with, I will thank them for. I shall write to my nephew⁴⁹ for the publications I allude to.

DOCUMENT 4.

Palmer to John Towill Rutt,⁵⁰ 10 September 1799:⁵¹

I have the pleasure to receive a letter from you, dated September 28, 1798, by the *Hillsborough*. On the receipt of it, I applied for permission to take Joseph Larkin⁵² to my house: but no such person could be found, nor has there been such a person embarked. It is most fortunate for him that he did not come in this murderous ship.⁵³ Of two hundred and sixty convicts put on board, ninety-seven died before they reached the harbour, and ten since. They were whipped, confined in pestilential air and starved. The Captain, H-----,⁵⁴ would not allow them a swab to clean out their place. I saw their filth. In consequence, the jail fever made its appearance. Eight died in one night at the Cape. It is painful to relate the barbarity, the tyranny, the murderous starvation of this wretch. This is the fourth who has exercised these atrocities while H-----⁵⁵ has been governor, and no inquiry made!!!

⁴⁹ Charles Fyshe Palmer (c. 1770-1843) was the son of Thomas Fyshe Palmer's brother, Charles. He entered parliament as the member for Reading from 1818-34 and 1837-41.

⁵⁰ See note 47 above.

⁵¹ Source: *The Monthly Repository*, 12 (1817), 266-67.

⁵² John Towill Rutt inserted the following editorial note: 'A young man who had been capitally convicted at Lancaster, on a charge of forgery. On account of some favourable circumstances in his case, his punishment had been commuted to transportation for life. Mr. Girle, who is mentioned in the Obituary (VIII. 280), and who then resided at Lancaster, took a very benevolent interest in the fate of Joseph Larkin; and at his desire, I had recommended the young man to Mr. Palmer's attention. If my memory serves me, Dr. Barnes, of Manchester, also interested himself on the same occasion'.

⁵³ The *Hillsborough* recorded the highest death rate of the convict ships to Australia – 95 of the 300 convicts died from typhoid.

⁵⁴ William Hingston, master of the *Hillsborough*.

⁵⁵ A reference to John Hunter. See note 35 above.

Letters of Thomas Fyshe Palmer from Botany Bay

I was very much pleased with Wakefield's pamphlet.⁵⁶ I sent a servant with it to a friend some miles distant, who unfortunately was robbed of it because it was tied in a silk handkerchief. I must beg you therefore to send me another, and Llandaff's also.⁵⁷

Mr. and Mrs. Boston and two children, Ellis and myself have always lived together since we have been on the Island. We have engaged in many schemes to make a living. Among the rest, brewing and farming, and what every officer civil and military does here, buying goods on board a ship and selling them on shore. We built a vessel at considerable expence to trade between this place and Norfolk Island, and a very beneficial trade it was. But the Governor of Norfolk Island for the time being (Captain T-----),⁵⁸ being a great trader himself, found that it interfered with his profits, and raised the strongest clamours against the enormous price we sold at. We sold liquor at 23s. per gallon, and he at that very time sold it at five pounds. At last he would not suffer us to land it at all, notwithstanding we had Governor Hunter's permit. We suppose the crew on this rose and seized the spirits, for we never more heard of captain or ship. It would have made our fortune soon. I am ashamed to say how much we lost. We were not disheartened. We set to and built another at a great expence, loaded her with a cargo that would make good returns, and sent her to Norfolk again. We had previously made a good quantity of salt to cure the cheap pork of Norfolk Island, and to put it into the stores here where it is so much wanted. This has been gone now five months. The gales have been dreadful, and we have every reason to fear that she is lost likewise: so that we have nearly the world to begin again.

⁵⁶ It is not clear which pamphlet by Gilbert Wakefield is here being referred to. It is possibly *A Letter to W. Wilberforce, Esq. on the subject of his late publication* (London, 1797).

⁵⁷ It is not clear which pamphlet by Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, Palmer is referring to. It is possibly *An apology for the Bible, in a series of letters, addressed to Thomas Paine, author of a book entitled, The Age of Reason* (London, 1796).

⁵⁸ John Townson (1760-1835) succeeded Philip Gidley King as commandant of Norfolk Island in 1796.

Michael T Davis

As there is little chance of my being able to draw any thing out of the company's stock to enable me to get home, I must take another method.

I find that the cerated glass of antimony with ipecacuanha, will cure the most inveterate fluxes of this country in a day or two. So little attention is paid to the sick, that I am obliged to doctor some, though I know that I do it with a rope about my neck. I would not change my residence for a week without these medicines, so very subject I am to this disorder. I know that I should long have been dead but for them. I give seven or tens grains of cerated antimony and alternately small doses of ipecacuanha. Oh had I known of this remedy at Spithead, what lengthened misery and wear and tear of constitution I should have escaped. Possibly Gerald and Skirving might now have been alive! Pray tell this to Dr. Hamilton and Blake.

I wish Mr. Holcroft would send me the remaining volumes of Hugh Trevor.⁵⁹ I was delighted with the three first. I think the first volume as good as any I ever read. The infancy of Hugh is inimitable. It is odd that I never saw but one person in this country who could perceive the tendency of the work, though it is so very conspicuous. I have never seen a Review since 1796, nor an Annual Review since 1793, and only four numbers of that excellent work the London [Monthly] Magazine. I cannot speak enough in praise of the C----- I-----.⁶⁰ Tell Mr. F-----⁶¹ to be careful. I am going to fit up a room for the worthy editor, well knowing he will come out here. If I deserve to be sent to Botany Bay, he ought to be sent to the Georgium Sidus.⁶²

The following is the price of articles at present. Rum 20s. a quart; tea 5s. an ounce; bread 4d. a pound; butter 4s.; mutton 2s.;

⁵⁹ Thomas Holcroft, *The adventures of Hugh Trevor* (6 vols., London, 1794-97).

⁶⁰ This is a reference to *The Cambridge Intelligencer* published by Benjamin Flower between July 1793 and June 1803.

⁶¹ Benjamin Flower (1755-1829), editor of *The Cambridge Intelligencer*.

⁶² Georgium Sidus was the name originally given to the planet Uranus. In 1781, Frederick William Herschel (1738-1822) of Bath discovered the planet and named it after King George who appointed him as royal astronomer.

Letters of Thomas Fyshe Palmer from Botany Bay

pork 1s. 3d.; wheat 10s. a bushel; wine 10s. a bottle; shoes from 20s. to 25s. a pair. That you see it is absolutely necessary to do something for a livelihood. I forgot to tell you that we have nearly built a windmill, which we are in great hopes will turn to good account.

Recommend me to those worthy friends, the very mention of whom in your letter I could not help being affected with, viz. Hamilton, Gurney,⁶³ Lindsey,⁶⁴ Dyer,⁶⁵ Vaughan,⁶⁶ Friend,⁶⁷ Tooke,⁶⁸ Disney,⁶⁹ Blake, and all who are pleased to interest themselves about me.

Farewell, dear Sir, with my best respects to Mrs. Rutt.

⁶³ Joseph Gurney, shorthand writer.

⁶⁴ Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808), founder and Unitarian minister of Essex Street Chapel, London.

⁶⁵ George Dyer (1755-1841), reformer and poet.

⁶⁶ Felix Vaughan, barrister and member of the London Corresponding Society.

⁶⁷ William Friend (1757-1841), Unitarian reformer.

⁶⁸ John Horne Tooke (1736-1812), reformer and member of the Society for Constitutional Information.

⁶⁹ John Disney. See note 23 above.

Jenny Graham, *The Nation, the Law and the King. Reform Politics in England, 1789-1799*, Lanham, Maryland and Oxford, University Press of America, 2000, 2 vols., xix + 1093pp + 168 plates; \$115, £51.14, pb. ISBN 0-7618-1484-1.

This weighty pair of volumes offers ample testimony to a continuing fascination with the crisis of the 1790s among British historians, in which they are joined by John Barrell's splendid and almost equally lengthy *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide 1793-1796* (OUP, 2000). Longman's publication of two shorter textbooks on the subject this year, by Jennifer Mori (*Britain in the Age of the French Revolution*) and Clive Emsley (*Britain and the French Revolution*) indicate that it also continues to be a popular subject among students. Jenny Graham's book is a marvellous resource for teachers as well as for researchers. It provides a painstakingly detailed account of the progress of the radical movement in Britain in this decade; it is supplied with extensive notes and a detailed index; and it is a treasury of useful primary source material, with frequent long quotations, seven appendices printing radical addresses and other writings, and 168 prints interspersed with the text, which constitute a gallery of honour of portraits of prominent radicals and reformers as well as a selection of prints by leading graphic satirists.

Dr Graham has not, of course, merely set out to produce a useful resource for others to employ. Her two volumes press a very clear argument which engages firmly with the work of the leading scholars in the field over the past several decades. In essence, her argument constitutes a defence of the English radical movement in the 1790s against various explanations for their failure which rest in some form on their own weakness. Thus, she argues that while many members of radical societies were men of relatively humble origins, educated, middle-class leadership and support for the movement were more substantial throughout the decade than is usually recognized. Indeed, middle-class leadership was what concerned the governing elite most about the radical movement. It is true, Dr Graham concedes, that the overt support of many middle-class reformers was lost during the period between late 1792 and 1795, after the increasing violence of events in France

The Nation, the Law and the King

and the popularity of Paine's *Rights of Man* had disillusioned many reformers. Thereafter, however, open middle-class support returned for the radical cause, provoked by the extremity of the government's reaction to radicalism.

Furthermore, according to Dr Graham, the radical movement endured government repression more solidly than is usually allowed by historians. Radicals remained active throughout the decade, including many middle-class men such as Joseph Gales of Sheffield, Thomas Walker of Rotherham and John Horne Tooke of London. Dr Graham also argues that the support of the parliamentary Foxite opposition for the radical movement was much more substantial than has previously been shown, citing, for instance, various 'quasi-insurrectionary' speeches made by them outside Parliament (p.859), the timing of some of their speeches and motions inside Parliament to coincide with radical activities out-of-doors, and their friendships with Irish revolutionaries such as Fitzgerald and O'Connor. Finally, she argues that the radical programme was more coherently revolutionary and republican than is often recognized: it was not only a 'revolutionary fringe' who thought in terms of insurrection. This was a movement which was both 'republican and international in outlook, and whose leading thinkers allowed for its probability, and, indeed, ultimate necessity' (pp.876-7). The radical movement was not, therefore, defeated by its own lack of commitment or eloquence, for it was as well-educated and as skilfully led as the loyalist movement, and a substantial core of its membership was resilient and convinced of its demands. Rather, it was routed in the end by government determination.

This is not so much a wholly new interpretation as a revision which takes issue with various emphases which have attracted recent support among many historians of the period, since Dr Graham's arguments align her with earlier work by E.P. Thompson and Roger Wells.¹ The outworking of her thesis buttresses this position in new ways and offers a fuller picture of the progress of

¹ E P Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class, 1780-1832* (Harmondsworth, 1968); Roger Wells, *Insurrection: The British Experience, 1795-1803* (Gloucester, 1983).

Emma Vincent Macleod

radicalism than we have yet had. She charts many more peaks and troughs than are commonly identified, exposing a more constant activity throughout the decade than has usually been represented. In this respect, her work is especially useful on the post-1795 period. Historians have often neglected the efforts of mainstream radicals in this period, implying that they were largely repressed except for an extremist minority. Dr Graham's argument for continuities between the mainstream radical movement and the insurrectionary activities of the later 1790s, and between the enthusiastic radicals of the 1790s and the more gradualist radicals of the 1800s, is also helpful. (She does not list Peter Spence's *The Birth of Romantic Radicalism* in the bibliography, but his thesis fits hers well at this point).² Her engagement with the views and activities of the Foxite Whigs is another important element, and she is rightly critical of historians who have ignored the impact of their more extreme speeches on politicians outside Parliament.

The provincial dimension of the book is also attractive. Graham has conducted a detailed investigation of reformism and radicalism in its other main English centres than London, especially in Norwich, Manchester, Sheffield, Birmingham, Liverpool and Derby, and she adds details from various other towns, such as Nottingham, Bath, Cambridge, Newcastle and Bristol. This adds fullness to her account and strength to her arguments, although there is less provincial detail for the later part of the decade, perhaps unsurprisingly. It is also perhaps a pity that she chose not to include Scotland in her survey. She does cite some Scottish evidence, but there is more which would have supported her case and, in such a major survey (entitled *The Nation ...*), it seems a pity to exclude the results of recent work on Scottish radicalism.³

² Peter Spence, *The Birth of Romantic Radicalism: War, Popular Politics and English Radical Reformism 1800-1815* (Aldershot, 1996).

³ See especially John D Brims, 'The Scottish Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of Edinburgh, 1983); but see also idem, 'From reformers to Jacobins: the Scottish Association of the Friends of the People', in T M Devine ed. *Conflict and Stability in Scottish Society, 1700-1850*, (Edinburgh, 1990), 31-50; idem, 'The Scottish "Jacobins", Scottish Nationalism and the British Union', in *Scotland and England, 1286-1815*, ed. R A Mason

The Nation, the Law and the King

Graham recognizes the strength of the Dissenting community to the radical movement throughout the country, and emphasizes many of the individuals and networks involved to good effect. Indeed, her evidence for middle-class influence in general on the movement is compelling, if not always such a novel argument as she suggests. (She herself acknowledges, for instance, that this has been emphasized by H T Dickinson.⁴) Her insistence on the neglected importance of Maurice Margarot to the London Corresponding Society, alongside that of the artisan Thomas Hardy, who has proved more attractive to historians, is a persuasive example.

Graham's arguments are, of course, provocative. The first difficulty for this reviewer is that the book risks the problem of the biographer who comes to sympathise too fully with his or her subject. Looking at the radical movement through its own lens has been clearly beneficial in this case, in that it has allowed Graham to demonstrate support and continuity of activity that is often neglected or downplayed elsewhere. However, it has also prevented a realistic assessment of why the radicals failed in the 1790s. Graham is surely right to argue that government repression deterred many radicals. The relentless attack of the government with the battery of legislation passed between the Traitorous Correspondence Act of 1793 and the second Combination Act of 1800 (even if this legislation was often temporary and rarely used), the imprisonment of leading radicals for lengthy periods under the suspension of habeas corpus in 1794-5 and 1798-1801, the surveillance of radical activities, and the sedition and treason trials in 1793-4 clearly weakened the radical movement considerably. But ministers did not possess unlimited force with which to compel

(Edinburgh, 1987), 247-265; idem, 'Scottish Radicalism and the United Irishmen', in D Dickson, D Keogh and K Whelan eds., *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion*, (Dublin, 1993); and idem, 'The Covenanting Tradition and Scottish Radicalism in the 1790s', in T Brotherstone ed., *Covenant, Charter and Party. Traditions of revolt and protest in modern Scottish history*, (Aberdeen, 1989), 50-62. See also E W Macfarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution: Planting the Green Bough* (Edinburgh, 1994).

⁴ See, for instance, H T Dickinson, *British Radicalism and the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1985), 9-13.

Emma Vincent Macleod

obedience from the British population. Regular troops, militia men and Volunteers were all used to suppress disturbances, but they were finite in number, militia and Volunteer regiments could only be employed in restricted geographical areas, and the Volunteers were not always reliably submissive to orders. In any case, overuse of military force against British subjects was traditionally avoided as a form of tyranny. The eighteenth-century British state could not by itself have defeated radicalism, had that cause persuaded a sufficient proportion of the population. In this surely lies the heart of the radicals' problem. The government had to rely on the active support of part of the population and at least the acquiescence of the rest. It cannot be enough to argue that the radicals presented a real danger to the stability of the British state which was only met by severe repression of government measures. Ministers had to depend on popular assistance. Graham does acknowledge the impact of loyalism to some extent, particularly examining the Association movement in late 1792, but she stresses government complicity, at the expense of persuaded, individual loyalism. Not all, or even most, loyalist writers and activists were paid by the Treasury. It is important to recognize the intellectual power of conservative ideas and the attraction of loyalty, and not to imply that people could only have been conservative by compulsion and not by conviction.

Moreover, to acknowledge the significance of loyalism is only part of the picture. It is surely the uncommitted state of the mass of the population which presented the radicals with their biggest problem apart from the failure of the French to invade. The radicals never mustered either middle-class or lower order support *en masse* more than temporarily or occasionally. They attracted few rural labourers and domestic servants, and public opinion as a whole was incorrigibly volatile for most of the decade. Support for the government was loud when victories against France were announced; public hostility was clear when the war was going badly and harvests were poor. It seems to me that convinced opinion and committed activism, whether loyalist or radical, accounted for only a minority of the population. They may be pictured as the two ends of a spectrum along which public opinion in general moved back and forth according to national and private

The Nation, the Law and the King

circumstances.⁵ If the loyalists ‘won’ and the radicals ‘lost’ in the 1790s, that was certainly partly because the government was behind the loyalists; but it was also, in an age without a police force, because the mass of the population did not choose to swing behind the radicals any more than temporarily at the very most. The roles of apathy and a lack of political awareness should also not be underestimated, and perhaps some of the radicals’ own statements of wide support for their cause ought to have been treated with a little more caution.

Dr Graham’s treatment of the Foxite Whigs as broadly supportive of the radicals is also problematic, largely because they themselves were not always consistent. It is impossible to dismiss the weight of evidence that she builds up of their dabbling in popular politics and dallying with provincial radicals, both from within the Whiggish Association of the Friends of the People and as individuals, and this is an important addition to our understanding of this group of politicians. But the evidence of their more conservative tendencies also needs to be taken into proper account. In fact they clung to the middle ground in the debate against the alarmism of the Portlandites on the one hand and the entreaties of the radicals on the other. It is difficult to prove that the radical movement was solidly republican and revolutionary, but it is impossible to demonstrate that the Foxites supported such a programme. Fox may have toasted ‘the sovereignty of the people’ when government repression was at its height and when he desperately wanted a show of public hostility to the government, but he never explicitly supported universal manhood suffrage. Most Foxites were more interested in establishing a recognized party of opposition which would be an effective counter-weight to ministers within Parliament than they were in politically empowering ordinary people outside it. William Adam, the Foxite ‘manager’, opposed even the reform of the notoriously corrupt Scottish burgh council electoral system.

In any case, the radicals failed, despite their middle-class leadership and finance, their provincial supporters, the inconsistent

⁵ Cf. E V Macleod, *A War of Ideas: British Attitudes to the Wars against Revolutionary France, 1792-1802* (Aldershot, 1998), chapter 8.

Emma Vincent Macleod

assistance of the Foxites, and their feat of endurance through the tribulations of the 1790s. Jenny Graham has endeavoured here to reopen the debate over the reasons for the failure of the movement, and it will be interesting to see whether or not she succeeds.

Emma Vincent Macleod
University of Stirling

EDITING MARY SHELLEY

Michael Rossington

Mary Shelley's *Literary Lives and Other Writings*. 4 vols. General Editor Nora Crook. Volume 1, *Italian Lives* edited by Tilar J. Mazzeo, with a General Introduction by Nora Crook. Volume 2, *Spanish and Portuguese Lives* edited by Lisa Vargo and *French Lives (Montaigne to Rochefoucauld)* edited by Clarissa Campbell Orr. Volume 3, *French Lives (Molière to Madame de Staël)* edited by Clarissa Campbell Orr. Volume 4, *'Life of William Godwin'* edited by Pamela Clemit (with the assistance of A A Markley). **Poems, Uncollected Prose, Translations, Part-Authored and Attributed Writings edited by A A Markley. 'The Pickering Masters', London: Pickering & Chatto, 2002. 4 volume set: 1912pp; 978 1 85196 716 2, £350.00 / \$595.00.**

In her Introduction to this edition, the general editor Nora Crook, summarizes its scope as gathering 'material remaining either (a) previously unpublished or part-published (b) unrepublished since the first nineteenth-century editions (c) published during the twentieth century but uncollected' (I, xiii). Together with its eight-volume companion, the *Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley* (1996), Pickering & Chatto have thus ensured that through these four volumes Mary Shelley's writings are now published to very high scholarly standards in well-produced and thoroughly annotated modern editions. These two 'Pickering Masters' multi-volume sets follow the *Collected Tales and Stories* edited by Charles E Robinson and published by Johns Hopkins University Press in 1976, the two-volume *Journals* edited by Paula R Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert and published by Oxford University Press in 1987, and the three-volume *Letters* edited by Betty T Bennett and published by Johns Hopkins University Press between 1980 and 1988. The standard of editorial work achieved by Nora Crook and her fellow editors in *Mary Shelley's Literary Lives and Other Writings* work is consistently and outstandingly high. In fact the scrupulousness of the textual scholarship and the thoroughness of the approach to such vexed issues as attribution and part-authorship is so formidably impressive that all editors of early nineteenth-century literary writings will learn from the methods and techniques

Michael Rossington

of Crook and her fellow editors and the clarity with which they are expositied. Thanks to their research, the canon of Mary Shelley's *œuvre* may now to a very great extent be defined and its coherence understood in a way that was simply not possible even ten years ago.

The title of this edition characterises its dominant theme: a writer's life. The first three volumes include Mary Shelley's biographies of Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and French writers from the medieval period to the early nineteenth century published between 1835 and 1839 in Dionysius Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclopædia*. In her Introduction, Crook cites Mary Shelley's positive self-assessment of her skills as a biographer in a letter of 1843 responding to an inquiry by the publisher Edward Moxon about her future writing plans: 'I should prefer quieter work, to be gathered from other works, – such as my lives for the Cyclopaedia – & which I think I do much better than romancing' (I, xxi). The original research Crook and the other editors have undertaken into surviving records in the Longman archives yields significant insights into Lardner's editorial methods, from how much he paid his contributors to the print-runs of the literary lives series within the *Cabinet Cyclopædia* and its reception history. Such detailed attention to Mary Shelley's involvement in this publication venture will be of interest not only to students of her works but to those engaged in the history of encyclopaedic knowledge in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and of writing by women between the 1810s and the 1840s, especially the way their literary livelihoods and careers were shaped by the demands of the market. Crook's Introduction is especially helpful too in enabling the reader to understand the relationship between the intended audience of Lardner's encyclopaedia and the working method Mary Shelley adopted in the essays she wrote for *Lives* which are not, in many cases, based on original research: 'Her referencing is sketchy and inconsistent, rather like P B Shelley's; it would not pass muster in an undergraduate essay today. But of course she was writing no such thing. She was writing amusing and instructive works for the general reader' (I, xxix). The policy of this edition is such that some of the Italian biographies not by her are omitted while others including the life of the Spanish poet 'Ercilla' and 'Rabelais' and

Editing Mary Shelley

'La Fontaine' which are 'identified from the Lardner ledgers and from internal evidence as not by her' are included because '[t]hey furnish a contrast to genuine items and *may* possibly contain some light editorial retouching by her' (I, xxxv). Such omissions and inclusions are in each case explained fully and persuasively.

In the introductions to their editions of Mary Shelley's Italian, Spanish and Portuguese and French *Lives* Tilar J Mazzeo, Lisa Vargo and Clarissa Campbell Orr detail their composition history, publication, contemporary reception, context and significance. A particularly useful feature of each of the first three volumes are the brief introductory notes on individual lives, illuminating Mary Shelley's sources and the extent of her indebtedness to them and, where appropriate, the originality of her approach. The annotation of the Italian *Lives* by Tilar Mazzeo is richly sensitive to the ways in which Mary Shelley draws directly on her experience of having lived in Italy, as when the account of Boccaccio's visit to the tomb of Virgil at Pausilippo near Naples shifts into an authoritative present tense: 'The exceeding beauty of this scene fills every gazer with delight' (I, 54). Another example is her clearly heartfelt comment in the context of Alfieri's conduct of his relationship with the countess of Albany that 'The gossip of the small Italian towns is unconceivably eager and pertinacious' (I, 286). Equally authenticated by her firsthand experience is the description of Foscolo's retreat on Lake Como, the Villa Pliniana, amongst the first places in Italy the Shelleys visited in April 1818. It was here that Foscolo had sought refuge after his expulsion from the University of Pavia for refusing to praise Napoleon in his introductory lecture: 'perhaps, in all the varied earth there is no spot which affords such a combination of the picturesque, the beautiful, the rich, the balmy, and the sublime' (I, 348). Indeed the Italian *Lives* continually reflect on liberty from the medieval period to the time of their composition (1833-5) often negotiating tensions in a writer's sense of how best to uphold the *patria*. Thus Boccaccio's 'pain and indignation' at Petrarch accepting the patronage of the Visconti family of Milan is recounted sympathetically even as it is claimed that 'Petrarch was a patriot in an elevated sense of the word' (I, 64, 65). Her interest in the 'enigmatic' question of Machiavelli's patriotic aims in *The Prince* results in the conclusion that, 'it is related of him, that,

Michael Rossington

being reproved for the maxims of his “Prince,” he replied – “If I taught princes how to tyrannise, I also taught the people how to destroy them.” He probably develops in these words, the secret of his writings. He was willing to *teach* both parties, but his heart was with the republicans’ (I, 150, 156). This view of *The Prince* sounds not unlike her husband’s assessment of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* in *A Defence of Poetry* (1821): ‘Milton’s poem contains within itself a philosophical refutation of that system of which, by a strange but natural antithesis, it has been a chief popular support.’ Mazzeo is right that ‘her lives of the contemporary Italian poets – Alfieri, Monti and Foscolo – are unquestionably the most personal and most inspired of the two volumes’ (I, xliii). Alfieri’s grappling to unlearn French and replace it with Tuscan, ‘clearing away the rubbish of another language, and placing the foundation stones of a pure and classic Italian’, constitutes part of an authoritative view of the language question evident also in the life of Monti where Mary Shelley asserts that ‘the grammar of all the Tuscans is pure, and that you may form your speech on that of the peasantry and servants, without running any risk of falling into errors and vulgarisms’ (I, 275, 319). Finally Monti’s depiction of Napoleon as Prometheus in his poem ‘Prometeo’ is censured – ‘There is something in the applause heaped on the conqueror that jars with our notions of real independence and patriotism’ – while Foscolo, whose sentimental novel of suicide *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* (1802) is condemned as being of pernicious influence ‘at the time when it was written’, is nevertheless respected as being ‘earnest to prove that death was not the worst of evils, but that it might be sought voluntarily as a refuge from slavery or woe’ (I, 307, 340).

Lisa Vargo comments that Cervantes ‘is identified [by Mary Shelley] with anyone who remained true to the cause of reform, be it her father, P B Shelley, or even herself’ (II, xxxi). Vargo’s editions of the *Lives* of Cervantes and Calderón add significantly to recent and important work on the significance of Spain in the Shelley Circle by Jeanne Moskal.¹ Mary Shelley’s description of

¹ Jeanne Moskal, “‘To speak in Sanchean phrase’: Cervantes and the Politics of Mary Shelley’s *History of a Six Weeks’ Tour*”, in *Mary Shelley in Her Times*, ed. Betty T Bennett and Stuart Curran (Baltimore, 2000),

Editing Mary Shelley

the trying circumstances in which Cervantes's greatest work was composed echoes, as Moskal and Vargo note, her portrayal of Godwin in her uncompleted 'Life' of him: 'when we compare all these sad depressing circumstances with the very outset of "Don Quixote," we feel that there must have been something divine in the spirit of this man, which could place a soul within the ribs of death, and vivify darkness and suffering with so animated a creation' (II, 144). Equally strongly marked by personal conviction is the contrast between the worth of Rousseau's *Emile* and its author's fate on its publication: '[i]t fills the soul with bitterness to think that this admirable work, whence generations of men derive wisdom and happiness, was the origin of violent persecution against the author' (III, 349). Clarissa Campbell Orr's editions of the lives of Madame Roland and Madame de Staël are particularly successful in pointing to the combination of reverence they display towards women who take on political tyrants or the agents of tyranny with judicious yet tactful criticisms of aspects of their behaviour and personalities. Such divisions as those in the case of de Staël between her 'weaknesses' and 'errors' on the one hand, and 'her virtues and genius' (III, 494) on the other, constitute the dramatic tension on which many of the lives so compellingly depend.

The 'Life of William Godwin' is a 'fragmentary manuscript draft' of Mary Shelley's uncompleted narrative commentary which was to have formed the backbone of a two-volume edition of Godwin's memoirs and correspondence to be published after his death 'for the benefit of his widow, Mary Jane Godwin' (IV, xiii). The persuasive argument of this edition is that 'the "Life" was not left as an assembly of incoherent fragments; even as a draft a structure can be seen' (I, xxxiii). This, the most complex of text editing enterprises, is undertaken with impressive success by Pamela Clemit. Her annotation provides necessarily full commentary on the manuscript evidence and the detailed annotation required to make sense of biographical and historical allusions. Mary Shelley's commentary on her father's life and writings is critical not adulatory. What she calls 'his faults as a teacher' are painfully

Michael Rossington

evident in the notes Godwin kept of his education of Thomas Cooper in 1789-1790, as exacting towards himself as his pupil: 'He is too apprehensive of error, particularly geometrical error; i.e. the consequences have been made too painful to him' (IV, 37). Equally she writes with sympathetic detachment of Godwin's political radicalism in the early 1790s. Following his letter to Sheridan of 1791 which ends 'Give to a state but liberty enough, & it is impossible that vice should exist in it', she remarks: 'This sweeping & somewhat astounding assertion proves the excess of Godwin[']s enthusiasm on the subject of political liberty' (IV, 48). Here, as in many instances in the *Lives*, she is, in Godwinian fashion, both judgemental and willing to contextualize such 'excesses'. Another example is her explanation of Godwin's vindication of Robespierre: 'he was willing to afford every excuse to the popular leaders, & to regard as long as he could the enormities committed in the name of freedom, as necessary to the extermination of slavery' (IV, 70). Moreover her anatomizing in the 'Life' of Godwin's doctrinaire faith in reason – 'the needle & the north in one' (IV, 60) – is comparable with aspects of her treatment of Voltaire and Condorcet in *Lives*. Indeed her assessment of the latter may be read as a judgement upon Godwin: 'he wished all to be enlightened as to their duties, and all to tend equally to the improvement of their intellectual and moral nature. These theories, if they be mistaken, emanate from benevolent and just feelings.' (III, 375) Her defence of aspects of Christianity and hostility to atheism make her stand apart from certain characteristics of Enlightenment thought at times professed by Godwin, as is evident in her 'Voltaire': 'Let Christians be real disciples of the Gospel, and men like Voltaire will neither have the power nor the will to injure the religion they profess' (III, 318).

Volume 4 also contains valuable editions by A A Markley of, amongst other works, a brief 'Life of Shelley', Mary Shelley's poems, *Maurice, or The Fisher's Cot* (the short story she wrote for the daughter of Lady Mount Cashell and George Tighe in 1820 which was rediscovered in 1997 and is here edited authoritatively),

Editing Mary Shelley

as well as translations, including that of the spurious *Correspondance de Louis XVI* (edited by Helen-Maria Williams and published in 1803) here established as having been done during the Geneva summer of 1816. As Crook comments in her Introduction, much of Mary Shelley's activity as a translator is to be seen as 'embedded in her reviews and the *Literary Lives*' and 'testifies to her membership of a *corps d'élite* of women, born 1790-1820, who trained themselves to be writers – whether for glory, pin-money or a living – through the systematic acquisition of languages ancient and modern' (I, xv). In this way this edition takes its place alongside other recent pioneering research into translation by women in England in the early nineteenth century such as that of Susanne Stark on Sarah Austin and others.² The German dimension is pertinent to an essay supplementary to *Mary Shelley's Literary Lives* published by Crook in which she affirms that *Cecil*, reproduced in Volume 4 and hitherto thought to have been 'an unfinished original composition', is in fact Mary Shelley's 'English version of the opening of a once-admired novel, *Cecil* (1843), by Ida, Gräfin von Hahn-Hahn (1805-80)'. Amongst many aspects of this discovery's interest is that by the mid-1840s Mary Shelley 'seems to have attained, or perhaps even surpassed, the stage of German that Percy Shelley had reached in 1822, when he made his translations of scenes from *Faust*.'³

The greatest achievement of this exemplary edition is the clarity and authority with which it sets out Mary Shelley's contribution to intellectual history. Towards the beginning of her life of Alfieri, she talks of the state of Italy in the mid eighteenth century as one in which 'the women were uneducated and degraded, and though they preserved, as is often the case in a depraved state of society, a nature more generous, artless, and kindly than the other sex, yet these virtuous feelings found no scope for their development, except in the passion of love' (I, 254). Many of the values that underpin her writings are encapsulated in this statement. Moreover,

² Susanne Stark, "*Behind inverted commas*": translation and Anglo-German cultural relations in the nineteenth century (Clevedon, 1999).

³ Nora Crook, 'Germanizing in Chester Square: Mary Shelley, *Cecil*, and Ida von Hahn-Hahn', *Times Literary Supplement* (6 June 2003), 14.

Michael Rossington

Crook is surely right to assert of their timeliness that ‘we are more in need than ever of the large-minded, comparativist vision that she implicitly and indeed explicitly promotes.’ (I, xxx)

Michael Rossington,
Newcastle University

Reviews

Paula R Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia eds., *A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture*, Malden, MA; Oxford and Carlton, Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, pp.550, £99.99; \$162.95. ISBN 1-4051-0157-1.

An addition to Blackwell's extensive series of *Companions to Literature and Culture* (this is the thirtieth), this volume offers a fascinating view of the current state of scholarship on the eighteenth-century novel. The general rubric for the series (reprinted opposite the title page) asserts that its volumes orient 'the beginning student in new fields of study', while the dust jacket blurb, more ambiguously (and ambitiously) suggests that the *Companion* 'furnishes readers with ... a sophisticated vision of the eighteenth-century novel in its political, aesthetic, and moral contexts'. Certainly this does not strike me as an obvious book to recommend to students embarking on the study of the eighteenth-century novel for the first time. The claim that volumes in the series also provide the 'experienced undergraduate and new graduate with current and new directions' is somewhat more credible for this *Companion*, but of course publishers prefer their books to be all things to all people. A 'beginning student' of the eighteenth-century novel would be better off consulting the *Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (1996), edited by John Richetti and evidently written for students, rather than to Blackwell's *Companion*, in which the contributors generally (but not universally) adopt a level of style and approach more appropriate to a scholarly journal. I say not universally because there are a few chapters which feel more like surveys of recent scholarship aimed at students than contributions in their own right, particularly Elizabeth Bohls' chapter on travel writing and the eighteenth-century novel and to some extent Christopher Flint's chapter on the eighteenth-century novel and print culture. This is not to detract from either of these contributions, merely to suggest that they feel as if they were written to a somewhat different remit from most of the other chapters in the book.

Catherine Ingrassia's Introduction makes a rather more reliable guide to the volume's intentions than the publisher's fond wishes. While she does provide a potted history of studies in the

Reviews

eighteenth-century novel from Watt to William Warner, Ingrassia also draws attention to precisely those aspects of this collection that make it challenging rather than introductory: 'these essays', she asserts, 'demonstrate the inventive and liberating possibilities that emerge when we eschew such ultimately limiting habits of mind' as those demanded by 'the exigencies of the classroom, the monograph, and the scholarly article'. The volume 'does not seek to be a traditional collection of essays on the novel; it is not concerned with providing a tidy history, but rather with exploring the diverse and often unsettling contexts that inform the genre' (p.2). The three sections into which the volume is divided – 'Formative Influences', 'The World of the Eighteenth-Century Novel' and 'The Novel's Modern Legacy' – do not emerge as particularly firm categories and do not attempt, as Ingrassia points out, to provide the kind of comprehensive coverage (or, perhaps more truly, the illusion of it) aimed at in something like the *Cambridge Companion*, with its more dutiful chapters on the major canonical authors (which, with the exception of Burney, are of course all male). This self-confessed indifference to such coverage makes all the more interesting the emphases that emerge from the collection as a whole, presumably unintentionally. A relatively rapid survey of the novelists discussed shows immediately that the two authors who dominate the collection in simple terms of space devoted to their work are, first and foremost, Daniel Defoe and, an honourable second, Eliza Haywood. Following them (in roughly descending order) are Richardson, Fielding, Edgeworth, Behn, Austen, Goldsmith and Burney.

The pre-eminence of Defoe and Haywood in the volume as a whole makes particularly apposite Richetti's choice of *Roxana* and *Love in Excess* as the key texts for his chapter, 'An Emerging New Canon of the British Eighteenth-Century Novel: Feminist Criticism, the Means of Cultural Production, and the Question of Value' (pp. 365-382). Arguably the most provocative piece in the collection, in it Richetti tackles head-on a question that no other contributor to the *Companion* considers: the literary value of different eighteenth-century novels, intrinsically and in relation to each other. He challenges the 'current dominant critical understanding of fiction in early eighteenth-century England' that 'all

Reviews

narratives are simply part of the jostling for market share in the new world of expanding print media' with its resulting tendency to shun 'value judgments' and offer 'neutral cultural analysis in which the canonical few merge with all other available titles' (p.370). While not precisely saying that we have been wasting our time in resurrecting writers such as Haywood (or that he wasted his own time struggling through 'unreadable' novels to produce *Popular Fiction Before Richardson* in 1969), he does want to re-establish at least some of the judgments that condemned her and so many others to obscurity in the first place. The canonical male novelists of the period (the 'main line of eighteenth-century fiction') are justly raised above the rest because of their 'superior socio-cultural fullness and density, an engagement both explicit and implicit, with the ideas and issues of their historical moment' (p.370). To soften the blow, Richetti attributes this superiority to women's less equal access to 'the means of literary and cultural production' (p.366). Analyses of *Love in Excess* and *Roxana* follow, with the conclusion that there simply is 'more to say about *Roxana*; it is not a piece of formula fiction'. Finally Richetti suggests that *Love in Excess* can be viewed as a useful foil: 'Haywood's romance is valuable exactly for the contrast it provides with Defoe's work and the substantial originality that it alerts us to in *Roxana*' (p.380).

Backhanded as this compliment is, it does at least give feminist scholars a reason to continue reading Haywood (if not one that many of them have considered before). The soothing idea that only men's greater access to the means of literary and cultural production enabled them to produce such decisively superior literature founders, however, as it always did, on the rock of Jane Austen. Austen's access (not to mention that of the Brontes, to think of other women accorded canonical status) to such 'means' was more restricted than many women's, let alone men's. If Richetti is to assert the 'primacy' of Defoe, Fielding and Richardson over any of their contemporaries (all women included), he must do so without attempting to throw a sop to women for their (in his terms) failure to provide figures of major stature in the early history of the novel. In a volume which otherwise takes for granted the value and importance of reading non-canonical work, however, Richetti's essay is a welcome inclusion, provoking his readers to

Reviews

consider where they stand and re-igniting ‘the question of value’ in engaging and arresting style.

Kathryn R King’s essay, ‘New Contexts for Early Novels by Women: The Case of Eliza Haywood, Aaron Hill, and the Hillarians’ (pp.261-275) provides a useful corrective to Richetti’s view of Haywood. Fittingly, she quotes Richetti’s own portrayal of the early reader of amatory fiction (from *Popular Fiction Before Richardson*) as a woman ‘possessed of severely limited capacities’ as indicative of an unhelpful approach that insists on reading the work of Haywood (and other women writers) ‘through the imagined reading experiences of heuristic readers generally supposed to be females of diminished cognitive ability’ (p.261). Pointing out that her earliest works, ‘elegantly produced and marketed for fashionable audiences’, are important ‘to the developing discourse of politeness and bourgeois refinement’ (p.263), King reads Haywood’s work in the context of her association with Aaron Hill and his circle (the Hillarians) in the first half of the 1720s. What emerges is a picture very different from the ‘scandalous’ writer of risqué fiction so frequently reproduced; here Haywood engages in the aesthetic discourse of the sublime, and *Love in Excess* transforms from ‘trashy page-turner’ to an ‘elegant tale of inner experience’ (pp.266-7).

Immediately following King’s essay, Laura’s Runge’s ‘Momentary Fame: Female Novelists in Eighteenth-Century Book Reviews’ (pp.276-298) also bears consideration alongside Richetti. While the later eighteenth century has often been viewed as a relative desert in terms of admirable novels (Burney excepted), Runge suggests that in terms of book reviews the period was almost a golden age; the aspiration to ‘universal coverage’ helped to ensure equal treatment – both in terms of length and seriousness – of male and female novelists, a state of affairs that began to alter with the advent of the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802 and declined steadily thereafter.

The volume as a whole shows a repeated concern with nationhood and with a desire to see the eighteenth-century novel as the product of plural influences, both national and generic. Srinivas Aravamudan (‘Fiction / Translation / Nation: The Secret History of the Eighteenth-Century Novel’) and Ros Ballaster (‘Narrative

Reviews

Transmigrations: The Oriental Tale and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century Britain') both consider *The Turkish Spy* (1684), written by Giovanni Paolo Marana, a Genoese refugee in the French court of Louis XIV. Arguing for the importance of genres such as secret histories, surveillance chronicles and the oriental tale, these essays suggest that eighteenth-century English fiction emerged from and continued to partake of a far greater mixture of kinds than the 'formal realism' of Wattian inheritance would allow. As James Grantham Turner also points out ('The Erotics of the Novel'), it is very important not to forget 'that English readers devoured French writing in the original and in translation, and that – contrary to the impression given by monoglot histories of "the rise of the novel" – prose fiction retained a Continental, amorous, and gallant aura' (p.215).

In a brief review, it is impossible to do justice to all the contributions in a volume this size (there are twenty-three essays, not including the introduction). Hitherto little-explored areas in relation to eighteenth-century fiction are tackled, such as demographics, women and old age, the character sketch and its role 'in attaching European racial features to the pleasures of narrative' (p.422), representations of poverty, and the Gordon riots (or lack thereof in contemporary fiction). Inevitably different pieces will catch the attention of different readers, depending on their interests; for me, Paula McDowell's 'Why Fanny Can't Read: *Joseph Andrews* and the (Ir)relevance of Literacy' stood out as a model of clarity and engagement, with its new reading of a well-known text and its persuasive unsettling of familiar assumptions. Arguing that *Joseph Andrews* consistently questions the capability of education to deliver either the increase in virtue or social mobility its adherents would claim (Adams is virtuous regardless of his learning, neither has it raised him out of relative poverty; Fanny is virtuous despite her illiteracy, while the literate Slipslop and Lady Booby fall somewhat short of the ideal), McDowell shows Fielding as frankly skeptical about the value of education, as challenging 'modern assumptions concerning the presumed "consequences of literacy" at the very moment when these modern ideologies of literacy and models of "literacy effects" were first being formulated' (p.186).

Reviews

Reading through the volume, I did experience a certain degree of frustration; not with the essays, which are generally of a high standard, but with the index, which is oddly inconsistent. Why are some critics in the index and some not? George E. Haggerty's essay, 'Queer Gothic', refers to numerous secondary sources and it seems to be pure chance whether they make it to the index or not. David Punter doesn't, Clare Kahane does; Cynthia Griffin Wolff doesn't, Vijay Mishra does. Footnotes are not indexed, so that neither John Barrell nor John Habbakuk (for example), whose work is of some importance to some of the essays, appears. An entirely new woman novelist called Maria Elizabeth Robinson is indexed (and makes an inaccurate appearance as the author of *The Shrine of Bertha* on p.285), but neither Mary Robinson nor her daughter Mary Elizabeth Robinson appears, although both should do so. Sometimes we are told to 'see individual works' by a major author, sometimes not (as in the case of Defoe, whose individual works are, thankfully, listed anyway). Brean Hammond is Brian Hammond in the index, Pieter Camper is Petrus Camper (either of which is fine, but not both), Frances Sheridan is Francis Sheridan. Proofreading a volume like this is indeed a thankless task, but accuracy does matter.

Gillian Skinner
St Chad's College
Durham University

Michael T Davis, Iain McCalman and Christina Parolin, eds.,
Newgate in Revolution: An Anthology of Radical Prison Literature in the Age of Revolution, London and New York: Continuum, pp.xxv + 202; hbk, ISBN 0-8264-7532-9, £85.00; \$180.00

The three editors of this collection of ten texts, who are all experts on British radicalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, argue persuasively that while Newgate prison was meant to repress and punish the radicals incarcerated there, the authorities could not prevent these able, determined and versatile men from creating a forum for political expression and cultural resistance in the most difficult of circumstances. Imprisoned radical authors and

Reviews

publishers used their prison experience to form a republican network of friends and associates that helped fuel and energize their political enthusiasm and commitment. They were able to receive visitors, including females, and to communicate with the outside world. They read, wrote and arranged publications despite being imprisoned for quite long periods. Imprisonment, far from demoralizing them, promoted a distinctive brand of interdependence and a sense of communal spirit for both those imprisoned in Newgate and those who visited and supported them.

The ten tracts published here to sustain the editors' general thesis were not all written by authors imprisoned in Newgate or written to describe the oppressions of those incarcerated there. Several are connected to Newgate only because their publishers (including James Ridgeway, Henry D. Symonds and Daniel Isaac Eaton) were imprisoned in Newgate during the 1790s. This applies to James Parkinson's *An Address to Edmund Burke from the Swinish Multitude* (1793), which mounted a satirical attack on Burke in the name of the common people; James Henry Lawrence's *An Essay on the Nair System of Gallantry and Inheritance* (1794) that advocated free love in general and complete sexual freedom for women in particular; and Robert Southey's verse drama, *Wat Tyler*, that was written originally in the early 1790s, was considered for publication by publishers who were imprisoned in Newgate in the 1790s but which was not in fact published until 1817 (though separately by two radical publishers, William Hone and Richard Carlile). The sharp attacks on the vices of three prominent members of the elite - Prince of Wales, William Pitt and Marie Antoinette - are extracted from Charles Pigott's more substantial work, *The Jockey Club* (1792). Pigott did spend a short period in Newgate awaiting trial and his two publishers both spent two years in the prison for publishing this work, but there is nothing in the chosen extracts about Newgate itself. William Hodgson's very short *Proposal for publishing ... the Female Citizen* (1796) was published while he languished in Newgate, but it does not discuss his experiences in the prison. On the other hand, the five other texts in this anthology do address the issue of imprisonment much more directly. A second tract by Hodgson, *The Case of William Hodgson, now confined in Newgate ... on a charge*

Reviews

of sedition (1796) was not only published by Daniel Isaac Eaton, a fellow inmate, but protested at the reasons for his own imprisonment. In a similar vein, Sampson Perry's *Oppression!!!* (1795) was written by a radical who spent seven long years in Newgate and was published by another radical, Citizen Lee. Much of this tract, however, is devoted to a defence of the French Revolution and an attack on British corruption and oppression, not to a discussion of Perry's experiences in Newgate. Much the best texts relevant to the thesis being argued by the editors are those that describe the abuses suffered by radical inmates of Newgate and provide vivid testimony to what they experienced in this prison. Daniel Isaac Eaton's *Extortions and Abuses of Newgate* (1813), published by himself, is full of complaints about the petty tyrannies of the Newgate jailer, his efforts to extort money from all his charges, and his refusal to treat political prisoners differently from the common criminals lodged in Newgate. Many similar charges are made in Thomas Lloyd's *Impositions and Abuses of the Management of the Jail of Newgate, pointed out and exposed* (1794). Lloyd was an American radical imprisoned for three years for seditious libel and his tract provides some valuable details on the wretched conditions experienced by the prisoners in Newgate, the oppressive actions of the jailer and Lloyd's inability to have his grievances redressed by a visiting Grand Jury. His tract was published by those other radical Newgate inmates: Ridgeway, Symonds and Eaton. Much the most valuable and also the longest text of the ten printed here, however, is the *Diary of Thomas Lloyd kept at Newgate Prison 1794-96*. This manuscript diary exists in a little-known American archive and it is published here for the first time. Unlike the other texts, it does not seek to convince contemporaries of the political views or political grievances of the author. Instead, it provides fascinating detail on what a radical prisoner did almost daily while serving his sentence in Newgate. It is full of detail on what Lloyd ate and drank, with whom he spoke and disputed, what he read and what he wrote, how his health was undermined, and who visited him or offered him some support. This text tells us more about prison life than any of the other nine and the general thesis of the editors rests more on the evidence

Reviews

provided by this text than that provided by the other nine.

H T Dickinson
University of Edinburgh

Malcolm Dick ed., *Joseph Priestley and Birmingham*, Brewin Books, Birmingham, 2005, pp.vi + 128, £11.95.

This slim but lavishly illustrated volume is a work of local history addressed to a general readership. In February 2004 the bicentenary of Joseph Priestley's death passed with 'few local events' commemorating it in Birmingham, where Priestley spent his happiest years as a member of the Lunar Society 1780-1791 (p.3). This seems to have occasioned some embarrassment, and by the end of the year the Birmingham and District Local History Association had established a 'Joseph Priestley and Birmingham Project' with £50,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The results include a walking trail, exhibitions and websites, and this volume of essays – published as a special volume of the *Birmingham Historian*. Nearly half are written by the editor, among which is a good overview of Priestley's 1788 sermon on the slave trade. Ruth Watts, who teaches in Birmingham and has written extensively on Unitarianism, gender and education, makes another useful contribution on Priestley's educational theory, practice and influence. Overall, however, specialists will find little new in these pages. While the authors have generally drawn upon some key books and articles relevant to their topics, it is disappointing to see the rich collection of articles on Priestley in the volumes of *Enlightenment and Dissent* pass un-cited.

These essays are designed to introduce tourists and residents of the contemporary multi-cultural city to a significant past resident of Birmingham. While not uncritical, the tone is generally one of admiration for the eighteenth-century polymath – referred to as 'our hero' by one contributor in the course of narrating Priestley's life (p.16) – with the volume including a commissioned poem that lauds Priestley's enlightened universalism and a selection of his quotations on subjects such as 'human rights and equality'. It is good to see such an important historical figure being put before a popular audience, and specialists might want to own a copy of this

Reviews

volume for the numerous illustrations that include portraits, some rare caricatures, and photos of buildings – including the New Meeting House where Priestley preached and which is now, ironically, a Catholic Church.

Anthony Page
University of Tasmania

Gavin Edwards, *Narrative Order, 1789-1819: Life and Story in an Age of Revolution*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2006, pp.207; ISBN: 1403992118, £47.00; \$69.95.

Narrative Order is a fine exploration of various pressures exerted on the telling of stories during a period of social and semantic upheaval. In a series of thoughtful studies of different authors and genres Gavin Edwards argues that, whatever their ideological positioning, the work of many British writers of the revolutionary period reflects an element of ‘doubt that life could be represented as a narrative’. This doubt is manifested at many levels, from the plotting and outcomes of a novel such as Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*, to the nuances of a single word in a poem by Wordsworth.

The book itself, however, is orderly enough, with a prefatory chapter setting out the principal points, followed by a short solid piece on Johnson, who stands as a no-nonsense Enlightenment doorkeeper to the party of anxious Romantics within. Working from a discussion of Johnson’s *Life of Savage*, Edwards argues that the revolutionary period saw a fundamental shift away from a typically eighteenth-century commitment to what Alisdair Macintyre has called a ‘narrative idea of life’, a shift which can be charted in the semantic evolution of words such as ‘character’ and ‘life’, ‘story’ and ‘history’. The word ‘character’, as Edwards points out, can now refer either to someone’s ‘moral identity – their personality’ or to a fictional representation, but ‘[N]ormal eighteenth-century use of the word does not distinguish in that radical way between a person and their representation’. (Johnson’s investment in the ‘narrative idea of life’ thus expresses itself as a biography written sequentially, ‘in the Order of time’.) What has split the word into its modern senses is an uncertainty about the

Reviews

power of narrative to convey lived experience truthfully: this book shows how subtly productive that uncertainty has been.

The other writers line up more or less chronologically, from Edmund Burke to Walter Scott, via Watkin Tench, Godwin, Wordsworth, Crabbe, Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley; the presence of Tench and Crabbe, two faces not often seen in this company, adds much to the generic mix. Tench's *Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay* (1789) and its sequel, *An Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson* (1793) are factual histories based on the journals recording his experiences as part of the 'First Fleet' sent to establish a British colony in Australia. His subsequent *Letters Written in France to a Friend in London* (1796) detail the six months spent as a prisoner of war in France in 1794. Edwards patiently unpicks the process by which the raw material of the journals was converted into published narrative, and the kind of disturbances wrought by this process of writing-up on the standpoint in time (real and supposed) of the authorial voice, whose retrospective knowledge of the significance of, say, 1789, inevitably bleeds into the record. (The perspective is further complicated by the fact that news of events in Europe in the period 1789-91 reached those in the colonies some two years after they happened). In one especially telling moment Tench himself, frustrated by the distancing effect of his own account, abandons the 'cold track of narrative' for the raw immediacy of the journal entries. The doubts of George Crabbe – committed, as Edwards puts it 'both as a poet and as an Anglican clergyman [...] to maintaining narrative order' – express themselves less theatrically and to almost the opposite effect: his moral poems, would-be parables for the early nineteenth century, betray again and again a pessimistic sense that lives and stories are at the mercy of circumstance.

Of those studied here, the text which most explicitly deals with the turbulent events of the period, while simultaneously being perhaps the least self-aware in its dealings with the concept of narrative itself, is Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). In a complex analysis of his account of the typically English process of hereditary 'entail', Edwards argues that Burke wrote so as to emphasize continuity, foregrounding what he called the 'condition of unchangeable constancy' in a way that

Reviews

obscures the abrupt violence of revolutionary beginnings and endings. In doing so, *Reflections* became the text which 'first seriously challenged the narrative idea of life' – and not, ironically enough, as a radical blow to the concept of order, but as a defence against those who wanted to start anew, to finish one story and begin another, with a new calendar, new laws, *carte blanche*. Burke's influence on subsequent writers of the Romantic period has been charted in countless ways; Edwards here adds the suggestion that an unsettling deployment of narrative tense (the present perfect 'I have known' of Wordsworth, for example, which hauls the past up into the present) might be one of them.

Wordsworth himself is credited with another first, the 'merging', in his 'spots of time' of two associations, both of which have to do with narrative: one 'between what is beneath the surface and what is past' and the other 'between what is beneath the surface and what is richly significant'. Edwards comes to this conclusion through an exploration of the word 'accident' – more particularly, the phrase 'moving accidents' from *Othello*, which Wordsworth uses or alludes to in 'The Ruined Cottage', 'Hart-Leap Well' and in the two-book *Prelude* of 1799. In a type of analysis at which he excels, Edwards peels apart the word's semantic layers to show how the poetry is disturbed by the pull of its various meanings, which include 'innate quality' and 'incident' or event, as well as the more modern senses of contingency and unforeseen tragic occurrence: his account of the episode in the *Prelude* describing the recovery of the drowned man's body from the lake is beautifully judged. Attentive consideration of the changes undergone by words through time is a hallmark of *Narrative Order* as a whole; a reminder that the work of these relatively modern writers may be laced with *faux amis* requiring an interpretive effort akin to translation.

'Family' is one such word, and it is explored, appropriately enough, in the chapters given to William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft and their daughter Mary Shelley. In Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, a novel conspicuous by the lack of blood ties or sexual relations between characters, 'family' basically has the earlier sense of 'household', and the power struggles of the 'domestic' sphere (which Wollstonecraft would transpose to the

Reviews

power of husband over wife) are those of master over servant – or (Caleb’s exact relation to Falkland seems to have bothered Godwin himself), those of patron and protégé. This novel, with its two possible endings, like Wollstonecraft’s unfinished *The Wrongs of Women; or Maria*, epitomizes ‘the sense of compositional interruption’ which Edwards sees as distinctive of the 1790s. And although in Mary Wollstonecraft’s case it was death in childbirth rather than the uncertainties of political events which tragically left her narrative open-ended, Edwards finds in that death a striking analogy with the radical interruption – a brutal bringing together of an end and a beginning – of the French revolution. He goes on to read Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as an attempt to create relationships through ‘relations’, through the telling of life stories.

The final chapter presents two works published in 1819, Scott’s *The Bride of Lammermoor* and Keats’s *Ode to a Grecian Urn*, as two different yet complementary generic outcomes of the loss of faith in narrative order: ‘the short lyric that reflects on its own passing present’ and the historical novel that acknowledges itself to be part of the process of history itself. The transitional, mediating figure of the bride is the focus here, a culmination of earlier discussions about the nature of promises and contracts – the speech acts which give narrative order to our lives.

Narrative Order makes a persuasive case for narrative uncertainty and semantic change as a hallmark of the 1790s, although it could perhaps be argued that many of the faultlines had appeared earlier, in the wake of the ‘authenticity debates’ of the 1760s and 1770s (one would like to think of Thomas Chatterton’s boast to his mother – ‘a character is now unnecessary; an author carries his character in his pen’ – as a sly nod both to ‘character’ in the sense of a testimonial to a person’s ‘real’, moral nature, as well as to its fictional, inauthentic opposite). And there is much else of value discussed in this deceptively slim book. It is not always an easy read, but Edwards has a very precise way of explaining himself, a careful style which leads the reader into some complex theoretical territory without the need for jargon. It is above all a very humane book, a reminder that reading and writing are not, or

Reviews

not only, clever games, but expressions of the bonds – the relations – that tie us together as human beings.

Mary-Ann Constantine
University of Wales

Amanda Goodrich, *Debating England's Aristocracy in the 1790s: Pamphlets, Polemics and Political Ideas*, Studies in History New Series. Royal Historical Society/Boydell, Woodbridge, pp.213; £40; \$75.00, ISBN 0-86193-275-7.

Amanda Goodrich's book, a handsomely-produced volume by Boydell for the Royal Historical Society, is based on her 2001 PhD thesis. As such it perhaps lacks a lightness of touch, but is certainly characterised by solidity of scholarship. Her aim is to tackle the pamphlet literature produced during the revolution debate of the 1790s, focusing upon the way in which aristocracy – its character and ideology – was treated in both radical and loyalist works. Following a chapter devoted to the work that played such a key role in creating this ferment – Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* – Goodrich devotes two chapters to radical and loyalist pamphleteers between 1791-2, and then two further radical and loyalist chapters to the 1793-6 period. This allows the author to reflect upon shifts in both camps during the period when the vast majority of pamphlets on the French Revolution debate were published. In the course of this work she looks at the aristocracy's central position in the revolution debate, new definitions of society provided by radicals and loyalists, and the differences between the representation and reality of the English aristocracy.

There is much that can be praised here, and a number of valuable correctives are offered. Goodrich plays up the importance of French comparisons in this debate. Both Burke and Paine made connexions with the French elite (though neither saw the two elite castes as the same) and many other pamphleteers followed their lead. On the radical side, she demonstrates that Paine played a key role in a shift in the concept of an English aristocracy from a form of government or a despotic faction, to a hereditary class akin to the French noblesse, defined by their hereditary rights and privileges. It

Reviews

was, she says, ‘the anti-aristocratic rhetoric espoused so forcefully by Paine and his followers that gave the movement of 1790-2 its strongly radical identity’ (p. 84). The period between 1793-6 saw an intensification of this attack on the aristocracy – the term reverting to one of abuse or ridicule. Joseph Gerrald saw them as ‘chicanery in ermine’ and John Thelwall sneered that their ‘*hereditary wisdom, and hereditary virtues*’ were derived ‘from the intrigues of Gallic Courtezans’ (p.118-22). Importantly, however, Goodrich notes that the solutions offered behind the rhetoric of the 1793-6 period did not become more radical, though there was gradually a change in emphasis upon capitalist relations within the workplace. Elsewhere in her chapters on radicalism Goodrich is happy to jump on the bandwagon that has sought to upgrade Mary Wollstonecraft’s contribution, describing her as ‘iconoclastic in her approach to the English establishment’ (p.48). But she is not always as sure-footed in this part of the book, and is a little dismissive of Jenny Graham on ‘the republican spirit’, unjustly offering a snide ‘whatever that means’ (p.46n). That said, I rather like the fact that Goodrich is disinclined to pull her punches. In her conclusion she makes it very clear that one of the central tenets of her study is that Dror Wharman’s ‘inclusive’ versus ‘exclusive’ interpretation of the language division is insufficient, and that a more appropriate assessment would take the lead from Gregory Claeys and see the debate as one of natural rights against commercial society.

Most impressively this book has allowed Goodrich to add to the growing body of work on popular loyalism, and it is in these sections that she is at her most persuasive. She seeks to challenge established interpretations of loyalism by the likes of Robert Dozier and Jonathan Clark, and convincingly puts forward a case for a ‘two-fold loyalism’, with old and new variants, and more generally for ‘defining loyalism not as one united movement but as a number of divergent but connecting groups’ (p.102). Her coverage of the luxury debate reveals that some loyalists were prepared to laud the manliness of the British aristocracy at precisely the same time that their allies were showing unease at effeminacy produced by luxurious living. Goodrich also claims that loyalist responses contained the most innovative lines of argument relating to aristocracy, and that these ranged from stressing the aristocracy’s

Reviews

meritocratic qualifications, to a conscious effort to portray the higher echelons of English society as an open, structured elite; the subject group now being the more fluid category of the 'rich' rather than the landed class. It was the new commercially-minded version that permitted the survival of the English aristocracy. This was won primarily it seems by a body of literature that 'masked continuity with the suggestion of change' (p.105).

I do have two minor points of criticism – other than the fact that my hackles are invariably roused by the appearance of Oxford English Dictionary definitions. Firstly, I was surprised to find no reference to the work of Michael T Davis whose forthcoming book on the London Corresponding Society will surely mark a key contribution to the revolution debate. This is particularly frustrating as elsewhere more dated works are used to illustrate very basic points. It seems odd, for example, to quote Gwyn Williams on the Two Acts. Secondly, although there is a reference to Hogarth's *O! The Roast Beef of Old England* – disappointingly via Jarrett, *England in the age of Hogarth* – more should surely have been made of recent interpretations of loyalist caricatures by the likes of Diana Donald, particularly given that a cartoon of Burke graces the dust jacket. More comparative points of this nature might have leavened the voluminous but somewhat stodgy evidence culled from the pamphlets. Ultimately however these points do not seriously detract from what is an impressive and scholarly study, and a work that succeeds in showing 'the process of intellectual ferment in action' (p.173).

Martyn Powell
University of Wales, Aberystwyth

Geraint H. Jenkins ed., *A Rattleskull Genius: The Many Faces of Iolo Morganwg*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2005, pp. xviii + 515, ISBN 0 7083 1971 8 £45.00; \$90.00.

The conventional distinction between enlightenment and romanticism has been an enduring obstacle to a proper appreciation of the cultural history of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although myriad scholarly qualifications to this grand narrative have led to some blurring of the borders which

Reviews

traditionally separated enlightenment from romanticism, these categories remain robust – and for good reason. After all, their core values seem incommensurable. The philosophers of the enlightenment invoked universal principles and promoted the liberation of humankind as a whole from the fetters of discredited forms of knowledge, primarily, of course, the tyranny of religious superstition. On the other hand, romanticism appeared to involve a set of particularist reactions against the imperialism – however benign its intent – of an enlightenment so fixated upon the common needs of humanity that it failed to recognise the deep differences which existed between cultures. Was there any real connection between proponents of an undifferentiating rationalist universalism and the nation-building champions of locally distinct – and thereby irrational – cultural peculiarities?

The splendid collection of essays on Iolo Morganwg and his multiple contexts assembled by Geraint H. Jenkins provides a positive – and persuasive – answer to that question. Of course, the career of that cultural ‘bricoleur’ and jack-of-all-trades Edward Williams (known to posterity under his bardic name Iolo Morganwg) defies reductive treatment. Iolo’s reputation takes various forms, as ‘the druidic bard, the labouring poet, the romantic myth-maker, the consummate forger, the political radical, the agricultural commentator, the dedicated transcriber of Welsh manuscripts, the apostle of anti-trinitarianism, and one of the fathers of modern Welsh nationalism.’ Jenkins is to be congratulated for having gathered such a large and impressive team: the only fitting way of paying tribute to Iolo’s remarkable versatility. Moreover, standards of scholarship across the twenty-two essays in the book are uniformly high, as is the quality of the book’s production, with numerous illustrations and reproductions adding visual support to the work of the text. Individually, the contributors explore the bewildering variety of Iolo’s enthusiasms; but it also becomes clear from the volume as a whole that it would be a category error to treat Iolo’s romantic – or proto-romantic – contributions to the making of a Welsh cultural identity in isolation from his enlightened efforts to promote the values of Rational Dissent. These were, it seems, but different aspects of the same ideological project.

Reviews

Indeed, this collection brings into focus the neglected theological origins of what British cultural and literary historians tend to describe – perhaps misleadingly – as ‘Celticism’. There is a tendency among modern scholars to assume that nations and ethnicities were the primary bearers of identity in the past; and that when antiquaries such as Iolo articulated their theories of the ancient British past they did so mainly as a means of expressing their identities as Welshmen and Celts. However, the central matter of much of this antiquarian endeavour tended to be ecclesiastical. This, in turn, raises a question, which modern scholars have rarely asked: whether ‘Celticist’ antiquarianism derived less from the defence of cultural identity or the desire to fabricate national myth than it did from the perceived need to mine the distant Celtic past for evidence to support particular religious positions. In other words, the theological points at issue might well have arisen prior to any concern for what now looks, in retrospect, like an all-too-obvious interest in cultural nationalism. Nor is this simply a chicken-and-egg puzzle; rather it pertains to the very kind of cultural phenomenon represented by ‘Celtic’ antiquarianism, and, furthermore, also suggests how enlightenment might have functioned in certain contexts as a seedbed for romanticism.

Relativism, as Isaiah Berlin long ago noted, played no part in the discourse of the eighteenth century, superficial resemblances notwithstanding. Iolo grew up in a world in which Truth was singular, though sometimes perhaps clad in local apparel. This is surely the most appropriate way to approach Iolo’s fascination with Druidism and the Welsh bardic tradition. The ‘druido-bardism’ of the ancient Britons had survived only in Glamorgan, and Iolo believed that he, the self-proclaimed ‘Bard of the South Wales Unitarian Society’, and Edward Evan, minister of the Unitarian meetinghouse at Aberdare, were the two last remnants of the Welsh bardic line, the ultimate descendants of the ancient Druids, whose lore was preserved in the triads of the bards. The Druids were not simply the precursors of the modern Welsh people whose bardic rites preserved the cultural memory of the ancient Celts; in Iolo’s eyes the Druids were the upholders of religious truth, the bearers not so much of a distinctive cultural tradition as of an uncorrupted primitive, patriarchal Christianity. While nineteenth-century

Reviews

Druidism came to function as a kind of surrogate nationalism and later dwindled into local colour, its late eighteenth-century significance was rooted in Christology and ecclesiology. Indeed, the meaning of Iolo's 'invented tradition' of a revived Gorsedd, or assembly of the druids, was at bottom Unitarian, a primitive vindication of the supposedly modern doctrines of Rational Dissent. Not that the Welsh – or, more particularly, the bards of Glamorgan – were unique in their access to ancient religious truth. Iolo's cultural interests were not limited to Welsh history and antiquities. His fascinations extended well beyond the ancient British past and included Hinduism, Brahminism and the Jewish Cabbala. Of course, one must take into account Iolo's restless magpie antiquarianism, but there was also, I suspect, a deeper logic at work, for the study of eastern religious traditions (a subject which engrossed many other contemporary Celtic antiquaries besides Iolo) provided the possibility of alternative gateways to primitive religious truth.

Iolo believed that the problems of a benighted world took their rise from the perversion of authentic Unitarian Ur-Christianity. The supplanting of sacred Unitarian truth by Trinitarian error had not only ushered in an era of metaphysical delusion, but had also been accompanied by systems of priestcraft and kingcraft which had tyrannised humankind. The recovery of freedom necessitated both the overthrow of 'Parsonism, Kingism and Devilism, the three grand curses of the world', and a return to primeval Christian values. Here Iolo parted company with the avant-garde of the radical Enlightenment. Tom Paine's satirical critique of Christianity in the *Age of Reason* (1794) went too far for Iolo. To be sure, Christianity needed to be purged of the harmful superstitions which had disfigured it, but with the eventual aim not of destroying Christianity, but of restoring it to full health on the prescription of latent patriarchal tradition. Iolo's message was for the wider Christian world – not just Wales – and Iolo had no nationalist scruples about aligning himself during the 1790s with metropolitan radicalism. Nationalism did not constitute a major faultline within radicalism, certainly not by comparison with the theological differences that alienated Iolo from the atheistic 'Iscaiot Paine'.

Reviews

Indeed, as some of the contributors demonstrate, one can learn a great deal about Iolo's concerns from studying the positions adopted by his opponents, such as Thomas Burgess, the Bishop of St. David's, or the schoolmaster-cleric Edward 'Celtic' Davies. Burgess insisted that modern Protestantism upheld the doctrines of the ancient British church, including its Trinitarianism. In his *Celtic Researches* (1804) Davies traced the dispersal of the Noachids across the ancient world; noted the support given by Celtic philology – and linguistics in general – to the idea of a primeval universal language, and, by extension, to the orthodox tenet that humanity sprang from a single origin; and discussed the (non-Unitarian) principles of Druidism espoused by the Celtic descendants of Japhet and Gomer. The axes of debate here were primarily theological, and Druidism incited scholarly interest because of its provenance at the intersection of sacred history with the history of nations.

A more secularised interest in cultural particularity – romanticism, if you will – developed as an offshoot of an earlier form of ecclesiastical antiquarianism, the quest for the primeval blueprints of Christian doctrine and organization as preserved by Noah's ancient Celtic descendants. The enlightenment was a staging post in this process. In a world whose beginnings apparently stretched back only to 23rd October 4004 B.C. – or thereabouts – such an enterprise was far from quixotic, and the enlightenment did not immediately discredit the traditional contours of universal chronology. There was, of course, some embarrassed circumspection with regard to the more folklorish aspects of Old Testament history and an emerging preference in sophisticated quarters for naturalistic – and chronologically vague – accounts of the origins of human society; but only on the deistic fringes of enlightenment was there an outright rejection of the core truths of sacred history. This was the milieu in which Iolo's unintended alchemy wrought the transformation of a patriarchal justification for Unitarian Dissent into a pedigree for Welsh nationhood.

Colin Kidd,
University of Glasgow

Reviews

Judith Jennings *Gender, Religion and Radicalism in the Long Eighteenth Century: The 'Ingenious Quaker' and Her Connections*, Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing, 2006, pp.205; ISBN: 0 7546 5500 8; hbk £50; \$99.95.

Jennings states in the introduction to this book that her intention in writing is not only to publish the first extensive research into Mary Knowles's life, but also to place her context amidst 'multiple historical currents and associations' in the Georgian age. She focuses on the three themes of Quakerism, gender, and radicalism, specifically avoiding analysing these topics in terms of separate spheres, although that ideology does have an occasional mention. Instead she chooses to explore them through networks and connections and 'the intersections of gender with religion and radicalism'. This choice suits the subject, opening up different perspectives, and at the same time wisely avoids having to engage with the extensive literature on separate spheres.

Knowles, previously Mary Morris, was born into a well-to-do Quaker family and was a practitioner of 'needle painting', the skilful representation of a subject through needlework. She gained a commission from Queen Charlotte to render a recent portrait of King George III in this style, and the result brought her royal favour, financial reward, and new opportunities. Her husband, originally an apothecary, was enabled by her increase in fortune, to pursue medical studies in Edinburgh and Leyden, an accepted route for dissenters wishing to train as doctors. At the age of 46, Knowles executed a self-portrait, unusual for a woman and even more so for a female Quaker. In it she was seen working on her portrait of the king, and Jennings comments that in this work Knowles 'continued the radical practice of female self-representation' and revealed a 'strong self-image', both challenging traditional Quaker disapproval of portraiture, and making a statement about her public presence as a woman. Knowles' artistic ability and its relationship to her Quaker beliefs is merely one of several interesting threads woven into the book.

A single encounter between Knowles and Dr Johnson provides the focus for much of the book and appears to have loomed large in Knowles' own thinking. The occasion was a dinner in April 1778,

Reviews

at the house of Edward Dilly, a bookseller, publisher and radical Whig. The guests included Dr Johnson, James Boswell, Knowles and the poet Anna Seward. There was a wide-ranging discussion covering such subjects as the extent of liberty appropriate for women, the experience of death, the political situation in America, and the subject of a friend of Knowles', Jane Harry. This young woman, who was from Jamaica, and had a mixed race background, had recently become a Quaker despite the opposition of her guardian. There was some debate as to whether Knowles had influenced the young woman unduly. Johnson, who appeared not to regard Quakers as Christians (a not uncommon belief at the time), could not accept that a young woman should be allowed of her own volition to change her religion. He was apparently extremely vociferous in his comments to Knowles on this issue, calling Harry an 'odious wench' who would not be able to understand the New Testament for herself as it was 'the most difficult book in the world'.

There are several versions of this conversation, and Jennings works through these varying accounts, returning to the issue several times in the course of her book. There was Boswell's journal account, his published version in his *Life of Johnson* Knowles' account later published in *Gentleman's Magazine*, and an account by Seward written to Boswell, which contains information not found in either. After Knowles's death, Boswell's account became the standard one and by the end of the twentieth century his view was 'enshrined in the literary canon', yet there are serious doubts about its accuracy. It may seem that too much time is taken approaching this subject several times from different angles, but Jennings is adept at teasing out the full significance from conversations, texts and events and she uses this skill to best effect when analysing the debate with Johnson. She draws out layers of meaning from the different accounts, considering what is left out by whom, and exploring the differing emphases of the participants. Thus, she capably illustrates Knowles' participation in challenging contemporary norms of women's behaviour and religious practice.

This book is a fascinating study of the life of the radical Quaker Mary Morris Knowles. It is also much more than that, making a useful contribution both to the individual issues of gender, religion

Reviews

and politics in the period, but more importantly, to their interconnections. Jennings' study is thorough, and Knowles is well worth the effort expended to recover her story. Knowles' life intersected with key individuals and issues of the period including the king and queen, Johnson and Boswell, the role of women and religion, and thus provides Jennings with a useful lens through which to study some of the main personalities and issues of the age, as well as a quest worthwhile in its own right, that of recovering from history a woman who was well-known in her own day.

Linda Wilson
University of Gloucestershire

Paul Keen ed., *The Popular Radical Press in Britain 1817-1821: A Reprint of Early Nineteenth Century Radical periodicals*, Pickering & Chatto, London, 2003, Six volumes, ISBN 1851967524. Discount price: £262.50/\$437.50

The years following the conclusion of war with France in Britain were, to borrow E P Thompson's often quoted phrase, the 'heroic age' of popular radicalism. These years saw the Blanketeers undertake their failed protest march from Lancashire to London; major riots occur at Spa Fields in the capital; an uprising take place on the border between Derbyshire and Nottingham; and what became known as the Massacre of Peterloo unfold on St Peter's Field in Manchester. Peterloo polarised the nation. Many were appalled not only at the loss of life that had occurred when innocent protestors seeking democratic reform had been attacked by Yeomanry Cavalry but also that the Prince Regent and parliament had offered thanks to the soldiers for their patriotic conduct.

The response of Lord Liverpool's Tory government to the escalation of popular protest was increasingly shrill. In 1817 the government briefly suspended Habeas Corpus and passed 'Gagging Acts' to restrict public meetings and curtail the publication of radical newspapers. At the end of 1819, in the aftermath of the popular outrage over Peterloo, the government introduced what became known as the Six Acts. These measures included the prohibition of public meetings of more than fifty people (without the prior approval of a Magistrate); much harsher punishments for

Reviews

publications deemed to be blasphemous or seditious; and an extension of the Newspaper and Stamp Duties Act to include journals that had previously avoided the stamp tax. It was, as one radical newspaper editor put it, the dawn of the 'Age of Persecution'. The impact of the Six Acts was felt throughout the radical movement but nowhere more severely than by those involved in the press. Many of Thompson's 'heroes' - men and women - had printers' ink on their hands. It is the labours of some of these 'heroes' in the period 1817-1821 that are reproduced in this six volume collection edited and introduced by Paul Keen.

In a lively and thoughtful introduction Keen draws attention to the determination of the editors of the post war radical press to 'prevent themselves from being dismissed as the belligerent other...by embracing a rhetoric of instruction rather than insurrection' (p.xii). The radicals, Keen tells us, saw the diffusion of knowledge as the prerequisite of a civil society; their journals were 'vehicles of intelligence' (p.xiv) that fed an increasingly voracious appetite for rational discussion and political commentary among a largely 'plebeian' audience. 'The radical weekly press', he notes, 'was both an eloquent witness of, and a key participant in, this project of "enlightening the minds of the people"' (p.xiii).

Building on this discussion Keen goes on to draw out a very interesting point in relation to the notion of the public sphere, a concept derived from the work of Jurgen Habermas. Students of popular radicalism have been among those to suggest that Habermas's notion of a bourgeois 'public sphere' (which emerged during the eighteenth century) needs to be modified to account for multiple or alternative public spheres created *inter alia* by radical opponents of the state and others outside the bourgeois political nation. Keen notes that, in fact, many radicals felt that far from engaging in rational public debate the privileged orders were retreating into the 'sanctity' of the private sphere in the face of their challenge. 'Enlightenment, it seemed, was faced with the challenge of ascending rather than trickling down the social hierarchy' (p.xxiii). This is an insight that is worthy of further consideration.

Keen also points out that the government's repressive action left the radicals in possession of the language of the constitution. 'This should be the age of discussion', editorialized one radical

Reviews

commentator (vol. 1, p.56), but in reality the government was bent on silencing it. As Keen notes, the radical press insisted ‘that it was the reformers who were the true loyalists, committed to the defence of traditional English liberties against the unprecedented interventions of the government’ (p.xxv). It is important, however, to understand that this was more than a rhetorical strategy; many radicals claimed their rights on the basis of the venerable constitution (regardless of how uneasily this historical appeal might have sat with more ethereal notions of universal rights).

Keen is right to suggest that radical publicists invariably saw their task as more than simply an educative one; they believed that their newspapers were ‘engines of reform’ that might lead to a transformation of society (p.xvii). Whether, as Keen suggests, the government was ‘probably right to be worried about the seditious potential of these weekly publications’ (p.xvi) is a moot point. Of course, the radicals did not confront the state in unified ranks. The newspapers in these volumes provide ample evidence not only of a rich intellectual variety – from the ultra-radical *Cap of Liberty* and the Christian reformist *Briton* to the freethinking *Theological Comet* and the utilitarian *Gorgon* – but also of the internecine squabbling and rivalry that beset the movement. Keen notes that notwithstanding the frequent calls for unity against the common enemy of reaction and intolerance these newspapers often fortified ‘the very divisions that they pleaded with their readers to overcome’ (p.xix). No student of radical politics will be surprised by this observation.

The journals included in the collection represent a broad cross-section of the radical press but not its best known examples. Most of the journals were short lived – the longest run included is Thomas Davidson’s ultra radical *Medusa* which appeared for nearly a year in 1819-20 and the shortest is the single issue of the *Gracchus* published by the irascible Richard Carlile in June 1818. That none of them were as widely read or influential as newspapers such as William Cobbett’s *Political Register* or Thomas Wooler’s *Black Dwarf* is not a criticism. Indeed one of the most important benefits of the collection is the access it provides to some of the lesser known newspapers of this important period. Graduate students far from the institutions that hold the originals will

Reviews

undoubtedly plunder these pages as a rich source for dissertations. If there is one criticism of the selection it is that it does little to live up to the word 'Britain' in the title. All thirteen of the newspapers included had a national audience of sorts but all were published in London. There were numerous lively and important 'engines of reform' in other parts of England (let alone elsewhere in Britain) that might have found at least some representation here.

Nevertheless, students and researchers alike will rejoice at the quality of the facsimile reproductions which are a credit to Keen and his publisher, Pickering and Chatto (a publisher unconnected to the present reviewer until a recent involvement in the *Enlightenment World* monograph series). In sum, this is an important collection that provides an excellent window onto a crucial period in the development of popular politics in Britain. As Keen notes, the radical press provided a form of enfranchisement to their plebeian readers that helped to pave the way for their formal inclusion in the political nation later in the century.

Paul A. Pickering
The Australian National University

F Arant Maginnes, *Thomas Abthorpe Cooper: father of the American stage, 1775-1849*, McFarland & Co. Inc., Jefferson, North Carolina., 2004, pp.248; ISBN 0-7864-1935-0, £28.95; \$45.00.

In 1788 William Godwin took in his young cousin, Thomas Cooper, after the teenager's father had died in India. He was to remain with Godwin until July 1792 when he left for Edinburgh to pursue a career as an actor. This book tells his story in two parts: Part I 'The Rise to Fame, 1775-1803' is mainly concerned with Cooper's relationship with Godwin, his early stage life in Britain and America. Part II 'The American Star, 1803-1849' charts the rise to prominence of this first great tragedian of the American stage and the role he played in the formative years of the young nation's culture.

While it is clear that the second part of the book will be of secondary interest to the readership of this journal, it would be remiss not to note that the overall objectives of the book, which

Reviews

Maginnes achieves admirably, are to establish Cooper as the 'father of the American stage' and as an assertive adventurer who personified the spirit of exploring new frontiers and entrepreneurship in the emerging nation. Her use of source material is impressively comprehensive and illuminating throughout although Cooper's own voice is much stronger in Part I due to the existence of numerous letters that he wrote to Godwin. Part II relies more on newspaper reviews of his performances which is disappointing after the intimacy the letters lend the first part, and it has the inevitable effect of the reader losing some sense of Cooper's personality in later life as the story becomes one of second hand reports and anecdotes. Overall, in the telling of a life-story, Maginnes certainly succeeds but a biography must also be judged in terms of what its subject's life tells us about the period or culture in which it is located. Cooper was a prominent actor and theatre manager and thus this book must be assessed for its contribution to general theatre history, and here the author has had mixed success.

To begin with, there are some questionable claims that one would not expect a writer familiar in theatre history to make. For example, it is at least misleading to claim that Covent Garden and Drury Lane were the only two patent theatres in London as, while they were closed over the summer, the Haymarket, also by right of royal patent, opened for business. It is equally incorrect to suggest that the leading actor of the age John Kemble only acted in tragedies; while tragedy was certainly his forte, he also acted in histories, melodramas and, to a lesser extent, comedies. Despite these errors, however, what really frustrates the reader are the missed opportunities that are raised by this well researched book but not followed through.

Cooper's status as the actor who first straddled the Atlantic and the first manager to also import major British stars such as George Cooke and Edmund Kean for tours (fascinating accounts of which are in the book) means that the biography was an excellent opportunity for a comparative exercise in theatrical culture between Britain and America; Maginnes has partially achieved this aim but there are many moments where further discussion is warranted. For example, when the author informs us that the First Continental Congress in 1778 banned theatrical activity as a source of 'idleness

Reviews

and dissipation' and the subsequent repeal of this ban on a city by city basis (Philadelphia in 1789), one can't help but think of the British 1737 Stage Licensing Act and John Larpent, the contemporary Examiner of Plays, and wonder how the stage was monitored in America? One assumes that it was on an individual ad hoc managerial basis, but we are not told. Furthermore, while it is instructive to learn that American audiences were equally enamoured with spectacle (in his first season in Philadelphia, Cooper hired an elephant for his benefit in April 1797), history plays, and August von Kotzebue, the German playwright whose translations took London by storm around 1798-1800, as were their British counterparts, there are many questions left unanswered. To what extent was there a backlash against the growing prevalence of stage spectacle as there was in Britain? To what extent did history plays present a uniform idea of American nationalism? Were there any dissenting voices to the popularity of Kotzebue (there were many British voices who felt that Kotzebue's plays were both immoral and an insidious influence on national moral fibre)? How did the Kotzebue translations by William Dunlap, American actor, playwright and manager, differ from those of Sheridan and Inchbald and what do they tell us about the contemporary cultural and political environments in the two countries? When we learn that Cooper, when he became manager of the Park Theatre, New York, oversaw its expansion in 1807 to a 2,700 capacity, we wonder whether there were any complaints about cavernous theatres, such as there were about the expansion of Covent Garden and Drury Lane in 1792-4, and did it contribute to a growth in spectacle over substance? All these questions strike the reader as being worthy of comment in a book that tells a story of a theatrical figure fashioned from the cultures of two nations but they only receive the scantiest of attention.

Nevertheless, the question of how the relationship with Godwin is teased out is the measure of this biography for *Enlightenment and Dissent*. Again, unfortunately, Maginnes has had mixed success. There are further careless errors – *Caleb Williams* was started by Godwin in February 1793, not in 1794, as she suggests. Her claim that Godwin wanted Cooper to be a writer and it was Holcroft that encouraged him to be an actor is overly simplistic.

Reviews

Undoubtedly, Holcroft was a major influence but Godwin was passionate about the drama; attending the theatre often, reading copious amounts of drama, and even spending 1790, when Cooper was resident with him, writing a historical tragedy *St Dunstan* – all of which information is clear from his diary. Mary Shelley wrote in her *Life of Godwin* that Garrick put him ‘in a sort of extacy brooding with jealous delight over the feelings excited by the Actor’. More pertinently, there is ample evidence in Godwin’s diary, which has not been fully exploited by Maginnes, that he was fully involved in Cooper’s theatrical education.

Godwin records ‘News from Edinburgh’ on 10 July 1792 in his diary, a reference to Cooper’s first offer of employment from Stephen Kemble, John’s brother, at the Edinburgh theatre. Between 10 July and his departure on 22 July, Godwin was determined to provide Cooper with every advantage and give him the very best preparation that he could provide. The day after the news arrived, Godwin notes ‘C’s theatrical lessons’ and these were repeated daily 12-16 July with no mention of Holcroft. Even after Cooper’s departure for Edinburgh to play the part of Malcolm in *Macbeth*, Godwin supported him through his letters, writing to him ‘on Malcolm’ on 16 August 1792, the day after his debut on the stage. The next day Godwin called on Holcroft and encouraged him to write to Cooper as well. Further letters by Godwin in the Abinger MSS, Oxford to prominent actors such as William Betty and Junius Booth, and searching comments on the abilities of Mrs Siddons (which have escaped Maginnes’s attention) are more than ample evidence of Godwin’s interest in the stage. In the end when Maginnes herself writes ‘For leading him into the theatre [...] he blamed Godwin’ (p. 56) before citing a letter in which Cooper does exactly that, it is difficult to see why she maintained this division of labour between Godwin and Holcroft in the first place.

The other major point of issue is the reason behind Cooper’s emigration to America. Maginnes argues that it was due to Holcroft’s radical reputation after the Treason Trials (1794) and it may well indeed have been a factor. However, while she cites a review in the *Monthly Magazine* in support of this argument, most of the evidence that she provides suggests a less dramatic reason: a better opportunity for fame and fortune. Far from damning him for

Reviews

radicalism, the ministerial paper *The Times* said of his first performances in Covent Garden in 1795 that he had great potential and with some experience gained on the journeyman regional circuit he could aspire to success. The same reviewer drew a parallel between Mrs Siddons (who did the same) and Cooper; hardly a terrible indictment. Cooper was simply not prepared to play secondary roles and turned down a more than fair contract from Thomas Harris, Covent Garden manager, for the potential of the American stage. To be fair, Maginnes does say this as well, but she suggests in her introduction that it was his radical background that was the primary driver behind his decision to emigrate, while most of the subsequent cumulative evidence in her book strongly suggests the ambition was the real reason.

Despite these shortcomings, Maginnes has done Godwin scholars a great service in publishing these letters and, in general, contextualizing them well. Godwin's relationship with Cooper is important both in terms of highlighting Godwin's strong links to the theatre and, more importantly, in giving a practical demonstration of his thoughts on education. Godwin's education of Cooper takes place between his *Account of the Seminary* (1783) and his later thoughts on pedagogy contained within *Political Justice* (1793, 1796, 1798) and *The Enquirer* (1797) and provides an excellent insight as to how those early opinions might have developed. Furthermore, Cooper and Godwin's correspondence contains an affectionate intimacy that may perhaps surprise those who still subscribe to the view of Godwin as the cold 'Professor': it is clear that Godwin cared very much for Cooper and that Cooper was deeply conscious of the great debt he owed 'the father of his mind' (p.11).

David O'Shaughnessy
University College, Oxford

Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: translation, scholarship, culture*, Princeton University Press, 2005, pp.273; hbk. £29.95, \$49.50; pbk. £11.95, \$19.95

What does Secularization mean for the Bible? Does it mean a process of destruction or a process of transformation? *The*

Reviews

Enlightenment Bible opts decisively for the second alternative. According to Sheehan, the Bible changes in the course of the eighteenth century from a normatively binding text of revelation to a cultural document. The author calls the stages on this journey the philological, the pedagogical, the poetic and the historical Bible. There is astoundingly little focus on Bible criticism in this book. Instead, Sheehan is more interested in the 'reconstitutions' of the Bible: 'The Enlightenment was [...] precisely the moment when the authority of the Bible was reconstituted as a piece of the heritage of the West. This reconstitution was first conjured up by a host of scholars and literati who together forged a model of biblical authority that could endure in a post-theological era' (p.xi). The central means for the reconstitution was the respective new translation of the Bible, together with commentaries, illustrations and philological variants. The focus on these means makes clear what kind of intellectual history the author prefers – he puts practices and institutions on the stage rather than what has been traditionally looked at: the 'philosophically powered assault on religion' (p.xii). And he claims the practices do not necessarily point to destruction, but to transformation.

Sheehan focuses geographically on two countries: England and Germany, for a good reason. In the eighteenth century, many initiatives in Bible scholarship came from England and were later adopted in Germany. For instance, the 'philological Bible' which originated in John Mill's 1707 variant-edition and reached its peak with the edition by the German Johann Albrecht Bengel. Another example is Robert Lowth's invention of the 'poetic Bible' with its enormous repercussions in Germany through the work of Cramer, Herder or Michaelis. Yet it is Germany who plays the part of the hero in Sheehan's narrative. While in England many of the innovations are not carried further, the productive 'reinvention of the Bible' occurs mostly in Germany. Only between 1830 and 1870 it can be observed how these innovations return to England and undergo a productive reworking by scholars such as Benjamin Jowett (pp.247-258).

Notwithstanding all good reasons to focus on England and Germany, the book would clearly have profited from a glance at Calvinist culture, especially to the Huguenots. Charles Le Cène, for

Reviews

example, a Calvinist with strong Socinian sympathies, announced already in 1698 a new French Bible translation, which modified the text in a resolutely rationalizing and modernizing way, just as the projects of Johann Lorenz Schmidt and Karl Friedrich Bahrtd would do decades later in Germany. Charles Le Cène calls scribes ‘avocats’, satraps ‘bachas’, and Royal councilors ‘kadis’. The translation appeared posthumously in 1747 and was condemned immediately by the Walloon Church. The Le Cène affair reveals – clearer than Sheehan’s examples – what a great impact Socinianism had on the reconstitution of the Biblical text in the early eighteenth century, simply because Socinianism had always focused on the Bible, while at the same time emphasizing the ‘reasonable’ nature of its content.

In England as well as in Germany there were authoritative standard translations since the sixteenth century: the King James Bible and the Luther Bible. According to Sheehan, in the late seventeenth century the Latin philological and theological Bible scholarship and the vernacular tradition of translation still move unaffected in parallel universes. Only around 1700 occurs a revolution: in England, the deism controversy and the attempts of an antitrinitarian reconstruction of primitive Christianity destroyed this parallelism, and in Germany the emergence of Pietism, especially in its radical and separatist wing, did the same. Radical Pietists pursued, as Sheehan shows beautifully, a sort of alienation strategy: by aiming at a perfectly literal translation, they wanted to preserve as much of the inspired character of the text as possible. From this strategy sprung linguistic monsters such as the translations by Caspar Ernst Triller or Johann Heinrich Reitz, but also the footnote monster of the *Berleburger Bible* (pp.64-85).

The next wave of Bible translations was triggered by the enthusiasm for the moral perfectibility of man that swept across Europe in the 1760s and 1770s. These translations evidently preferred the New Testament and portrayed Christ as a moral hero. Here too transpires the ideal of Socinian and Deist thought, which no longer requires the divine nature of Christ. The provocative translations of Karl Friedrich Bahrtd made him the archetype and at the same time the enfant terrible of this movement. Numerous other Wolffians and *Popularphilosophen* (popular philosophers) could be

Reviews

added. Sheehan interprets the theory of the late Bahrdr about Jesus as the founder of a secret society as a revocation of the pedagogical Bible. He rightly points out that an exoteric enlightenment which uses the means of an esoteric and secret society is self-contradictory – nevertheless I would see Bahrdr's theory more as a change in strategy facing the political situation of radical reformers in an absolutist society. He was projecting onto Jesus the experience that capital reforms could be carried out only in secrecy. Whether Johan Lorenz Schmidt, though, the editor of the infamous *Wertheimer Bible*, really belongs to the chapter on the pedagogical Bible, I would doubt. As Ursula Goldenbaum's recent research shows, it is most of all the rationalism of Schmidt and the problem of a public sphere that was at stake in these heated debates, not yet the pedagogical impetus of the post-Rousseau era.

Sheehan demonstrates the transformation into the 'poetical Bible' by the Job translations that appeared after Lowth (and, one should add, after the emergence of the new poetics of *Empfindsamkeit* [sensitivity] and the sublime), with Cube and other long forgotten authors (pp.148-181). As in most cases, he can offer only short glimpses into complex and fascinating debates. Sheehan emphasizes the significance of the concept of sympathy, which incorporated the ambivalence between identification and emotional distance, that on the one hand countervailed the loss of typology and Biblical prophecy, but on the other lead the translations into irresolvable internal contradictions in textual interpretation. Herder's notion of *Volksgeist* (national character) tries to fill the gap and to reconcile the different motives in a new perspective. Sheehan could also have mentioned Lessing's wrestling with the Job motif, to which Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs has directed our attention.

Finally there was the 'archival Bible', represented above all by the figure of Johann David Michaelis, the initiator of the famous expedition to Arabia in 1761-67. Here, with this late eighteenth-century translation, an antiquarian scholarship that has been blossoming for more than a hundred years and that has been supplemented by ethnographical and scientific knowledge, reaches its full potential (pp.182-217). This type of the Bible equally results in some sort of alienation, which, unlike the case with the radical

Reviews

Pietists, consists in an awareness of the cultural difference of an early oriental past. Sheehan's chapter on Michaelis is the largest and most beautiful case study of the book.

All these versions of the Bible represent not so much stages of a single road of evolution (although there is undeniably a chronological sequence) but rather a pluralization of the Biblical text. 'Translation and Scholarship merged to give Germany a universe of possible Bibles', Sheehan formulates pregnantly (p.85). It would be an interesting task to compare this process of pluralization with other pluralizing processes in this period (and generally in the early modern era). Then Sheehan's argument that we should understand secularization as a multiplying transformation would possibly become even more powerful.

One could, however, argue that Sheehan's decisive abandonment of a grounding of his book in the history of ideas makes the reader somewhat blind towards several intellectual developments, to which some of the Bible translations react. If Herder, for example, views the ancient Hebrews as a primitive nation that precisely due to its 'primitivity' is able to produce such eminently valuable poetical achievements, then this view was possible on the one hand through the new positioning of the Hebrews from the bearers of perfect knowledge to simple peasants (a process for which John Spencer, John Locke and William Warburton were important) and, on the other hand through the inversion of the hierarchy of the human senses (as a result of French sensualism after Condillac). Under these presuppositions Herder could rehabilitate the 'prisca sapientia' view that had been discarded around 1700 as a 'poetic wisdom' of the religious imagination of the Hebrews.

One might also ask: did the 'philosophically powered assault on religion', which Sheehan blinds out, not have its own 'reconstituting' consequences? One example would be Hermann Samuel Reimarus with his *Apology*, whom Sheehan mentions only casually in the context of Lessing's publication of the 'fragments'. Albert Schweitzer has rightly seen in Reimarus's Bible criticism the origins of what would later be called the 'Life of Jesus scholarship', which became an important part of nineteenth century theology.

Reviews

All these objections, though, are more suggestions than real criticism. Overall, the book convinces as a freshly and brilliantly written account of the genesis of the 'Cultural Bible' and displays a wealth of interesting details about the various approaches to the Bible in the eighteenth century. Sheehan is always in full control of his material and presents a narrative that is consistent and that will stir further research and reflection.

Martin Mulrow
Rutgers University

Mark G Spencer, *David Hume and Eighteenth-Century America*, University of Rochester Press, 2005. ISBN 1-58046-118-2. pp. x + 534, £65.00; \$90.00.

This is an exceptionally good book: it unequivocally establishes the prevalence of 'flawed assessments of Hume's reception in America, [and] serious misunderstandings about the intellectual origins of the American Revolution' (p.86). The book is very well-written, impeccably documented, and should be in every self-respecting library – private or institutional. Two extensive *Appendices* itemise Hume's works in early American Book Catalogues, and list Subscribers to the first American edition of the *History*.

Together with three recent books which have gathered together contemporary British and American reviews of Hume's works, and analysis of their Continental reception, Spencer's study has transformed the landscape for historical and intellectual assessment of Hume's thought in the eighteenth-century. Those works are:

J. Fieser ed., *Early responses to Hume*, 10 vols. (Bristol, 1999-2003)

M. Spencer ed., *Hume's reception in Early America*, 2 vols. (Bristol, 2002)

P. Jones ed. *The reception of David Hume in Europe* (London, 2005).

Spencer begins by insisting on the currently inchoate state of knowledge about precisely what books, where, when and how, were available in Colonial America – let alone, who read them,

Reviews

why, when, and in what ways. Devastating library fires, for example at Harvard in 1764 and Charleston in 1778 – quite apart from the Civil War – destroyed both books and catalogues, although some 700 library and booksellers' catalogues have now been identified covering the period up to 1830. (And for the decade after 1773 Hume was the most borrowed author at Harvard.) But establishing the existence of a book at a certain date, is one thing, discovering who read it, and how, is something else. Unlike his predecessors, Spencer starts with an impressive knowledge and understanding of what Hume himself actually wrote: thus richly armed, he studied countless American writers of the period, in both their private and published works, to identify acknowledged and unacknowledged quotations, silent borrowings, and misappropriations. Hume's works were more commonly available after 1760 than often claimed, and the diffusion of his thought much wider, not least by means of imported British periodicals which reprinted several of his essays – a story which is replicated throughout the century in Europe, and for many authors. As in Europe, the works which attracted attention were the *History*, and the *Essays and Treatises* – although no American edition of any of his writings appeared during Hume's lifetime.

Although historical writing formed the basis of everyone's reading after the mid-century, Spencer is surprisingly one of the first scholars to explore the place of history in the political mind of eighteenth-century Americans. Hume's thoughts, of course, were encountered in the context of colonial politics, and most pre-revolutionary readers explicitly cited him as him as a defender of liberty, not as a Tory opponent. John Adams, John Dickinson, Alexander Hamilton all incorporated Hume into their political reflections, combining both abstract ideas and historical evidence to proclaim both the natural rights of man, and the historical rights of Englishmen. Hume's contemporary audience did not regard his constitutional project as essentially negative: his persistent emphasis on the rule of law, together with the slow, complex and utterly contingent ways in which commercial society evolved, and the effects of unintended and unforeseen consequences, were all pondered by American readers. His rejection of an unchanging 'ancient constitution' and dismissal of all 'speculative system of

Reviews

principles' – Whig or Tory – may have been initially shocking to readers, but by the same token cannot have been missed because it fitted no existing categories of thought. In fact, Hume was not regarded as representative of his time in any context, his anti-religious reputation often deterring potential readers or blinding less timid spirits.

Spencer devotes a separate chapter to 'Hume and Madison on Faction' arguing that Hume's *History* was even more influential than has been claimed. Like many contemporaries, Hume held that faction had ever been a potent force in political history, and that extreme factions should be strenuously prevented from forming: but for him moderate affiliation could be praiseworthy and beneficial. Having argued that men are motivated primarily by their passions, over which reasoning has some but not decisive influence, Hume inevitably confronted the political issues of majorities and minorities, of polarisation and enthusiasm, of dogma and over-simplification. Indeed, he faced the perennial challenge to all advocates of 'moderation': first, how are the appropriate limits to thought and action to be determined *in advance*, and second, how is fanaticism to be effectively countered by moderation? Like his mentor Cicero, Hume grappled with such issues from the 1730s onwards in almost all his works, and the more he was inclined to dismiss all philosophical 'systems' or theories (or ideologies) as damaging to society and individual fulfilment, the more acute the problem became. As is well known, Smith and Hume disagreed on the extent to which religious factions were the most intractable, and Spencer shows how religious toleration and diversity became a central issue for Madison – as it was for Hume in the *History*.

After the American and French Revolutions, American and British readers alike strove to establish or re-establish a Christian society, and writers associated with religious scepticism or deism were loudly denounced. Such attitudes were clearly evident at the very public death of Hume, and in the invective directed at Smith for his famous letter to Strahan on Hume's character. Moreover, after 1800 American writers were keener to differentiate their political thought from European precursors, even if they had earlier openly confessed extensive debts.

Reviews

Spencer provides numerous fascinating quotations from known and unknown writers, including a devastating put-down of 1774, by a young woman of a priggish male graduate: ‘big with your own importance [having discovered] that our sex, as they never go, and *never ought to go* to college, have no business with such writers as *Newton, or Locke, or Clarke, or Berkeley, or Hume*’.

Aside from a brief but informative ‘Afterword’, the book confines its attention to the eighteenth-century. For the succeeding decades the magisterial volumes of Michael O’Brien should be consulted: *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South 1810-1850* (Chapel Hill, 2004). O’Brien shows how many College Professors in the South (some named by Spencer), often recently arrived from Europe, discussed Hume in some detail in their classes, sermons and writings, long before he became an inspiration to William James.

Historians in many areas of enquiry will quickly perceive the importance of Spencer’s book; philosophers still flouncing about in one established Anglo-American tradition will parrot their moronic rejection of any contextual knowledge as irrelevant to the transcendental demands of philosophy. And this, in spite of the fact that Spencer has done half their work for them, with his splendid ‘revisionist findings’ (p.189).

Peter Jones
Edinburgh

Books received

David Bebbington ed. with Kenneth Dix and Alan Ruston, *Protestant Nonconformist Texts: vol. 3, The Nineteenth Century*, series editor Alan P F Sell, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2006, pp.420; ISBN 978-0-7546-3850-2, £75.00, \$144.95.

Alan P F Sell ed. with David J Hall and Ian Sellers, *Protestant Nonconformist Texts: vol. 2 The Eighteenth Century*, series editor Alan P F Sell, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2006, pp.478, ISBN 978-0-7546-3853-7, £75.00, \$144.95.

Reviews

Emilio Mazza & Emanuele Ronchetti eds., *New Essays on David Hume*, Franco Angeli, Milan, 2007, pp.480, ISBN 978-88-464-8336-2, €27.00.

David M Thompson ed. with J H Y Briggs and John Munsey Turner, *Protestant Nonconformist Texts: vol. 4, The Twentieth Century*, series editor Alan P F Sell, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2007, pp.432; ISBN 978-0-7546-4013-4 £75.00, \$144.95.

Servanne Woodward ed., *Lumen, volume/tome XXV*, 2006, Selected Proceedings of the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies / Travaux choisis de la Société canadienne d'étude du dix-huitième siècle. Academic Printing and Publishing, Kelowna, B.C., ISSN 1209-3696; 323pp., pbk, Cdn\$36.95 (Canadian); US\$37.95 (U.S.A.); Cdn\$50/US\$42/£23/€34 (World)