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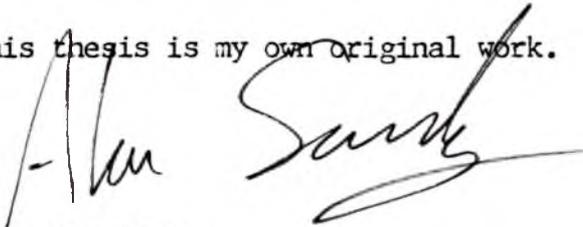
ALAN JOHN SAUNDERS.

'BE CANDID WHERE WE CAN': THE RATIONAL DISSENT OF JOSEPH PRIESTLEY

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the  
Australian National University.

July 1989.

This thesis is my own original work.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Alan Saunders', written in black ink.

Alan Saunders.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ABSTRACT

This essay locates the origins of the religious and political radicalism of Joseph Priestley in his early abandonment of calvinism: having deprived himself of a powerful, subjective system of explanation, he sought a view of the world that could be justified by entirely objective criteria. He was assisted in this project by the psychological theory of associationism - which purports to provide an empirical explanation of mental activity - and by the concept of candour: which in the eighteenth century embodied not only frankness but also a certain generosity of spirit and a willingness to engage in unacrimonious debate.

In the central chapters of this essay, four aspects of his work are examined: his activity as an historian (and to some extent as a scientist, an historian of nature), his theology and preaching, his philosophical writings and his political theory, in each of these areas, his work is marked by concern for objectivity and devotion to associationism. He saw history as a providential mechanism in which mental associations played an essential role and he looked to history to provide empirical, objective justification for Christian belief. He found, however, that there were some Christian dogmas - notably that of Christ's divinity - which could not be so justified, and he abandoned them. He thus came to oppose (even more strongly than orthodox dissenters) the religious foundations of the British state; he advocated instead a candid free market in ideas (by means of which God's providence could operate unhindered).

The final chapter describes how this project came to grief, having written an historical account of the growth of those Christian doctrines to which he was opposed, Priestley hoped that he could engage in candid conversation with his critics. But he underestimated the

alarm which his opinions provoked, especially in the years after the fall of the Bastille: the debate grew heated, he was publically vilified and, at last, forced into exile.

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Together let us beat this ample field;  
The latent tract, the giddy heights explore  
Of all who blindly creep or sightless soar;  
Eye Nature's walks, shoot Folly as it flies  
And catch the Manners living as they rise;  
Laugh where we must, be candid where we can;  
But vindicate the ways of God to Man.

Alexander Pope, An Essay on Man

Together let us beat this ample Field.  
... Be candid where we can,  
But vindicate the Ways of God to Man.

Epigraph to Joseph Priestley and Richard Price,  
A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism  
and Philosophical Necessity

## CHAPTER ONE

### EPISODES IN THE LIFE OF JOSEPH PRIESTLEY: FROM 1733 TO 1780.

In actual fact, clarity is a purely rhetorical attribute, not a quality of language in general, which is possible at all times and in all places, but only the ideal appendage to a certain type of discourse, that which is given over to a permanent intention to persuade.

Roland Barthes, Writing Degree Zero

#### I.

Joseph Priestley was born on March 23 1733, and he was born once only. A second birth, that rebirth in the Holy Spirit whereby alone could salvation be attained, had, he came to believe, been denied him. The discovery that this was so caused the young Joseph the greatest torment; and, though he recovered from his distress, he was never to enjoy that powerful sense of assurance which those who have undergone conversion know. So, denied subjective assurance, he sought objective certainty and, in a long and varied career, he carried this search into many fields: into theology, philosophy, science and politics. In each of these fields he rejected implicit faith and in each of them he dug deep to uncover the roots of belief.

The moral of Priestley's story and of this essay lies not in the psychological origins of his radicalism - though I shall shortly try to justify the bald and speculative account of it given in the previous paragraph - but in the predicament to which he had brought himself by

leaving his father's house. One of the great attractions of the Calvinism which he abandoned in adolescence is that it provides a way out of what Richard Popkin has called 'the intellectual crisis of the reformation'. By abandoning Calvinism, Priestley plunged himself back into the crisis and so needed to find a new means of resolution.

In Popkin's account, the crisis has its origins in Luther's defiance of the Holy See. To defy Rome was to challenge the criterion by which the truths of scripture had for centuries been ascertained. But how can such a criterion, once challenged, be either defended or refuted? Where is the criterion accepted by all the contending parties according to which this criterion and its rivals may be judged? 'In the battle to establish which criterion of faith was true,' writes Popkin, 'a sceptical attitude arose among certain thinkers, primarily as a defense of Catholicism.'<sup>1</sup> These Catholic theologians would ask how the Protestant, who claims to found his faith upon Scripture, knows that he has interpreted the Scriptures correctly. How, indeed, does he know that the Bible is the word of God? How does he know which books constitute the Holy Scripture? The Roman Catholic answer is that unaided human reason cannot help us to such knowledge; the implication is that, where reason fails us, we have no alternative but to turn to the authority of the Church. But the sceptical project can be carried much further before this or any other stop is put to it. Montaigne showed that it could be carried as far as the ancient sceptics had carried it, putting into question all the evidence of the senses and even the faculty of reason itself.

Eventually, a solution would be found to these doubts in the form of what Popkin calls 'mitigated scepticism': while admitting the force of the sceptical assault, mitigated scepticism allowed that, though our knowledge of the world may fall short of mathematical certainty, yet it is probable enough for most of the purposes of life. The growth of mitigated scepticism in the seventeenth century coincided, of course, with the rise of empirical science; and science, as well as religion, was in need of standards of proof less rigid than those which the sceptics assumed. The result was the abandonment of the old scholastic dichotomy between scientia - certain knowledge, the preserve of logic and the mathematical sciences - and opinio, the merely probable knowledge that belonged to the humanities, to rhetoric and the empirical sciences. In its place was put a continuum of knowledge, stretching from fiction to the morally certain. And, though standards of proof were now less formal, the scientific enterprise imposed a new obligation to assess the value of testimony: both the testimony of one's own senses and the testimony of others.<sup>2</sup>

Though many Calvinists were involved with the new science, these new standards of knowledge did not touch their theology at all. For the Calvinist, God is so infinitely removed from humankind that knowledge of him is inaccessible to human reason. Certain knowledge of God's grace can be had only when God chooses to make himself known in some great revolution of the spirit. It follows, then, that to abandon Calvinism without either abandoning Christianity or embracing Roman Catholicism is to find oneself back in the grip of the sceptical crisis of the Reformation. This is what happened to Priestley and to many others who

had been raised as Calvinists in the England of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Though the modification in standards of proof which I have mentioned is commonly associated with the early Royal Society and the first Newtonians, it would be a mistake to suppose that matters had been resolved by the mid-eighteenth century. On the contrary, the persistence of anti-Newtonian and non-Newtonian theodicies and the controversy which surrounded the work of David Hume indicate that these were still live issues. So Protestants like Priestley, seeking some new and secure ground of belief, did so in an atmosphere of intellectual turmoil. Out of this turmoil arose the notion of 'Rational Dissent'. This came to mean two things: firstly, a determination to find objective justification for religious belief in either the books of scripture or the book of nature; secondly, an opposition to all civil jurisdiction over religious belief and practice.<sup>3</sup> For religious dissent in England still laboured under legislative restriction: by the Corporation Act of 1661, nobody could enter upon civic or municipal office who had not taken communion according to the Anglican rite within a year previous to his election; by the Test Act of 1673, all who held office, either civil or military, under the Crown had to not only to take communion but also pledge oaths of allegiance and supremacy and repudiate the doctrine of transubstantiation.

Acts of Indemnity, passed almost annually after 1727, enabled Protestant Dissenters to evade the Acts by the means of 'occasional conformity', by taking the sacrament after rather than before election to office. Nonetheless the existence of such legislation reminds us of

the nature of the society in which the crisis of the Reformation arose. It was a society in which all thought was - or was supposed to be - so unified that religious dissent looked like political dissent. This is the world which Peter Laslett has memorably called 'the world we have lost': a world of small groups, in which the principal unit of economic organisation was the family; in which the affective relationships which govern life in the family also governed other connections, political as well as economic, so that political factions were described as the 'friends' of their leading figure ('Mr. Pitt's friends', 'the King's friend's'). Though Dissenters could not be full members of this patriarchal system of loyalty and patronage, it would be a mistake to suppose that they stood completely outside it: their catechism reminded them that, 'The fifth commandment requireth the preserving the honor of, and performing the duties belonging to, every one in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, or equals.'<sup>4</sup> But Priestley and the Rational Dissenters did devise a political philosophy that challenged the basis of the old society, and it is clear that they did so by turning on it the same radical gaze that they had brought to bear upon religious doctrine.

Priestley, though, laboured under a serious difficulty. Reason was of the greatest importance to him, but the concept of reason had, along with the standards of proof, been modified in the seventeenth century. At the height of the old society, reason, like political legitimacy, had exerted its authority downwards: it was 'candle of the Lord', a guide to wisdom. But by Priestley's time it was a merely ratiocinative faculty, incapable of action until moved by the passions.

Hume acknowledged this change in a well-known declaration: 'Reason is, and ought to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.' He was not alone; in the following chapters, we shall see that this state of affairs was recognised by thinkers much less acute than Hume: John Wesley, John Brown, the political writer, and even so incompetent a philosophaster as James Oswald. Priestley, however, did not recognise this change and much of the story that follows will be taken up with his replies to those who did recognise it.

There are various ways in which one might try to find a home in a world in which reason has lost much of its authority. One might urge the importance of direct divine illumination, which is what Wesley did; one might argue that there is a human faculty more useful than mere ratiocination, which is what was done by Oswald and the other Scottish philosophers of the commonsense school; one might assume that human society is the only proper sphere of human activity and that human society is a given and unarguable fact, in no need of rational justification, which is what Brown did. As we shall see in the following chapters, none of these solutions was acceptable to Priestley: he thought that both Wesley and the commonsense philosophers were, in their different ways, irrationalists; he thought Brown's political philosophy oppressive; and he saw Hume as little more than a destructive sceptic. Instead, he proposed an intellectual project in which objective certainty was to be sought in every area of knowledge: nothing was to be taken on trust; scriptural truth was to be sought in history, truths about the natural world in the incorrigible perceptions of the

mind. He was assisted in this project by the psychological theory of associationism, which purported to show how the complex workings of the mind could arise from very simple basic operations.

As Priestley saw it, his project could be carried on only if the mind was cleared of prejudice and people were prepared to engage in unacrimonious debate. Hence the importance to him of the concept of candour, which in the eighteenth century implied not only frankness but also generosity of spirit. (The importance of candour in the eighteenth-century had, of course, a lot to do with the new significance of testimony as a source of knowledge.)

He failed. The final chapter of this essay tells the story of his failure; the chapters before it describe the construction of the intellectual vehicle which he was eventually to crash against the wall of the old society.

## II.

Joseph Priestley was born into the very heart of English religious Dissent. His father - a man of strong religious principles, who prayed morning and evening with his family - was a cloth-worker, and as such he followed a trade whose association with religious radicals went back to the Lollards of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Joseph's mother died when he was six, but he remembered her as a pious woman who taught him his catechism, gave him his earliest instruction and impressed him 'with a clear idea of the distinction of property, and of the importance of attending to it.' Upon her death, Mr. Priestley found himself alone with a family larger than he could look after unaided and in 1742 young

Joseph was sent into the care of his widowed aunt, Mrs. Keighley. She, though 'truly Calvinistic in principle', was, Priestley tells us, 'far from confining salvation to those who thought as she did on religious subjects': all Dissenting ministers, no matter how obnoxious their principles might be to her, were welcome in her home. Whilst under her care, Joseph went to the local free school and also received instruction in Hebrew from a Dissenting minister, who later opened a school of his own which Joseph attended. However, ill health caused him to leave school, and the rest of his education was private - conducted in part by 'Mr. Haggerstone, a Dissenting minister in the neighbourhood' and 'Mr. Thomas, a Baptist minister' - until 1752, when he went up to Daventry Academy.<sup>5</sup>

He was brought up amongst the members of the Heckmondwike Independent Church. By the age of four could repeat by heart the (very long) Shorter Catechism, agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, ... Anno 1648, a document, the work of the English Presbyterian ministry, which sets out in lucid detail the Calvinist scheme of salvation: the complex mechanism of election, justification, adoption, and sanctification. He was a precocious child and, by the age of thirteen, he was acquainted not only with the Catechism but also with most of the works of Bunyan. And so by the time of the illness which nearly killed him - a 'weakly consumptive habit' of which he writes and which his brother tells us he acquired around the age of twelve or thirteen - he was well acquainted with Calvinism at its grimmest.<sup>6</sup>

The God of the Westminster Catechism and of Bunyan's works is absolute sovereign of all. Before the creation of the world he

predestined a few of its future inhabitants to salvation and the vast majority to eternal damnation. All are born with their fate predetermined; nothing they can do will alter it. This is an important point: we are saved by faith but faith itself is a free gift of God's grace; only the elect, those already predestined to salvation, are capable of possessing a saving faith. Their conversion begins with their calling, which brings them to awareness of their sinful state. It is not a sudden experience, but neither can it occur without a broken heart.

The authors of the Catechism do not specifically allow that those who are saved may know certainly of their condition or that others may know of it. Their church, the Presbyterian Church, must therefore necessarily include both the elect and the damned. But Priestley's parents and aunt were Independents, and Independents believed that, by minute self-inspection, one might discover signs of one's spiritual condition. So their church was a gathered community of the elect. As their favourite poet told them:

We are a Garden wall'd around,  
Chosen and made peculiar ground.<sup>7</sup>

These lines are by Isaac Watts, poet and philosopher, and - with his friend the educationalist and theologian Philip Doddridge - one of the greatest Dissenting writers of the day. But though both these men, the twin pinnacles of Dissenting intellectual achievement, were Independents, the general tenor of Independent life was less rationalistic than that of life amongst the Presbyterians. The contrast is reflected in their different ways of appointing ministers: a

candidate for the Presbyterian ministry would be examined in his knowledge of philosophy, divinity and the Greek and Hebrew scriptures, but the Independents looked principally for men who could tell of their faith, repentance and religious experience. And whereas the Independents restricted their communion to those able 'to give an account of the work of grace', of the direct action of the Holy Spirit, on their souls, the Presbyterians demanded of intending members only that they live respectably and have some knowledge of Christianity.

This habit of introspection among many Calvinists drew them to keep diaries and to write autobiographies. Many of these books of religious experience were published; the greatest of them was Bunyan's Grace Abounding. They tend to follow an established pattern: the author tells of God's early mercies towards him; next, of his own unregenerate life and resistance to the gospel; then of his awakening to a sense of sin, of his struggles with Satan, and of his eventual attainment of comparative tranquillity in the light of divine mercy. Such was the literature that the young and sickly Joseph Priestley read, and he writes of it in a passage of his Memoirs that describes, I would suggest, the beginning of a conversion experience:

The sickness of my constitution. which often led me to think that I should not be long-lived, contributed to give my mind a still more serious turn; and having read many books of experiences, and, in consequence, believing that a new birth, produced by the immediate agency of the spirit of god, was necessary to salvation, and not being able to satisfy myself that I had experienced any thing of the kind, I felt occasionally such distress of mind as it is not in my power to describe, and which I still look back upon with horror. Notwithstanding I had nothing very material to reproach myself with, I often concluded that God had forsaken me, and that mine was like the case of Francis Spira, to whom, as he imagined, repentance and salvation were denied. In that state of

mind, I remember reading the account of the man in the iron cage, in the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' with the greatest perturbation.<sup>8</sup>

Francis Spira, whose story was related in a number of pamphlets, is a Protestant who becomes a Roman Catholic for worldly motives and dies in despair. Of his story, the excellent Richard Baxter, a moderate Protestant, wrote, 'The reading of Spira's case causeth or increaseth melancholy for many.'<sup>9</sup> The man in the iron cage, one of the most haunting characters in Bunyan's allegory, is similarly afflicted with despair. Once 'a fair and flourishing' Christian, he has despised Christ's righteousness and preferred the things of this world. The spirit has deserted him and he cries out:

I am now a Man of Despair, and am shut up in it, and in this Iron Cage. I cannot get out; O now I cannot ... God hath denied me repentance; his word gives me no encouragement to believe. ... O Eternity! Eternity! How shall I grapple with the misery that I must meet with in Eternity?<sup>10</sup>

This does not seem suitable reading for an impressionable twelve year old. Nor does Grace Abounding, which Priestley had presumably read; yet it was books like these that formed the principal part of the young Joseph Priestley's literary diet.

This brings us close to what is surely the important point: according to question twenty of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, God did not condemn all mankind to eternal damnation, but, 'out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.'<sup>11</sup> The vital phrase here is 'mere good pleasure', and its precise import is very terrible indeed. So great is the distance between God and his

creation that men, however obedient they may be, could never merit any reward but damnation unless God had voluntarily held out his hand to them. The elect, those very few who have been saved, have not only done nothing to deserve this, but are incapable of doing anything to deserve it; and this incapacity is not merely contingent but logical, for God has been determined upon their salvation not merely from before their births, not merely from the creation of the world, but 'from all eternity'. As Thomas Hooker said in the mid-seventeenth century: God, 'to show the sovereign freedom of his pleasure', will deny salvation to some who have begged it of him and have lived virtuous lives, whilst granting it to others 'who never sought him.'<sup>12</sup> By thus stressing the transcendence of God, the Calvinists had created a system that was beautifully rational, coherent and closed. The product of this inhuman mechanism was inevitably, as Max Weber points out, 'a feeling of unprecedented inner loneliness of the single individual. In what was for the man of the age of the Reformation the most important thing in life, his eternal salvation, he was forced to follow his path alone to meet a destiny which had been decreed for him from eternity.'<sup>13</sup>

It is an odd feature of Priestley's Memoirs, most of which were written in 1781, that they begin rather like an attempt at a spiritual autobiography, though written in a style more suited to an age of reason: cooler, less introspective, more given to dwelling upon outward and secular circumstances. Thus, we have the recital of God's early mercies towards him and of the happiness of a Calvinistic home: 'Looking back, as I often do upon this period of my life,' he writes, 'I see the greatest reason to be thankful to God for the pious care of my parents

and friends, in giving me religious instruction.' We have too the mention of early sinning. This was necessary in any spiritual autobiography, though the sins were often of an apparently trivial nature, and the only one that Priestley records is the removal from his uncles's house of a pin with which he had been playing.<sup>14</sup> In most autobiographies the sinning usually becomes more significant than this. Priestley cannot, or will not, furnish his readers with any more interesting sins, but his account follows the pattern in going on to mention a monitory endangering of its subject's life. Next comes the spiritual awakening. For some this was occasioned by a sermon, for Bunyan by hearing some poor women of Bedford 'sitting at a door in the Sun, and talking about the things of God', for Priestley by the reading of books of experiences. But here the resemblance between Priestley's book and the classic spiritual autobiography beings to come apart. It would appear that he had reached the earliest of the several stages of the Calvinist conversion process, a consciousness of sin, but that he had not been granted repentance; which may well be what he means by invoking the cases of Spira and of the man in the iron cage: they were both men who were profoundly aware of their sins but, having been denied repentance, they could do nothing about it. This is why an iron cage is so appropriate an image for the despair of a Calvinist whose heart God has hardened: he can see out but he cannot get out; his prison is wholly private, no-one can rescue him, but from it he can watch Christian walking to the celestial city.

In an excellent essay on The Puritan Way of Death, David E. Stannard draws attention to modern psychological studies which have

shown that the most persistent and basic of the fears with which young children associate death is that of separation from their parents. In New England, Puritan sermons played on this fact: congregation were told that on judgement day reprobate children would see their own parents concur in their damnation.<sup>15</sup> Priestley, harbouring fond memories of his pious mother and enjoying the tender care of his pious aunt, may well have been particularly tormented by such doctrine: he was surrounded by people who had experienced the second birth that was denied him and whose love for him would turn to condemnation on the day of judgement. The important point, then, is this: the content of Calvinist theology is deterministic, the tone of Calvinist preaching and of Bunyan's writings is exhortatory. The young Joseph Priestly, already in a physically weakened state, was at once being exhorted to do something and told that there was nothing much that he could do.

In fact, Priestley nowhere tells us what, if anything, he did do. Having written of his illness, his distress, and his failure to experience a new birth, he changes tense in his next paragraph:

I imagine that even these conflicts of mind were not without their use, as they led me to think habitually of God and a future state. And though my feelings were, then, no doubt, too full of terror, what remained of them was a deep reverence for divine things, and in time a pleasing satisfaction which which can never be effaced, and, I hope, was strengthened as I have advanced in life, and acquired more rational notions of religion. The remembrance, however, of what I sometimes felt in that state of ignorance and darkness, gives me a peculiar sense of the value of rational principles of religion, and of which I can give but an imperfect description.<sup>16</sup>

With this paragraph, which takes us from 'terror' to 'rational principles', we leave the world of Calvinist theology and enter upon an age self-consciously enlightened. It might almost be said that we leave

a world of religious feeling and enter one of theological thinking. This passage, from the very early pages of Priestley's Memoirs, is almost the last in which we are afforded any substantial glimpse of the author's inner life.

It may well be that between these two paragraphs, between the terror and the rational principles, lies a change of heart so great as to constitute a genuine conversion. Certainly, Priestley's journey out of 'ignorance and darkness' seems to have been dramatic enough to fit the account given by the psychologist of religion Walter Houston Clark, who defines 'conversion' as: 'that type of spiritual growth or development which involves an appreciable change of direction concerning religious ideas and behaviour. Most clearly and typically it denotes an emotional episode of illuminating suddenness, which may be deep or superficial, though it may also come about by a more gradual process.' Clark finds that studies of the phenomenon lend themselves to analysis into three stages: first, a period of unrest, perhaps merely of vague depression, formerly called 'conviction of sin', often arising from the potential convert's becoming aware of the gap between the soul and the object of its worship; next, the conversion crisis itself; and third, after the crisis has been brought to a climax, a sense of peace and harmony. Such experiences often take place in adolescence: a time of change, doubt and restlessness, when ideas of God become more abstract and less literal. It is also a time when the child begins to long to join the adult community, and so, if the community is a religious one, it will be natural for the conversion experiences of its adolescents to take the form which the local model suggests.<sup>17</sup> The shape of these

passages of Priestley's Memoirs suggest the memory of a time when he may well have tried in just this way to fit his own experience to the available model. But this, as we have seen, he could not do.

Indeed, the crisis itself - that stage in the conversion process where the mind is torn between two incompatibles, between its imperfect self and its idea of perfection - is not likely to be resolved by trying. As William James suggests, 'to exercise the personal will is still to live in the region where the imperfect self is the thing most emphasised.' In these circumstances, the personal will must relax; it must allow God or its own unconscious to take over.<sup>18</sup> But there is nothing in Priestley's subsequent history to suggest that such self-surrender would ever have come easily to him. The exercise of the personal will, of its questioning and theorising faculties, was (it later became apparent) what he lived for. And he was indeed attracted by two incompatibles: by Calvinism, which demands introspection and surrender to the will of an absolute divine sovereign, and his own nature, which was extrovert and self-sufficient.

Of course, the extrovert and the self-sufficient tend, on the whole, not to be candidates for conversion. They are what James, in a famous and useful piece of labelling, calls the 'once-born': optimistic, little given to soul-searching or to metaphysics, they are at home in a world ruled not by a stern judge but by a merciful and kindly God. The autobiography, as opposed to the memoir, and the spiritual autobiography in particular, is a literary medium to which they are not very readily drawn. Clark does, however, nominate as a self-portrait of a benevolent, unreflective, spiritually-shallow mind, Benjamin Franklin's

Autobiography. May we perhaps couple with it the Memoirs of Franklin's good friend Joseph Priestley?

Priestley himself provides us with an argument for not doing so. Having spoken of the 'peculiar sense of the value of rational principles of religion' which the remembrance of his 'state of ignorance and darkness' gives him, he goes on to say that, 'the want of these peculiar feelings is compensated by something of greater value, which arises to others from always having seen things in a just and pleasing light; from having always considered the Supreme Being as the kind parent of all his offspring.'<sup>19</sup> But this, he adds, has not been his experience. He seems to be telling us that he has not enjoyed that gradual and pleasing growth, under the eye of a benign and merciful God, which is the prerogative of the once-born. Instead he has struggled through pain out of darkness. But can we really, following James' classification, rank Priestley with the 'twice-born', those inconsolably sick souls, weighed down with a sense of the evil of the world and the transience of its pleasures, who can be made well only by some great revolution of spirit? Obviously not; but, though James appears to be structuring his dichotomy around an event in the life of the soul - its rebirth - he should better be seen as offering us two ideal types of personality. The culture in which Priestley was raised takes as normative the experiences of one of these types: the Westminster Catechism rationalises and classifies these experiences and Bunyan's work depicts them in painful detail. But not everybody could be forced into the mould. The experience which Priestley reports in his Memoirs and which he claims still to look back upon with horror was not a rebirth - he was

not at all one of the twice-born - but it was, or may have been, a conversion experience: he emerged from it with a picture of God more suited to his own extrovert, optimistic nature. There was no breaking of the heart <sup>or</sup> ~~of~~ subduing of the will: he was a once-born Christian.

The reason for invoking James' categories of the once-born and the twice-born is that they encourage us to a particular arrangement of events and character traits. Reading the Memoirs with James' terms in mind, we can see much of Priestley's character - his philosophical character as well as his character as a man - crystallising around a single, formative experience. Of course, we must be wary of looking upon any autobiographical work as a transparent window on actual events; two empiricist philosophers much more distinguished than Priestley, John Stuart Mill and Bertrand Russell, both describe at length personal crises, secular conversion experiences, for which no evidence can be found other than their own accounts. Events may not have occurred as Priestley describes them, or, if they did, they may not bear the interpretation that I have placed upon them; but two things need to be said about the idea that Priestley underwent a formative, 'conversion' experience. Firstly, it is a plausible idea given the Calvinist milieu in which he was raised. The diary of his younger contemporary Thomas Belsham, who was brought up in just such an environment, is a vivid record of obsessive self-examination: 'My state of mind through this week has been variable,' wrote Belsham at the age of seventeen. 'Sometimes I am, at least I think myself to be, pretty deeply affected with divine things, but at other times I am quite hardened.' Belsham doubts his own sincerity; he fears irresolution; he pours out his soul

'with great freedom of speech' in his private devotions but finds 'this tender, affectionate frame' much diminished by the time he goes to supper and too cool to be fanned back into flame at bedtime. His attention is fixed entirely upon what he thinks and feels rather than upon what he does or says, and over everything he writes, over every punctilious observation of every flickering of mood and motive, lowers a single, inescapable terror: 'I am ready to fear that God has not elected me, and that I am irrevocably doomed to everlasting misery.'<sup>20</sup> All this happened to Belsham while he was a student, enjoying the relatively liberal education offered at Daventry Academy, and he gives us no reason to suppose that either he or his tutors considered his behaviour in any way out of the ordinary (monitoring and writing down one's 'experience' was, indeed, a course recommended by Doddridge himself). We cannot assume that the atmosphere at Heckmondwike was any less claustrophobic than that at Daventry. Priestley, who was latter to deprecate such introspection - Christ, he said, he seeks to command our obedience, not our feelings - had, no doubt, close personal knowledge of it.

Secondly, the idea of Priestley's conversion has at least a certain symbolic force in that the rejection of Calvinism - with its rebirths, its elections, its justifications and its sanctifications - is the single decisive act from which follows all his subsequent intellectual career. For, by abandoning Calvinism, he had deprived himself of a source of extraordinary assurance. Weber writes thus of the experience of the Calvinistic converted:

The phenomenon of the religious sense of grace is combined ... with the feeling of certainty that grace is the sole product of an objective power and not in the least to be attributed to personal worth. The powerful feeling of light-hearted assurance, in which the tremendous pressure of their sense of sin is released,

apparently breaks over them with elemental force and destroys every possibility of the belief that this over-powering gift of grace could owe anything to their own co-operation or could be connected with achievements or qualities of their own faith and will.<sup>21</sup>

But it would appear that no such feelings of light-hearted assurance had broken over Priestley's soul. He could not enjoy that feeling of certainty, which the converted enjoy, that their grace is the gift of an objective power. A Calvinist needs no objective or external principle with which to legitimate his system of beliefs. The system is an entirely closed one, and its principle of certainty is not subjective but inner and fugitive (which is presumably why there are so few Calvinist philosophers: Calvinists do not need to have their beliefs validated by the universe).<sup>22</sup> But Priestley had, as he believed, split it open and admitted the light. Now, if he was to open the eyes of others, he was in need of one or more objective, external principles of legitimation.

After the spiritual crisis that darkened his adolescence, the ideas of Calvinism and of gloom were ever associated in his mind. 'It has pleased God, in the course of his providence,' he wrote in 1783, 'to open my own eyes, after having been educated in all the gloom and darkness of Calvinism, and I am determined (in conjunction with my philosophical researches) to do all that I can do to open the eyes of others.' It is not at all surprising that one of his sermons should have been entitled 'Christianity, the light of the world', nor that in it he should have invited his hearers to compare the uses of light with the nature and benefits of the Christian religion and the character of its founder.<sup>23</sup>

The imagery, though particularly attractive to Priestley, was not a personal quirk; it formed part of the Rational Dissenters' image of themselves as enlightened people. As late as 1828, we find Lucy Aikin - granddaughter of Priestley's colleague, John Aikin, and niece of his friend Mrs. Barbauld - telling a distinguished co-religionist that, 'Long before my time, ... my kindred - the Jennings, the Belshams, my excellent grandfather Aikin, and his friend and tutor Doddridge - had begun to break forth out of the chains and darkness of Calvinism, and their manners softened with their system.'<sup>24</sup> As we can see from this roll of honour, the young Joseph Priestley, coughing consumptively over his Pilgrim's Progress and pondering his eternal destiny, was not without earthly allies. Already the sensibility of the age had turned against the remorseless theology of Bunyan's novel, and James Foster, enlightened divine, great preacher and enemy of mystery in religion, was wont to say that the only character in the entire book who spoke sense was Ignorance: 'a very brisk lad', who will believe in Christ but not in the evil of his own heart; who relies for salvation upon the religion of his country, on prayer, fasting and almsgiving; who has been 'a good Liver' and is damned eternally on the last page.<sup>25</sup>

In his long debate with Christian, Ignorance does indeed sound rather like a Rational Dissenter, and Priestley was before long sufficiently of Ignorance's way of thinking to be refused admission to his aunt's church. Interrogating him 'on the subject of the sin of Adam', the church elders found that he 'appeared not to be quite orthodox, not thinking that all the human race (supposing them not have any sins of their own) were liable to the wrath of God, and the pains of

hell for ever, on account of that sin only. ...'<sup>26</sup> He had some time before been much troubled by his inability to feel 'a proper repentance for the sins of Adam', but the conversation of more liberal minds - Mr. Haggerstone his tutor and Mr Walker, a local preacher - had done much, he says, to open his eyes and by the age of nineteen he was an Arminian: that is to say, he followed the sixteenth-century theologian Jacobus Arminius in repudiating the doctrine of predestination. Though he had 'by no means rejected the doctrines of the Trinity, or that of Atonement' he was now heterodox enough to be unable to concur in the desire of his aunt and relatives that he attend a strict Calvinist academy in London. Instead he went, in September 1752, to the new academy at Daventry.

### III.

Education, general education, was of the greatest importance to Dissenters; they believed that children had an inalienable right to it and parents an inalienable duty to provide it. Denied access to the two English universities - which, as ecclesiastical institutions, were closed to Dissenters and to Papists - they founded academies of their own and the best of them were very good indeed: they made a contribution to English life far out of proportion to their size and the number of their pupils.

When Priestley enrolled, his Academy had only just moved to Daventry from Northampton, where it had been run for more than twenty years by Philip Doddridge, its founder. Worn out by a life of incessant toil, Doddridge had died eleven months before, but the Academy bore the

impress of his mind and so did Priestley's education. Doddridge was an educationalist of original mind and wide interests. He had introduced English as the language of instruction, which meant, as Alexander Gordon has pointed out, that 'lectures in English would be illustrated from English sources, at once more easily and rapidly consulted, and modern in their range of thought'.<sup>27</sup>

As we have seen, Priestley's scientific education had already begun. It was Mr. Haggerstone who had taught him his geometry, algebra and mathematics; and at the same time Priestley read, 'but with little assistance from him', W.J. 'sGravesande's Elements of Natural Philosophy, Watts' Logick and John Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding. Since he finds it worthy of mention that Haggerstone had been taught by Newton's pupil Colin Maclaurin, he may also have by this time have read Maclaurin's excellent textbook, An Account of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophic Discoveries (he certainly possessed a copy later in life).<sup>28</sup> But though the Academy did not introduce him to science - and though its lectures on science, having so much else to compete with in the curriculum, cannot have been very advanced - it may well have afforded him his first glimpse of scientific practice. In most cases the students at Daventry used the same scientific textbooks as their contemporaries at Cambridge, but presumably they learned their science as the students at Northampton had learned it: by experiment. This certainly was an important innovation.

Priestley, however, was most grateful to the Academy not for this but for something else: 'It was a reference to "Dr. Hartley's Observations on Man" in the course of our lectures, that first brought

me acquainted with that performance, which immediately engaged my closest attention, and produced the greatest, and in my opinion the most favourable effect on my general turn of thinking through my life.'<sup>29</sup>

Hartley's book - which Priestley, incomprehensibly, found both stimulating and affecting - is one of those works which, by the systematic application of one or two easily-grasped principles, seem suddenly to illuminate vast areas of human existence. In this case, the big idea is an alliance of Newton's speculations about the aether with a doctrine of the association of ideas drawn principally from Locke. According to Newton's Principia, the aether is, or may be, a subtle medium or 'spirit', filling the entire universe and pervading all material objects. It is posited as a means of explaining the cohesion of such objects: through the aether are propagated those forces of attraction that draw together the particles of which solid bodies are comprised. Moreover, we may also, Newton proposes, account for physical sensation 'by the vibrations of this spirit, mutually propagated along the solid filaments of the nerves, from the outward organs of sense to the brain, and from the brain to the muscles.'<sup>30</sup> Here Newton's speculations end and Hartley's begin. Hartley suggests that the vibrations in the brain - the movements back and forth of its constituent particles, movements short enough and small enough not to disturb the brain itself - set up sensations, and these sensations come by repetition to be associated with the particular material object that gave rise to the original vibrations in the aether. (This can happen of course, only if sensations remain in the mind for some little time after the objects which cause them have been removed, but the phenomenon of

persistence of vision - extended by analogy to the other senses - demonstrates that this is indeed the case.) The repetition of sensation thus gives us our stock of what Hartley calls 'simple ideas of sensation'. Now, if two or more sensations are impressed upon the brain at exactly the same time or in successive instants of time, then they may by repetition come to be associated together. The result of this will be that any one of these sensations alone will be able to excite in the mind the simple ideas generated by the others. There are innumerable instances of this, says Hartley; for example, the name, taste, smell or tangible qualities of a natural body excite in our minds the idea of its visible appearance. Of course, this means that such often-repeated sensations are never to be had in an unmodified form: every experience leaves its trace in the shape of faint vibrations which may, to a greater or lesser degree, divert from their course the vibrations set up by the object immediately before us. Thus it is that our experiences of the smell of a rose is modified by association with our ideas of the feel of a rose and of its appearance (and also, presumably its name; so that a rose by any other name might not smell as sweet).

Ideas, then, function in Hartley's psychology much as elementary particles do in Newton's physics: their mutual interactions - almost infinitely complex but in principle open to analysis - account for all the phenomena before us. Or, as Hartley puts it, 'simple Ideas will run into complex ones, by Means of Association.'<sup>31</sup>

The essential and most original aspect of Hartley's principle of association is his premise that the ideas thus associated need not have

what Locke calls 'a natural Correspondence and Connexion one with another.'<sup>32</sup> It is not logical rapport but mere contiguity that unites them. In this respect, associations function in the same way as the conditioned reflexes made famous by one of Hartley's intellectual descendants, I.V. Pavlov: the bell rings and the dog salivates, simply because the sound of a bell ringing has come through repetition to be associated with the serving of dinner, not because there is any logical connection between bells and food.<sup>33</sup> Locke had made use of this sort of association - 'This strong Combination of Ideas, not ally'd by Nature' - but only to account for defects in reason. There were, he said, many examples of it (as when people come to associate pain with the room in which an event painful to them has taken place, even though there is nothing painful about the room itself), but his chief purpose in mentioning it was to warn parents and teachers: they would be well advised to 'think it worth their while diligently to watch and carefully to prevent the undue Connexion of Ideas in the Minds of young People'.<sup>34</sup> By extending the principle of associations to account for the connections of any ideas whatever, Hartley has added considerably to the explanatory power of Lockean psychology.

According to Locke, the bricks out of which are constructed all that our minds contain are 'simple ideas'. Some of these derive from reflection - from, that is, the mind's observation of its own workings - but the primary source of such ideas is our sensory experience of objects external to us. There is no source of ideas but these two, sensation and reflection, and the mind can have no ideas at all until

the senses have begun to allow them in. Until then it is a blank slate: the famous tabula rasa of classical empiricism.

Locke's 'simple ideas' are, then, pretty much the same as Hartley's 'ideas of sensation' (though Hartley does not allow of reflection as a source of ideas). The two philosophers differ, however, in their accounts of what happens to the mind once it is furnished with ideas. According to Locke, the mind, passive in the reception of simple ideas, is active in forming complex ideas out of them. It combines, it compares and it abstracts, all at its own will and pleasure. But Locke gives no account of how it acquires the power or the volition to carry out these activities, and any attempt to draw such an account from what he does say is likely to arrive at a doctrine much like Hartley's. For Hartley goes beyond Locke in making the mind almost entirely the product of its environment: sensations, combining in accordance with the principle of associations, account for all the mind's ideas, the complex as well as the simple. The mind forms ideas in obedience to a universal law and not solely at its own will and pleasure, though it will naturally learn to shun violent vibrations, which are painful, and to seek more moderate ones, which give pleasure. Indeed, it is out of these simple pleasures that are constructed not only the higher pleasures but also the moral sense; and it is from the complex interactions of pleasing ideas that sympathy at last emerges, and, after sympathy, altruism and the love of God.

So the theory of associations appears to redeem one of the most alluring promises of empiricism: it offers us something for nothing, or almost nothing. Hartley purports to show how a mind that is truly a

blank slate, with no innate capacities and little in the way of volition, can acquire a rich and complex body of ideas, refined intellectual and artistic tastes and a moral sense. In fact, though, this happy result has not been obtained without cost. Locke had good cause to restrict the scope of associations largely to derangements of reasoning, for serious difficulties arise when the environment is invoked as almost the sole means of accounting for the shape and content of the mind.

If the mind is made up of mental atoms, called 'ideas', and if these atoms exist in a one-to-one correlation with objects or events in the external world, and if it is this correlation rather than any rational principle that governs the way these atoms are put together, then it is reasonable to ask how they have come to be put together in an apparently ordered way. After all, there is nothing very orderly about the way in which a newly-born baby, dragged from the womb into noise and brightness and confusion, is exposed to the world. And the impressionable mind of the infant may easily form illogical associations, as Locke pointed out.

Succinctly put, the problem is this: given our partial view of the world, how can mere repetition of experience enable us to form reliable generalisations about it? What we have here, of course, is a version of the philosophical problem of induction, which had hitherto been confined to the domain of the natural sciences. By making the mind to be so much the product of its environment, Hartley has brought the problem indoors: our basic beliefs - that glass is brittle, that fire will burn - are now

seen to be of a piece with the most remote scientific hypothesis, and as problematic.

This had not happened to Locke. What he has to say about the mind can reasonably be read as a philosophical account of the nature of our concepts rather than as a psychological account of the way in which we happen to acquire them. Though he does talk about the acquisition of concepts, his attention is largely focussed elsewhere: not on their origin but on their status, their extent, their relation to experience and to language. Hartley, on the other hand, tries to develop an account that is at once both philosophical and psychological. He is in general agreement with Locke as to the compounded or molecular nature of our ideas, and his account of them is, like Locke's, analytic: that is, he seeks to show how most complex concepts may be broken down into their simpler constituent parts. But, seeking to explain how these concepts came to be so constituted, Hartley also offers an account that is not analytic but synthetic. Here - in psychological or historical mode - he describes how sensations are transformed into simple ideas and simple ideas into complex ones. This double method of analysis and synthesis is perfectly in accord with Newtonian orthodoxy but it will not work here. In the first place, no analysis that Hartley offers of our concepts can break them down into anything like the confused state of our earliest experiences. Of course, this would not matter much if Hartley's work were merely analytical - a philosophical analysis can be a promissory note; not the trick itself but a demonstration that the trick can in principle be managed - but if Hartley's work were merely analytical it would not be very different to Locke's. It is, in fact,

the synthetic, psychological aspect of the Observations on Man that makes it look like a significant advance on the Essay Concerning Human Understanding. Unfortunately, none of Hartley's attempts at synthesis can possibly explain how the bright, buzzing chaos into which we are born can be sorted out into the comparatively tidy view that we come to have of the world. So his psychological account will not justify his philosophical account, nor can he reduce the tidy concepts of his philosophical account to psychological terms.

Ten years after the publication of Hartley's book, these difficulties were brilliantly laid bare by Laurence Sterne. The eponymous hero of his Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy takes it for granted that Locke's Essay is 'a history-book ... of what passes in a man's own mind' and he proceeds to demonstrate by his own attempts at autobiography what might happen were such a book to be used as template for a real history. Led astray by those strong combinations of ideas not allied by nature, against which Locke had warned, Sterne's characters can seldom keep to the straight and narrow of rational narrative. In the famous and seminal first chapter, Tristram Shandy's mother reminds her husband to wind up the clock. This is an untimely remark - it interrupts Tristram's conception and so disperses those animal spirits without which he will later be prey to many infirmities of mind and body - but it is nonetheless quite understandable in light of the fashionable metaphysics of the day. Shandy pere is in the habit of winding the clock on the first Sunday of every month and, shortly thereafter, of attending to his more intimate duties as husband. So what more natural than that, 'from an unhappy association of ideas which

have no connection in nature', his wife should have thought of the clock at such a moment? If her husband is irritated by the interruption it is because the associations which his mind has formed are not the same as her's.<sup>35</sup> For, of course, there is no guarantee at all that two different minds will form the same set of associations, which is why Sterne's characters are so often at cross purposes. Sterne speaks only of Locke and not of Hartley, but, by taking Locke seriously as the author of the history of what passes in a man's mind - that is, as a psychologist rather than as a philosopher - he beautifully depicts a world run on Hartley's principles.

There appear to be two ways of avoiding these difficulties. One is simply to assume that the law of associations is not everywhere sovereign, which is what David Hume had done, some ten years before Hartley, in his Treatise of Human Nature. Though Hume speaks of 'universal principles', his version of the principle of association is weak: it 'is not to be consider'd as an inseparable connexion' but rather 'as a gentle force, which commonly prevails. ...' Moreover, contiguity, which is the kind of association that most concerns Hartley, is for Hume only one of three kinds and by no means the most important. He seems to accord equal importance to association on grounds of resemblance, and he certainly accords much greater importance to the relation of cause and effect. This is significant: cause and effect is a relation that holds between enduring objects in the external world, not merely between impressions in the mind; so even though the relation itself may be a mental matter, Hume's analysis of it takes him away from

psychology out into the realm of natural philosophy. It therefore also takes him away from associationism.<sup>36</sup>

The other way of avoiding the chaotic fate of Tristram Shandy is Hartley's way, clearly laid out by him in the second volume of the Observations.<sup>37</sup> Suppose that the human mind is but part of a complex mechanism so providentially ordered that everything must in the long run be for the best: such a mechanism will naturally ensure that the formation of the mind is orderly and coherent. In his second volume, Hartley attempts to show that the mind is indeed part of such a great machine. 'By general Providence,' he explains, 'I mean the adjusting all Events to the greatest Good of the whole; by particular, the adjusting all to the greatest Good of each Individual; and, consequently, by both together, the adjusting the greatest Good of the Whole, and of each Individual, to each other; so that both shall fall exactly upon the same Point.'<sup>38</sup> There is nothing irregular about this providence: it operates according to the laws of cause and effect. So Hartley's doctrines regarding providence further emphasise the mind's status as a part of nature, subject in its formation and its workings to laws which hold sway throughout the created universe. He is quite frank as to the deterministic implications of all this. Religion, he says, clearly presupposes freedom of the will 'in the popular and practical Sense' - in other words, it allows that we can exert a voluntary power over our volitions - but our volitions are causally determined, and the law of associations reveals to us that this determination is ultimately physical in character. There is no effect, not even a psychological effect, without a cause, and identical causes will bring about identical

effects; we are free as it is possible to be (and certainly free enough to be accountable to God for what we do), but our freedom does not place us beyond the reach of nature's laws.

In Hartley's universe there is no absolute uncertainty. Such uncertainty as we experience is relative to our circumstances as fallible creatures of limited vision. God alone is certain in his knowledge: if he knows that a thing will happen then that thing must happen, because, of course, certain knowledge that an event will occur simply is not certain knowledge unless that event<sup>t</sup> really will occur. So determinism, as Hartley argues, is a prerequisite of divine providence: if all actions were not necessary, then God would be neither omniscient nor omnipotent, and if God were not omniscient or omnipotent then he could not exert his power providentially as he does.<sup>39</sup>

It is difficult not to suspect that it was this aspect of the Observations of Man, as much as anything else, that aroused Priestley's enthusiasm. So recently exiled from the deterministic embrace of the Puritan universe, he found here a determinism as firm as Calvin's but more benign. Hartley's book, he says in the Memoirs, converted him to 'the doctrine of necessity'; it deepened his spirit of piety 'and freed it from the rigour with which it had been tintured.'<sup>40</sup> In later life he was frequently to pay tribute to Hartley's influence and there is no doubt that associationism is a very significant element in his own work; perhaps, indeed, the most important element of all.

IV.

It is impossible to overestimate the significance to Priestley of his first looking into Hartley's Observations; certainly nothing else of comparable importance happened to him at Daventry. Presumably he missed the courses of civil government and on pneumatology, which were given in the second year and which, following Doddridge, would have made much use of the great continental jurists, Pufendorf, Grotius and Le Clerc, as well as Locke and the celebrated Whig martyr, Algernon Sidney.<sup>41</sup> But then if he was excused these course it must have been only because he was already tolerably acquainted with these authors.

Theology was of greater importance to him. Doddridge's lectures on the subject were undogmatic - charitable to all, comprehensive in their coverage of every side in controversial issues - and in this their author appears consciously to have followed in the footsteps of his great seventeenth-century predecessor, Richard Baxter. Inspired by a great hatred of the sectarian strife of his age, ever ready to associate with good men of all parties, Baxter had prided himself on being 'a CHRISTIAN, a MEER CHRISTIAN, ... of that Party which is so against Parties ...' Though he believed his religion to be scripturally-founded, he was not bibliolatrous. Much, he was convinced, had not been revealed but had been left to man's discretion. In any case, the Bible was the effect of secondary causes: it was the product of a particular time and place and was therefore to be read critically: it is our Rational faculty that proveth us men.' Things above reason were not articles of faith. His own conversion having been a very gradual awakening rather than a great revolution of spirit, he came to place

more importance on sincere desire than on spiritual achievement and to be suspicious of the orthodox Calvinist claim that a great chasm yawned between the elect and the reprobate.<sup>42</sup>

Baxter's influence was profound, especially in an age whose sensibilities were turning away from the rigours of orthodox Calvinism. He agreed with Calvin that a very few had been predestined to salvation regardless of what they thought or did upon earth, but he agreed also with the Arminians that God desired the salvation of all. Those who had not been predestined to heaven were not on that account predestined to hell: God would extend to them all necessary grace, but it was for them to decide whether to accept or to refuse it. This, with all its good-hearted inelegance, is a reconciler's doctrine. Philip Doddridge, ever careful to explain that he was not a 'high' Calvinist, was happy to place himself in the Baxterian tradition, and like Baxter he desired Christian unity - or, at least, Protestant unity - above all things. 'Your innate candour and benevolence,' wrote one of his many correspondents in 1745, 'your contempt of party distinction, joined to a worthy pursuit of usefulness and good fame, have induced you sometimes to attempt the reconciliation of parties to each other, and to show yourself a friend to both; but this is not an age for success in such schemes.'<sup>43</sup> In the interest of unity, Doddridge advised preachers to decline 'the highest points of Calvinism, even supposing them to be believed, viz. the imputation of Adam's sin, Reprobation, Irresistible grace, &c.'<sup>44</sup> In his system of divinity he concentrated on non-sectarian issues: the nature of the human mind, proofs of the existence

and attributes of God, the immortality of the soul and the genuineness of scripture.

It was, then, the spirit of Baxter that spoke to Priestley, at some remove, in the lectures he heard at Daventry. He had already met with it before - Mr. Haggerstone and Mr. Walker, whose liberal conversation had helped him through his difficulties, were both Baxterians - and it pleased him very much. He thought the course at Daventry 'exceedingly favourable to free inquiry' and looked back on it with great satisfaction:

In my time, the academy was in state peculiarly favourable to the serious pursuit of truth, as the students were about equally divided upon every question of much importance, such as liberty and necessity, the sleep of the soul, and all the articles of theological orthodoxy and heresy; in consequence of which, all these topics were subject of continual discussion. Our tutors also were of different opinions: Dr. Ashworth taking the orthodox side of every question, and Mr. Clark, the sub-tutor, that of heresy, though always with the greatest modesty.<sup>45</sup>

David Bogue and James Bennett, nineteenth-century nonconformist historians, dated the decline of Protestant Dissent from the lectures of Doddridge. Reasonably enough, they pointed out that if Doddridge and his followers really believed that the mind began as tabula rasa, then it was very wrong of them to inscribe error as well as truth upon the tablet and then to expect the innocent young to make up their own minds upon the subject. 'If such conduct be defended under the name of liberality, would it not be still more liberal,' they asked, 'to admit persons who were yet speculating whether Christianity, deism, or atheism, was more consistent with truth?'<sup>46</sup> This liberality went by the name of 'candour', and candour was a quality very popular with enlightened Dissenters.

Generally, to be candid was to value others for their sincerity and personal virtues, no matter how heretical their opinions might seem to be. This now-obsolete use of the word - to mean 'freedom from malice, kindness, sweetness' - is one of several given in the Oxford English Dictionary. A more familiar meaning of the word, as 'freedom from mental bias', dates from at least as early as the seventeenth century; and there is yet a third - 'freedom from reserve, openness, frankness' - which Watts seems to have had in mind when, talking of the prefect tutor's relations with his students, he wrote: 'He should also have much candour of soul, to pass a gentle censure on their impertinences and to pity them in their mistakes ...'<sup>47</sup>

It is by no means always clear which of these several meanings an eighteenth-century user of the word may intend by it. When, for example, Sir William Blackstone says that from Priestley's History of Electricity, 'I conceived a very favourable impression of his talents as a candid and ingenious writer', is he praising Priestley for the frankness with which he writes of the errors of electrical scientists, for the amiable disposition which causes him to mention these errors only when they have contributed to the discovery of truth, or for something else?<sup>48</sup> It is difficult not to suspect that in cases like this, 'candour' and 'candid' function merely as buzz words: candour is a quality you unreflectingly attribute to somebody you like or wish to compliment.

Even when employed with deliberation, the word was in the eighteenth century made to do an inordinate amount of work; a fact well

brought out by D.O. Thomas in his study of Priestley's good friend Richard Price, Dissenting preacher and philosopher:

The general connotation of 'candid' was possession of good character; it suggested purity, integrity, and freedom from moral blemish, and derived a special force from its association with luminosity and brilliance. More particularly, the word suggested the possession of a sweet and reasonable disposition, a freedom from malice and rancour and, above all, an unremitting zeal for the pursuit of knowledge.

Concentrating principally of this latter aspect of candour, Thomas goes on to explain that it involves 'the claim that all beliefs should be subject to rational criticism'; the assumption 'that in principle the truth can be discovered and communicated'; the belief that 'the appeal to reason is the only legitimate form of persuasion'; the requirement that we be dispassionate, patient and humble in our search for the truth; 'a sense of the equality of rational agents and a sense of community in the search for knowledge.'<sup>49</sup> Thomas can hardly be said to be offering us a definition; instead, he combines most of the meanings of the word and then extrapolates freely from them. But he is not confused: he accurately reflects the complex of ideas which the word summoned up for Dissenters of Price's day and persuasion. For them and for many of their contemporaries, candour was a much more important and a more substantial concept than we take it to be.

But it was by no means an unproblematic concept, as Bogue and Bennett - writing at a time when its lustre had considerably dimmed - were very well aware:

The misapplication of the word candour was more injurious in its effects on religious sentiments, than can now be well conceived. It was supposed to possess indescribable virtues. Candour was sounded from many a pulpit; and like charity, it was supposed to hide a multitude of sins. An orthodox minister who had candour, was to believe that an arian or socinian was a very good man; and

that if he was sincere in his opinions, and not rigid in condemning others, he ought not to be condemned himself. The influence of this idea was exceedingly pernicious; for it led to an indifference with respect to truth and error, which deprived both their sentiments and dispositions, which relaxed the springs of Christian integrity and conduct, and gradually brought them to call good evil and evil good, to put light for darkness and darkness for light.<sup>50</sup>

We can, perhaps, conjecture why things should have come to this. First we have Richard Baxter, himself firmly rooted in the intellectual and spiritual traditions of English Calvinism, anxious to reconcile the contending parties of his time, choosing to stress in his writings that which unites, 'mere Christianity', rather than that which divides. This choice in no way represents a lack of integrity: Baxter can say of Bunyan that, though 'an unlearned Antinomian-Anabaptist ... yet (abating his separation) I never heard that Bunyan was not an honest godly man. If then he attained the design of Christianity, was he not a Christian?'<sup>51</sup> In other words, he can say that Bunyan is to be accepted in spite of his heresies but not regardless of them. These heresies - his Antinomianism, Anabaptism and separation - are put in their place but they are not ignored. After Baxter we have Doddridge, inspired by similar benevolence but bestowing it upon doctrines as well as men. Accordingly, controversial doctrines are either ignored (as Doddridge advises preachers to do) or taught with no bias to any side of the controversy (as he did at Northampton and as his followers did at Daventry). But how are students to decide between the various parties in any controversy, lacking, as they are presumed to do, any particular bias of their own? Why indeed should their tutors not do as Bogue and Bennett ironically suggest, and teach atheism and deism as well as Christianity? The answer, presumably, is that the touchstone of

religious truth is still the Bible. But then arises, as we have seen, the problem of how the Bible is to be interpreted without the magisterium of the Church. This is answered by the new concept of candour to which Thomas refers: 'One of the important elements in the ideal of candour is the claim ... that the appeal to reason is the only legitimate form of persuasion.' And so candour - which once meant treating all men alike in spite of their doctrines and then came to mean treating all (or almost all) doctrines alike - now means subjecting all doctrines alike to the scrutiny of an externally-obtained principle of rationality.

Candour is less a quality of feeling than a quality of the behaviour that mediates between people. (Hartley thought it a quality that accompanied the sympathetic affections.<sup>52</sup>) It is, moreover, a quality of specifically public behaviour: its historical importance is that it modifies and refines the behaviour of people who do not yet, and may never, know each other well. It is a thing needed not in the village but in the city, not in the organic community but in the public square and the market place. This surely is why it was so much favoured by those Dissenters who called themselves rational. For one thing, they were socially unknown qualities - to others, at least - as soon as they stepped outside the meeting house. Separated, <sup>as they were often believed to be,</sup> from the traditional and well-understood network of social relations, the world of patriarchal authority and religious establishment, they were strangers meeting strangers. As such, they faced the problem of establishing relationships of trust with those who could not rely upon a common loyalty to squire or parson. The problem was increased by the fact that

many of them lived in cities - the monstrously-burgeoning London or the new industrial centres of Birmingham and Leeds - for the city was a world of strangers, people whose material concerns were similar but who had not yet come to recognise their community of interest. (Their interests were, of course, commercial; but commercial interest did not provide the obvious and solid focus of attention which real estate provided.) They were people whom one could not 'place' in the old ways: in terms of family, property or traditional trade. Naturally, people thus situated were in need of forms of social intercourse which were polite but not too personal: a repertoire of conventional phrases and gestures, displayed in order not to reveal the self but to establish connections between people who were, and might remain, strangers to each other.<sup>53</sup>

V.

At Daventry, Priestley tells us - evidently impressed by his own daring - he 'saw reason to embrace what is generally called the heterodox side of almost every question.' But he adds that he and his contemporaries all left Daventry 'with a belief, more or less qualified, of the doctrine of atonement', and that 'the extreme of heresy' among them was Arianism.<sup>54</sup>

Named for Arius, a fourth-century theologian, Arianism denies that Christ has existed from all eternity, is consubstantial with the Father and is divine by nature. The Unitarian Priestley, looking back on his innocent youth, may not have thought it strong water, but it was not at

all acceptable to the Presbyterian congregation of Needham Market in Suffolk, where, still only a candidate for ordination, he was appointed minister in 1755. Here, though he eschewed controversy in the pulpit, his conversation betrayed him, and his hearers, he says, 'fell off apace'. He was not, he insists, unhappy there, but his situation was not well remunerated and he was glad to accept appointment as minister to the 'good natured, friendly people' of Nantwich in Cheshire. Here, combining his spiritual duties with those of a schoolmaster, he lived for three years without controversy. In 1761, though, the tutorship in languages and belles lettres at the new Dissenting Academy at Warrington fell vacant and the trustees unanimously chose him for the post.<sup>55</sup>

He had first been considered for a job at Warrington three years before. At that time, the trustees had thought him too young for the job, but they did remark that he was 'of most unexceptionable character; of steady attachment to the Principles of Civil and Religious Liberty; and Remarkable for a Degree of Critical and Classical Learning not common in one so young ...'<sup>56</sup> It was typical of the spirit of Warrington that learning and a regard for liberty should have been what its trustees were chiefly looking for. John Taylor, who was divinity tutor at the Academy from its inception in 1757 until 1761, began each year with the same address, which, according to the Academy's historian, Herbert McLachlan, 'set forth what may be called the guiding principles of the Academy.' In it Taylor adjures his pupils to believe nothing he teaches them unless it appears to them 'to be supported and justified by proper evidence from Revelation, or the reason of things.' Anything that they do believe is to be rejected later if, 'upon partial and

faithful examination', it appears 'dubious or false'. Finally, they are to keep their minds 'always open to evidence', to banish from their breasts 'all prejudice, prepossession and party-zeal', to try 'to live in peace and love' with their fellow Christians, asserting for themselves and allowing for others 'the inalienable rights of judgment and conscience.'<sup>57</sup> This was the spirit that informed Priestley's own teaching. At the end of every lecture he would encourage his students to discuss its subject and to let him know of any objections they might have to his treatment of it. All his fellow tutors were determinists and Arians, and they differed amongst themselves only on the doctrine of the Atonement. It was a most agreeably candid place.

During the six years that Priestley spent at Warrington, the pace of his life quickened considerably: he lectured not only on languages and rhetoric but also on history, law and economics; he wrote on theology, education and politics; he married Mary, daughter of Isaac Wilkinson, the iron-founder, and sister to John Wilkinson, the inventor of the blast furnace; he devised an educational aid, his Chart of Biography, and for it was awarded an LL.D. by the University of Edinburgh; he began his scientific career and was elected Fellow of the Royal Society. It was here too that he was ordained. Thus he fulfilled part of that 'general plan' which he claims to have laid at Daventry, where ordination and the duties which it imposed had constituted 'the great object' of his endeavours: 'and I can truly say that I always considered the office of a Christian minister as the most honourable of any upon earth, and in the studies proper to it I always took the greatest pleasure.'<sup>58</sup>

His numerous theological publications afford, perhaps, some idea of what these pleasurable studies consisted in. He is not a devotional writer: he is a polemicist and a systematiser, and all his labours amongst the church historians are bent towards controversial ends. But while it is doubtless significant that he chooses to single out for mention the studies proper to his office rather than any of its other duties, the fact that he undertook this office at all is itself worthy of note. Indeed, Bogue and Bennett, evangelical Calvinists both, thought it worthy not merely of note but of astonishment:

Induced by the love of books to enter the ministry, into which zeal for the glory of Christ and compassion for the souls of men should have led him, the consequences to himself and the church were just such as every discerning Christian would have anticipated with anguish and alarm. To rid himself of the dread which he had felt from a consciousness of being unregenerate, he adopted the compendious but hazardous method of denying the necessity of regeneration. Hence all his future aberrations from the truth; for to the carnal mind, light appears darkness and darkness light, evil good and good evil, bitter is put for sweet and sweet for bitter. Hence also the mere man every where shews himself instead of the christian.<sup>59</sup>

When reading what the nineteenth century has to say of the eighteenth, one should always be wary of mistaking a higher level of noise for greater depth of feeling; nonetheless, this outburst surely has a convincing ring, if only because it gives voice to doubts which many of Priestley's readers must feel. The suggestion that it was the love of books that induced him to enter the ministry is particularly perceptive: there is indeed something inescapable bookish about Priestley's religion.

His career after his ordination, as recorded in his Memoirs, has done nothing to dispel the suspicion which his coolness arouses. In

1767, to the great disappointment of the Warrington trustees, he moved to Leeds to become minister to the congregation of the Mill-Hill Chapel; a growing family and a wife in delicate<sup>health</sup> having, he says, necessitated this removal to a better-remunerated position. At Leeds, where he began the chemical experiments that secured his intellectual reputation, he had every reason to be satisfied with his lot: 'My salary exceeds that of most Dissenting ministers, and I may say that the whole of my time is at my own disposal, so that I can pursue what studies I please without interruption.' Eventually, however, the promise of an even more comfortable post lured him away from the Mill-Hill pulpit and into the service of the Earl of Shelburne, whose librarian and 'literary companion' he was from 1773 to 1780.<sup>60</sup>

He had hesitated for some time before accepting Shelburne's invitation. Could he offer his lordship services commensurate with a salary large enough to tempt him from Leeds? Was he not too ignorant of politics and of modern history to be of assistance to a statesman like Shelburne? Would not his position be, as some warned, 'too dependent and humiliating'? Many friends, indeed, advised against acceptance, but none of them was personally acquainted with Lord Shelburne; those who knew him encouraged Priestley to enter his service. At last, a personal visit from his prospective employer helped Priestley make up his mind. It was agreed that he would have two hundred and fifty pounds per annum for life, a town house adjoining Shelburne's and another very near his country seat at Calne. His course was now determined. He delivered his farewell sermon at Leeds on May 16, 1773.<sup>61</sup>

These hesitations are worthy of note because they reflect upon Priestley's sense of the importance of the pastoral office. In his Memoirs, he gives as his reason for leaving Leeds merely the inadequacy of his salary - 'only one hundred guineas per annum, and a house' - and the consequent impossibility of his making any provision for his family (he had now three children) after his death. But few Dissenting ministers were as well paid as Priestley, and his willingness to leave the ministry for what he represents as purely financial considerations has drawn a tart comment from Michael Watts, historian of Dissent:

That Priestley succumbed to Shelburne's offer, when Andrew Fuller, for example, was struggling along at Soham at £21 a year in the late 1770s, is indicative that Priestley's Christian ministry was somewhat lacking in zeal. And when he left Shelburne's household at Calne and became co-pastor of the New Meeting in Birmingham in 1780 it was on the understanding that, in order to enable him to continue his "philosophical and other studies", baptisms and sick-visiting would be left to his fellow minister and Priestley's own duties would be confined to Sundays.<sup>62</sup>

Of course, Priestley's 'philosophical' studies - the chemical investigations that he pursued with particular success while in Shelburne's service - may have been one the reasons why he needed so large a salary: by the end of his time in Birmingham, he had put together one of the best laboratories in Europe. Besides, it can be said in his defence that, though he may not have baptized or visited the sick (and, since there were two ministers, why should there not have been a division of labour?), he seems to have been proud of the attention that he paid to his other duties:

With this congregation I greatly improved my plan of catechizing and lecturing, and my classes have been well attended. I have also introduced the custom of expounding the scriptures as I read them, which I would earnestly recommend to all ministers.<sup>63</sup>

It appears too that neither Priestley's congregation nor Dissenting onlookers thought his services inadequate. The Birmingham Dissenter Samuel Kenrick, writing to a Scottish minister in 1781, noted the wide variety of Priestley's interests but saw no reason to suggest that they implied a lack of zeal for his pastoral duties: 'This wonderful man, who writes & does so much is always at leisure to receive a friend - visits & examines his people almost as regularly as you do - & has one if not 2 days a week to meet Mess<sup>rs</sup> Bolton, Watt, Keir & the other ingenious artists and literati at Birmingham - in his physical walk.' Nor did the Mill-Hill congregation complain at their pastor's work. Quite the contrary: on his resignation, they wrote to him to acknowledge their gratitude for his 'affectionate and earnest endeavours ...'<sup>64</sup>

Of course, these testimonies are not of a form that would satisfy , Bogue and Bennett, nor even, perhaps, Michael Watts. Neither Kenrick nor the Mill-Hill congregation has anything to say about Priestley's Christian zeal or enthusiasm for God's glory, nor can we confidently suppose that they are silent about these matters merely because they take them for granted: Priestley and his congregations were well suited to each other. But it cannot have been love of pecuniary gain that led Priestley to seek ordination: he had no illusions about the difficulties to which the holders of pastoral office were exposed. Just before his marriage, in 1762, he wrote of these difficulties in a letter to John Seddon of Warrington:

I am seriously preparing for ordination. As all things in this world are uncertain, I think it a point of prudence not to omit anything that may possibly be of advantage to me, if ever it be my lot to be obliged to have recourse to the ministry for the whole or any part of my subsistence, particularly, as I am going to have a dearer, and more important stake in this world than I have ever yet had in it. I can sincerely say, I never knew what it was to

be anxious on my own account; but I cannot help confessing I begin to feel a good deal on the account of another person. The hazard of bringing a person into difficulties which she cannot possibly have any idea or prospects of affects me, at times, very sensibly.<sup>65</sup>

The emphasis in the second sentence is mine and it draws attention to the fact (as it seems) that, for Priestley, the honourable office of a Christian minister need not be identical with the tenure of a pastorate. A minister, we may conclude from this and from the Memoirs, could justify his ordination and pursue his ministry with appropriate zeal without being attached to a particular congregation. He might instead serve as Priestley did while in Shelburne's employ: writing on theological matters; defending the truth in public controversies; discovering it by theological, philosophical, scientific and historical investigations; preaching, like Priestley at Calne, the occasional sermon. Few, perhaps, were fitted to this sort of life - most were better employed in baptising and in visiting the sick - but Priestley had little doubt as to where his own talents lay or how great they were: the question which troubled him apropos Shelburne's invitation was where he would be most 'capable of doing any good in the world', whether at Calne or in Leeds.<sup>66</sup>

This was how Priestley chose to glorify the God whose hand he saw in all things. And at last Birmingham - its congregation 'the most liberal of any in England' - seemed to him a particularly appropriate place in which to do his sort of good:

I consider my settlement at Birmingham the happiest event in my life, being highly favourable to every object I had in view philosophical or theological. In the former respect, I had the convenience of good workmen of every kind, and the society of persons eminent for their knowledge of chemistry, particularly Mr. Watt, Mr. Keir, and Dr. Withering. These with Mr. Boulton, and

Dr. Darwin, ... Mr. Galton, afterwards Mr. Johnson, of Kenelworth, and myself, dined together every month, calling ourselves the Lunar Society, because the time of our meeting was near the full moon.<sup>07</sup>

None of it was to last, of course: all the materials of Priestley's intellectual life - his house, his library, his laboratory - were consumed suddenly and violently on Bastille Day 1791.

The mob that destroyed Priestley's house - and would have destroyed his happiness had he not been of so cool and resolutely 'philosophical' a temperament - had presumably some idea, however crude, of who and what he was. In the final chapter of this essay, I shall examine the part that Priestley himself played in creating for them the caricature that they attacked; in the four chapters that precede it, I shall trace the formation, during the seventeen-sixties and seventies, of the ideas that led him into such fatal controversy in the seventeen-eighties and nineties. Priestley himself has indicated the route that I shall take through his works; its twin landmarks are the Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion, which he published in three volumes from 1772 to 1774, and the History of the Corruptions of Christianity, which he published in 1782. In the final volume of the Institutes, he looked briefly and critically at the work of the Scottish 'commonsense' philosophers, and he returned to the subject in 1774 with an Examination of their works. The ideas into which this work led him were expanded in 1777 in his Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit, a philosophical essay to which he appended a theological sequel - an 'historical account of the system of heathenism concerning the pre-existence of souls in general, and of the pre-existence of the soul of Christ in particular' - which he had originally intended to be part of the fourth volume of the

Institutes. This fourth volume never appeared as such; it burst its bounds and was finally published as a substantial work in its own right: An History of the Corruptions of Christianity.

The Institutes, the Examination, the Disquisitions and the Corruptions thus constitute a sequence in Priestley's work. All his other most important writings - the Lectures on History and General Policy, the Essay on the First Principles of Government, and his numerous scientific publications - are related in significant ways to this theologically-orientated sequence; in his scientific writings, for example, he explores God's creation, and in his political writings he seeks to provide a social environment in which his theology may prosper. These works are all parts of a single intellectual project which is radical in the most literal sense of the word: it is an attempt to uncover the roots of belief and to arrive at those basic minimal elements which can be rationally defended in free and open debate. Hence, of course, the importance to him of the concept of candour; though, as we shall see in the final chapter, it was his obstinate attempt to keep a candid debate going when it was no longer tactful to do so that helped to kindle the fires that consumed his house.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES.

1. Popkin [1979], p.5. I have drawn most of my account from Popkin's chs.i, iii and vi.
2. See Shapiro [1983], chs.i and ii.
3. For the concept of Rational Dissent see Richey [1973-74], Bradley [1975] and Seed [1985].
4. The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647), question 69, in Schaff [1877], iii, 690, quoted in Laslett [1983], p.218. For these aspects of the old society, see Laslett chs. i, ii, vii, and Perkin [1969], ch.ii.
5. Priestley [1806], pp.69-73. For Dissent among the cloth workers, see Watts [1978], pp.350-355.
6. Priestley [1806], p.70, and Thomas Priestley [1804], p.36. The catechism is reprinted in Schaff [1877], iii, 676-704. For a useful discussion of the Westminster Confession, on which the catechism is based, see Routley [1962], pp.117-122.
7. Isaac Watts, 'The Church the Garden of Christ', quoted in Davie [1978], p.28.
8. Priestley [1806], pp.71-72.
9. Sharrock, notes to Bunyan [1666], p.146. For the effect on Bunyan of his reading of this passage, see ibid., para.163.
10. Bunyan [1678], pp.34-35. See Sharrock's note on this passage for the influence of Spira's case on its composition. For the theological background, see The Humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines, now by Authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, concerning a Confession of Faith ... 1647, ch.iv, sec.vi (Schaff [1877], iii, 614) and Greaves [1969], chs. ii and iii, especially (on God's hardening of the sinner's heart) pp.57-58.
11. The Westminster Shorter Catechism, qu.20, in Schaff [1877], iii, 680.
12. Stannard [1977], p.72. According to Donald Davie ([1978], p.114), there was in Priestley's time at least one Dissenter who, drawing from all this its logical implications, 'took the ultra-Calvinist position of refusing to evangelise since to do so would be to meddle with God's absolute prerogative of election when and as he pleased.'
13. Weber [1920], p.104.
14. Priestley [1806], p.69. His mother told him to return the pin; an admonition intended, he supposes, to impress his mind, 'as

it could not fail to do, with a clear idea of the distinction of property, and of the importance of attending to it.' He does not dwell upon the incident and his mother's actions are clearly of more interest to him than his own; but the age, we must remember, was one in which, according to Roy Porter ([1982], p.182), charity school children were being taught that:

It is a sin

To steal a pin.

Perhaps this and baby sins like it did not lie so lightly on Priestley's juvenile conscience as the Memoirs would have us believe. When, like Priestley, one has 'nothing very material' with which to reproach oneself but believes nonetheless that reproach is in order, one must make use of whatever peccadilloes are to hand.

15. See Stannard [1977], especially p.63.
16. Priestley [1806], p.72 (a misprint in Lindsay's edition has caused the omission of nine words from this passage: I have supplied them from Rutt (ed.) [1817-32], i, 12).
17. Clark [1958], pp.11-19, 191, 208.
18. James [1902], p.209.
19. Priestley [1806], p.72
20. Belsham, in Williams [1833], pp.10-11.
21. Weber [1920], pp.101-102.
22. Thus Stewart Sutherland can argue ([1982], p.144) that Hume's anti-theological thought was influenced by 'two elements in early presbyterian thinking; the transcendence of God, and the rejection of any attempt to argue on the basis of an analogy between the temporal and the eternal.'
23. Priestley [1783a], p.37, and Ms. Sermons, Manchester College, Oxford: 'X<sup>ty</sup> the light of the World', pp.2-3 (pagination mine: this sermon, preached at Leeds in 1771, 1772 and 1773, was later delivered at Calne in 1773 and at Birmingham in 1782).
24. Lucy Aikin to W.E. Channing, Hampstead, 26 December, 1828, in Le Breton (ed.) [1874], pp.27-32.
25. Foster's remark is cited in Sharrock [1968], pp.92-93. For Foster, see also Davie [1968], pp.114-115, and his entry (written by Leslie Stephen) in the Dictionary of National Biography.
26. Priestley [1806], p.73. A question arises from this passage. Priestley says that he presented himself as a candidate at the church 'Before I went from home ...' From this and from the

position which the account of his rejection occupies in his Memoirs it would be natural to conclude that this rejection took place soon before he went to Daventry in September 1752. 'Some time before,' he continues, he had been distressed by his not being able to feel repentance for the sin of Adam. Again it is natural for the reader to conclude that he means 'not long before'; more particularly as he then goes on to refer to Mr. Haggerstone, whose student he was in the two years before he went to Daventry. Are we, then, right to conclude that this episode of distress occurred when Priestley was about seventeen and is thus to be distinguished from the crisis that he appears to have undergone at the age of twelve or thirteen? This seems most likely; though it is possible that - as both episodes revolve around his inability to repent - they constitute one episode, lasting some five or so years.

27. Priestley [1806], p.76; Alexander Gordon, Addresses (1922), quoted in Thomas [1950], p.55. 'The general plan of our studies, ...' says Priestley ([1806], p.76), 'may be seen in Dr. Doddridge's published lectures ...' For general accounts of the academies, see McLachlan [1931] and Hans [1951].
28. Priestley [1806], p.72. It is unfortunate that we cannot know which edition of 'sGravesande's book Priestley read; to each succeeding edition was added a new preface with new methodological reflections, culminating in the 'Oration concerning Evidence' in the third and final edition. It seems reasonable to assume, however, that Priestley would at some time have provided himself with the most up-to-date edition of this important work, and so this is the one that I have used in my second and fourth chapters. Maclaurin's book was used by Priestley in the preparation of his [1772] and is listed by Robinson ([1970], p.158) as being part of his library.
29. Priestley [1806], p.76.
30. Newton [1726], p.547.
31. Hartley [1749], i, 73 (italicised in original).
32. Locke [1700], bk.ii, ch.xxxiii, sec.5.
33. Hartley's role as 'the theorist whose conclusions most clearly foreshadowed Pavlov's' is discussed briefly in Gray [1979], pp.22-23.
34. Locke [1700], bk.ii, ch.xxxiii, sec.8.
35. Sterne [1759-67], pp.35-39, 107.
36. Hume [1739], bk.i, pt.iv. I am indebted here to some remarks of Ayer's in his [1980], pp.33-34, 56-57, and of Passmore's in the epilogue to his [1980].

37. On this volume, its neglect and the consequences of this neglect, see Leslie [1972].
38. Hartley [1749], ii, 44-45.
39. Ibid., ii, 16.
40. Priestley [1806], p.76.
41. See Lincoln [1938], pp.85-91.
42. On this see Keeble [1982], pp.24-25, 30, 32, 109, 135-136, 144.
43. J.D. Humphreys (ed.), Correspondence and Diary of Philip Doddridge, iv, 421, quoted in Nuttall [1951], p.11.
44. Doddridge, Lectures on Preaching, in Works, v, 439, 441, quoted in Nuttall [1951], p.3. See also Nuttall [1967], chs.xv and xvi.
45. Priestley [1806], p.75.
46. Bogue and Bennett [1808-12], iii, 479-480 (quoted in Davie [1978], p.139). See also Lincoln [1938], pp.54-55.
47. Watts, Improvement of the Mind, quoted in Lincoln [1938], p.76n.
48. Blackstone [1769], pp.5-6.
49. Thomas [1977], pp.99-100. For further modern discussion of the concept of candour, see Empson [1951], ch.xv; Tucker [1977], pp.212-214; and Davie [1978], pp.139-141 and [1982], ch.vi.
50. Bogue and Bennett [1808-12], iii, 384.
51. Keeble [1982], p.24.
52. Hartley [1749], i, 473.
53. On the changed nature of public roles in the eighteenth-century city, see Sennett [1977], ch.iii. Some Dissenters were well aware of the social demands of their new situation: 'This day', wrote a Leeds Dissenter in his diary in 1754, 'I have very different company - at some part, professors, at another part, profane. To carry well among all requires the wisdom from above.' (quoted in Seed [1985], p.314)
54. Priestley [1806], pp.76-77.
55. Ibid., pp.78-87.
56. Manchester College, Oxford, Mss.: Minutes of the 'Committee for the Conduct of the Academy', January 5, 1758, in the Warrington

- Academy Minute Book, i, 58, 55. The ellipsis is in the original text.
57. McLachlan [1943], pp.44-45.
  58. Priestley [1806], pp.77, 92.
  59. Bogue and Bennett [1808-12], iv, 434-435.
  60. Priestley to Richard Price, Leeds, 21 July, 1772, in Schofield (ed.) [1966], p.105, and Peach and Thomas (eds.) [1983], p.133.
  61. Priestley to Price, 21 July, 1772; 27 September, 1772; 11 November, 1772: in Schofield (ed.) [1966], pp.105-109, 111-112, and Peach and Thomas (eds.) [1983], pp.132-138, 147-148; Priestley to Price, Leeds, 25 August, 1772, in Peach and Thomas (eds.) [1983], pp.135-136. See also Priestley to the Rev. W. Turner, 27 August, 1772, in Rutt (ed.) [1817-32], i, 117-118.
  62. Priestley [1806], p.98; Watts [1978], pp.473-474.
  63. Priestley [1806], p.121. Priestley wrote this part of his Memoirs while still in Birmingham, hence his use of the imperfect tense. For Priestley's laboratory see Schaffer [1984], pp.160-161.
  64. Dr. Williams's Library, Ms., 24.157, no.72, Samuel Kenrick to James Woodrow, Bewdley, 15 August, 1781 (for the provenance of this correspondence, see Creasey [1965] and [1966], and Fitzpatrick [1988]); 'The Congregation of Protestant Dissenters at Mill-hill, to their Pastor, the Reverend Dr. Priestley', repr. in Priestley [1787a], pp.10-11.
  65. Priestley to the Rev. John Turner, Warrington, 1 May, 1762, in Royal Society Mss., Priestley Memorial Volume, p.11.
  66. Priestley to the Richard Price, Leeds, 27 September, 1772, in Schofield (ed.) [1966], p.108, and Peach and Thomas (eds.) [1983], p.137.
  67. Priestley [1806], p.120. For Priestley's relations with the Lunar Society, see Schofield especially pp.193-203.

CHAPTER TWO.

THE HISTORY OF MAN AND THE HISTORY OF NATURE.

Dear boy, you will not hear me speak  
With sorrow or with rancour  
Of what has paled my rosy cheek  
And blasted it with canker;  
'Twas Love, great Love, that did the deed  
Through Nature's gentle laws,  
And how should ill effects proceed  
From so divine a cause?

Sweet honey comes from bees that sting,  
As you are well aware;  
To one adept in reasoning,  
Whatever pains disease may bring  
Are but the tangy seasoning  
To Love's delicious fare.

Richard Wilbur, 'Pangloss's Song'

I.

Taking up his post as tutor in languages and belles lettres at Warrington, Priestley had, as he later confessed, 'no particular fondness' for these subjects, and would rather have taught mathematics and natural philosophy. Nonetheless, he applied himself - with 'great assiduity', he tells us - to the duties of his position and, in doing so, discovered a serious flaw in Warrington's curriculum: 'though most of our pupils were young men designed for situations in civil and active life, every article in the plan of their education was adapted to the learned professions'. To remedy this defect, he composed lectures not only on languages and on oratory and criticism but also on 'History and

General Policy', the 'Laws and Constitution of England', and the 'History of England'.<sup>1</sup>

Priestley maintains that those intended for the active life of a lawyer, soldier or merchant will have little use for the adornments of a classical education. The academic curriculum of the universities as well as the dissenting academies, admirably suited though it may be to prepare men for the pulpit or the library, is sadly neglectful of topics more immediately important: 'The subjects I would recommend are CIVIL HISTORY and more especially the important objects of CIVIL POLICY; such as the theory of laws, government, manufactures, commerce, naval force etc., with whatever may be demonstrated from history to have contributed to the flourishing state of nations, to rendering a people happy and populous at home, and formidable abroad. ...'<sup>2</sup> Though Priestley is anxious to disclaim any desire to teach politics 'to low mechanics and manufacturers', his attention is not directed at the middle class alone. Many great historians, including some of those upon whose writing he relied, had insisted on the exemplary value of their work; from it nascent rulers were to learn the arts of government. Priestley fully agrees: political evils result not from a want of patriotism but from ignorance of the real constitution and interests of the country. Education should, by remedying this ignorance, contribute much to the well-being of the nation and ultimately, it may be hoped, to better government.<sup>3</sup>

Having written all his lectures, Priestley found himself with time on his hands. He was, however, engaged in electrical experiments and had been making occasional visits to London, where he had met a number

of distinguished men of ideas, Benjamin Franklin among them. It was Franklin who had encouraged him in his project of writing an history of electricity and had furnished him with some of the necessary materials. As the list of works consulted which Priestley appended to his History indicates, he was very zealous in his pursuit of source materials, but he did not confine himself to reading the works of others: he repeated many of their experiments himself and was led by them to devise new experiments of his own, thus applying to the historiography of science a dictum current among humanist historians since the renaissance, that only those who had participated in affairs of state could hope to write useful civil history. The result of all this industry and ingenuity was one of his most successful works: The History and Present State of Electricity, with Original Experiments, published in 1767 and so successful that Priestley undertook another (and, as it turned out, less successful) project, The History and Present State of Vision, Light, and Colours.

By the early seventeen-seventies, then, Priestley was known to his pupils as a general historian and to the public at large as an historian of science; but there was a further area of historical investigation that was more important to him than any other. In the introduction to his Lectures on History, he remarks that:

no person can be a good divine, much less undertake any part of the controversy with unbelievers, unless he be very well acquainted with history, civil as well as ecclesiastical. Indeed, more than half of the books of scripture consist of history. And as all the prophecies of the Old and New Testament must be verified by history, none but a good historian can be a judicious commentator upon such important parts of the sacred writings.<sup>4</sup>

The historical bias in Priestley's theological thought is on full display in the Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion which he published in three volumes from 1772 to 1774 but which he had begun writing, he tells us, whilst still a student at Daventry.<sup>5</sup> Despite the title of his work, he devotes little of it to natural religion, and is much more concerned to examine 'the evidences of the Jewish and Christian Revelations.'

## II.

The Lectures on History is not a piece of original scholarship. It leans heavily on the work of earlier historians - is, indeed, intended partly as a guide to their writings - and its author frequently has occasion to quote some of his more illustrious predecessors: Bolingbroke, Voltaire, Montesquieu and Hume, every one of whom is keen to stress the importance of the study of history. This, in fact, is a common empiricist theme: a philosophy according to which knowledge derives only from experience must naturally, when it turns its attention to public affairs, place considerable weight on the collective experiences recorded in works of history; these are the experiments of mankind, 'the profitable things of Antiquity.'<sup>6</sup> But, of course, the problem for the student of history was how to identify these profitable things and separate them from the useless learned lumber with which, it was agreed, only crabbed scholars concerned themselves. This was the task which Bolingbroke undertook.

Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, the earliest of the Enlightenment historians from whom Priestley quotes, and one who seems

to have influenced him considerably, sets the tone for his followers with his scepticism and his contempt for mere antiquarianism. As a great statesman addressing himself in his Letters on the Study and Use of History to a fellow member of the House of Lords, he is naturally concerned with the lessons that may be learned from the study of history. 'The true and proper object' of this study is, he says, 'a constant improvement in private and in public virtue', and he has nothing but contempt for the under-labourers, the dessicated antiquarians, who study history so as to become not wiser but more learned: theirs is a foolish affectation. The true value of history is expressed in a famous phrase often credited to Bolingbroke but attributed by him to Dionysius Halicarnassus: 'history is philosophy teaching by examples.'<sup>7</sup> That is, history is a source of illustrations of theory, a testing ground for theory, and, perhaps, its raw material. For Bolingbroke, knowledge of history without experience of the world makes pedants, and experience without a knowledge of history makes half-finished players in the theatre of life:

If experience alone can make us perfect in our parts, experience cannot begin to teach them till we are actually on the stage: whereas, by a previous application to this study, we con them over at least before we appear there: we are not quite unprepared; we learn our parts sooner, and we learn them better.

Bolingbroke does not expressly declare that history is anticipated experience, but the sentiment - a commonplace throughout the century - is clearly implicit in this passage. He goes on to point out that the examples which history puts before us may be considered superior to the lessons of experience in that they are complete; we see not merely the origins of a policy but also its outcome. Thus we may learn from the

mistakes of others, 'and their good and their ill success are equally instructive.'<sup>8</sup>

Bolingbroke is a disagreeable figure - sententious and dishonest as a politician, glittering and superficial as a philosopher - but his historiographical theories proved very agreeable to many of his contemporaries. Voltaire was certainly influenced by them and throughout his career expressed opinions similar to Bolingbroke's about the use of history and the uselessness of antiquarianism. Similarly, David Hume had no doubt as to the exemplary value of history or the historian's duty to abridge and arrange the countless facts which threatened to overwhelm it.<sup>9</sup> By this means, and by this means alone, would history become what it ought to be: an instrument of education, improving both morals and intellect. It was, of course, an instrument which Dissenters as well as sceptical philosophers were very ready to employ. 'History is a necessary study in the supreme place for gentlemen who deal in politics', says Isaac Watts. 'The Government of nations and the distressing and desolating events which have in all ages attended the mistakes of politicians, should ever be present in their minds to warn them to avoid the like conduct.'<sup>10</sup>

But a barrier stood in the way of the exemplary use of history, a barrier whose existence was so widely acknowledged that we find it alluded to alike by Bolingbroke and by one who had little love for him:

The common remark as to the utility of reading history being made:  
JOHNSON: 'We must consider how very little history there is; I mean real authentick history. That certain kings reigned, and certain battles were fought, we can depend upon as true; but all the colouring, all the philosophy of history is conjecture'.<sup>11</sup>

Bolingbroke devotes the whole of one of his Letters to this problem, insisting that a lot of what passes for history is not so much untrue as untrustworthy; that it mingles the plausible with the wildly improbable, the well-attested with the doubtful, the biased with the disinterested. In an essay written some years before the Letters, he had tried, like a number of his contemporaries, to allay these doubts by tabulating rules according to which works of history might be assessed. A putative fact, he had there said, may be regarded as probable if it contains nothing that contradicts general experience. If, in addition to this, it is 'supported by the testimony of proper witnesses, ... it becomes really probable in the highest degree. ...' In general, degree of assent will be proportional to the number, character and circumstances of the original witnesses.<sup>12</sup> In the Letters Bolingbroke is careful to repudiate the extreme scepticism, or 'Pyrrhonism', deployed by Pierre Bayle in his very influential Dictionnaire historique et critique, which had been published in 1697. The Pyrrhonists, says Bolingbroke, argue that because ancient history is too improbable to be believed, more recent historians must - notwithstanding their 'greater air of probability' - be similarly uncreditworthy and therefore of no use to mankind. But this is to go too far: truth may often be attained, or at least falsehood exposed, by the use of concurrent testimony. This is a method of which Voltaire, perhaps following Bolingbroke, was to make considerable use. The Whigs, he said, contradict the Tories and the Tories contradict the Whigs, so we may accept as indisputably true only what both parties agree upon. Priestley in his turn was later to enumerate various considerations of this kind - which were, he said,

'well understood by all persons who attend to them' - in the 'Maxims of Historical Criticism' which he appended to his Letters to Dr. Horsley.<sup>13</sup>

From these considerations of the comparison and evaluation of sources, it naturally follows that history may be better studied the more sources there are, and, consequently, that recent history is the most reliable. Hence Bolingbroke's advice that European history need be studied in detail only from the end of the fifteenth century and Voltaire's dismissal of the first five centuries of Roman history.. For medieval historians, with their credulity and their 'Gothic barbarism', Voltaire had nothing but contempt; and Hume, though he wrote several volumes of medieval history, had no very high opinion of the subject: real history, useful history, began with the renaissance.<sup>14</sup>

Outside the despised company of antiquaries, there can have been few contemporaries of Bolingbroke, Voltaire and Hume who would have sought edification in accounts of Gothic barbarity; it was only when they turned their attention to scriptural history that the philosophical historians became really controversial. Bolingbroke, for example, is cool and almost conciliatory in tone but obviously malicious in intent. The Jews, upon whose writings alone sacred history is founded, were, he says, a superstitious people, 'among whom the custom and art of pious lying prevailed remarkably. ...' None but Jews believed Jewish historians until the establishment of Christianity, which is in part founded upon their works and the prophecies related in them, 'reflected back upon them an authority which they had not before, ...' Following Richard Simon (a Roman Catholic priest whose Histoire critique de Vieux Testament was published in 1678), Bolingbroke suggests that the

scriptures be regarded as only intermittently inspired, to be believed only when they touch on matters of faith and doctrine but not when they purport to describe historical events. So much of the Old Testament is confused, broken and full of interpolations that it could not possibly be the work of the Holy Ghost, who must surely have higher editorial standards. The authority of the New Testament may, however, be taken for granted, and so it may lend this authority to certain parts of the Old.<sup>15</sup>

Bolingbroke, obsequiously careful to disavow any irreligious motives, nonetheless leaves his readers with an unsettling sense of incredulity and, if they are believers, a serious problem. Either they reject his method of biblical interpretation and swallow the Old Testament whole, ignoring or trying to refute his criticisms, or they join him in selective reading. But this latter course is (and is obviously intended to be) an inherently unsatisfactory compromise; for might not the writers of the Old Testament - who, it is agreed, were credulous, confused and piously mendacious - have been lying even when they wrote on matters of faith and morals? Can there possibly be a reliable method of discovering which parts, if any, of the Old Testament are inspired? To put it another way: if the pious reader cannot refute Bolingbroke's textual criticisms, then either he must ignore them and take a leap of faith or he must adopt Bolingbroke's readings of scripture and still take a leap of faith. The choice seems to lie between Catholic fideism - obedient submission to the authority of the Church - and deism, or even atheism. Protestantism is no longer an available option. As Simon pointed out, Protestants put their faith in

the Bible but, in doing so, they put their faith in what can now be seen as confused and mutilated writings that cannot be understood without the assistance of some interpretative tradition. The Bible alone is not enough.<sup>16</sup>

For many Englishmen, anxious to be rational Protestants, this was an inescapable dilemma even before Bolingbroke's Letters appeared. In 1697, Charles Leslie tried to solve it with a set of four criteria for the evaluation of scripture. According to Leslie, any putative fact recorded in an historical work must: first, be such that the human senses may judge of it; second, relate to something done publicly; third, be commemorated by overt acts and public monuments; and fourth, be commemorated by monuments instituted and actions commenced from the time the public acts were performed. The first two rules are supposed to insure that no imposition can have taken place at the time of the alleged fact, the last two that there has been no subsequent imposition. The traditions of Mohammed and of the pagan deities fail this test, says Leslie; those of Moses and Christ pass with flying colours. Thus Leslie feels able to say that he receives the scriptures 'upon the testimony, not authority, of the Church; and I examine that testimony as I do other facts, till I have satisfied my private judgment there is no other way'. Leslie's tests, naive and inadequate though they are (it was quickly pointed out that the heathen often set up festivals to commemorate events that had never taken place), were made great use of by succeeding generations of Christian controversialists. But, of course, once it was accepted that the Bible could <sup>be</sup> put to the test in this way, a change had come over Christian thought; something pure and simple had become

muddied and difficult. The way<sup>had</sup>/been opened for all kinds of Biblical interpretations, and such talk encouraged scepticism or deism. And to try to refute deism - as the greatest of English classicists, Richard Bentley did in a triumphant polemic - is to go further than any Protestant ought to go; for the more learned the refutation, the more it seems to imply that the Bible is not, as Protestants believe it to be, a divinely lucid text whose meaning is clear even to the humblest of men.<sup>17</sup>

None of this would have come as a surprise to the author of the Histoire des variations des eglises protestantes. Writing in 1688, Jacques Benigne Bossuet, Bishop of Meaux, was moved to compare the sad array of Protestant sects ranged before him - Lutherans, Zwinglians, Calvinists - with the various heresies that had afflicted the early church. And in his opposition to error he found a kindred spirit from those times: 'The heretics, says Tertullian, change their rules, that is their confessions of faith; everyone of them believes himself entitled to change and modify the tradition by his own light, for it is by his own light that the author of the sect has formed the tradition; heresy remains true to its nature if it does not cease to innovate, and its progress is similar to its origin.' Acting thus, according to no lights but their own, individual heretics are not able to foresee clearly all that follows from their innovations. Those innovations will themselves, therefore, be liable to further innovation; and so on, down a road leading ever farther from the Catholic truth. But who are these heretics, asks Bossuet, that they should set their opinions before the accumulated wisdom of the majority? Against the presumptuous

questioning of the inconstant individual, he sets the wisdom of the collectivity as represented by the Catholic Church, custodian of the Christian tradition. To question this authority is to break the living continuity of that tradition.<sup>18</sup>

Bossuet was a sworn enemy of Simon (rather to the dismay of the latter, who thought that he had done well by the church), but about this one important particular they were in agreement: outside tradition there is no certainty, no secure vantage point from which tradition may be surveyed and critically analysed. Of course, such arguments will tell most powerfully against Protestants; against, that is, those who wish to retain some but not all of tradition's content. They do not at all touch the atheist or the deist. It was a work of Bossuet's, the Discours sur l'histoire universelle, that provoked Voltaire's mistress, the Marquise du Chatelet - herself untouched by traditionalist arguments - to an outburst against the idea of universal history as a providential drama of creation, fall, covenant and redemption. Against one of the pages which Bossuet devoted to the story of the Jews, she wrote, 'One may talk much of this people in theology, but it merits little space in history.' The implication of her comment is well expressed by Eric Voegelin:

The note becomes revolutionary by its implication ... that profane history has the monopoly of determining the relevance of peoples and events. The center of universality is shifted from the sacred to the profane level ... Christianity will be understood as an event in history. Through this shift of the center of interpretation the dualism of sacred and profane history disappears. The profane history is profane only as long as sacred history is accepted as the absolute frame of reference and when this position is abandoned,<sup>19</sup> the two histories merge on the level of secularized history.

So by the time Priestley walked into the lecture-hall, the value of profane history was widely acknowledged, but its very success posed a threat to Christian belief. One of his main tasks would be the writing of a sacred history, agreeable to his need for an objectively-sanctioned Christianity, that would escape alike the strictures of the deists and of Simon and Bossuet.

### III.

The Lectures on History and General Policy open in strikingly Bolingbrokean terms. 'History ...' says Priestley, unsurprisingly, 'may be called anticipated experience'. Its advantage over personal experience, he continues, still echoing Bolingbroke, is that the lessons which it lays before us are complete. Knowledge cannot be acquired but by experience, and the most exalted understanding is merely that which is best able to draw conclusions from facts and experiments. All this is decidedly commonplace, but Priestley's associationism gives him a rationale for his faith in the educative function of history. It will, he says, be evident to us that an acquaintance with history tends to strengthen virtue 'if we consider in what manner virtuous impressions are actually made on the mind. How do we acquire a love for virtue, but by frequently viewing it in those points of light in which it appears desirable to us, and in a situation of mind in which no bias is laid upon us in favour of vice?'<sup>20</sup>

But, of course, Priestley cannot allow himself the scepticism of the philosophes; his fear and hatred of fideism are too great and, besides, he has two strong objections to historical scepticism. The

first arises simply from his Protestantism. His religion is biblical in foundation, and so - though, in fact, he does not believe all of scripture to be divinely-inspired - he requires a method of textual criticism more dependable than Bolingbroke's. Furthermore, as a Socinian he would like to be able to show how true Christianity has been corrupted by the priests, and in order to do this he needs reliable historical information; it will not do merely to follow Bolingbroke in supposing wholesale mendacity.

His second objection to scepticism arises from his belief in divine providence, a belief in God's constant interest and occasional agency in the world which places him in marked contrast to his philosophical forbears. There are no providential explanations in Voltaire's Essai sur les mœurs nor in Hume's History of England. Voltaire's God is a passive spectator, not of the drama - for there is no plot, no predetermined scene on which the final curtain will descend - but of the game (for there are rules, which God wrote before retiring to the stands).

Priestley finds the importance of a belief in providence most clearly demonstrated by the effect a lack of it had on the heathen. Without belief in providence, belief in the existence of God can have no influence on human behaviour. Whatever may have been the benefits of a natural religion such as the heathen philosophers professed, none of these benefits was moral. Religion and morality were not connected in the philosophical mind, and the philosophers, notwithstanding their belief in a supreme being, felt no compunction to try to abate the lewdness and cruelty of their times. Modern deists and believers in

natural religion, Bolingbroke among them, are no better: they too separate religion from morality, and they neither encourage virtue nor discourage vice.<sup>21</sup>

For Priestley, the hand of God is everywhere apparent, 'ever bringing good out of evil and gradually conducting things to a more perfect and glorious state. ...'<sup>22</sup> He can turn nowhere without seeing evidence of the divine handiwork: the History of Electricity reveals the work of God in the phenomena of nature and the progress of science; the Lectures on History and General Policy show how human history, even in its darkest-seeming moments, is part of a vast and benevolent plan. Thus convinced that all will ultimately be for the best, Priestley can regard history with a reasonably contented eye. He knows that scientific error leads in the end to truth and that even manifestly objectionable institutions, like Popery, have had their uses and, though evil in themselves, have sometimes been the instruments of good (monasteries, for example, were the asylums of learning in the Dark Ages, and Romish superstition gave rise to knight-errantry, which helped to preserve the peace in lawless times). History, then, is a play with a happy ending and a divine author, so it is natural that we should want to read the reviews so as to find out a little more about the dramatist. It is surely for this reason that Priestley treats even secular historians with a respect much greater than that accorded them by Bolingbroke and Voltaire.

By the time Priestley turned his attention to these matters, the anti-sceptical project was at least a century old. Bayle's Pyrrhonism was merely the application to historical and scriptural studies of that

scepticism which, in the opinion of many, underwrote the errors of Cartesian cosmology. Not surprisingly, the Newtonians were particularly anxious that scepticism should not carry the day, and this anxiety is well displayed in 'sGravesande's Mathematical Elements of Natural Philosophy and Hartley's Observations on Man.

'sGravesande prefaces his work with the 'Oration Concerning Evidence' which he delivered at Leyden in 1724. Here he concerns himself, like other Newtonians, with a truth to which Aristotle long ago drew attention: that it is the mark of an educated mind to seek in each subject only such precision as the nature of that subject admits. He agrees with Locke that mathematical proofs impose themselves instantly and irresistibly upon the mind, but he fears that attempts to apply mathematical methods to other sciences - doomed as they are to frustration - will in their failure engender scepticism. But there are, he reminds us, many truths which cannot be proved by mathematics and many methods of proof other than the mathematical; the evidence for our belief that the sun, having set, will rise or that the Romans were once a powerful people is not mathematical but 'moral', and the persuasion which follows from it is 'moral certainty'.<sup>23</sup>

Hartley too is concerned with moral certainty (though he does not employ the term) and he is very noticeably not overawed by mathematics, which he refuses to allow to lord it over other methods of enquiry. His treatment of epistemic probability is unusually graphic: observed effects or experimental results are compared to the ordinates of an unknown curve and the total or all possible circumstances or outcomes to the abscissa on which these points stand. The general law for this

curve is, then, analogous to 'that Law of Action, which, being supposed to take place in the given Circumstances, produce the given Effects.' The more ordinates that are given, and the smaller and more nearly equal the distances between them, the more reliable will be our conclusion. Of course, our general mathematical law will be unreliable if the curve is of a particularly outlandish shape, and induction may similarly mislead us; but Hartley, following Abraham de Moivre, believes that this will not usually be the case, for God maintains the statistical regularities of nature.<sup>24</sup> This does not imply, as it might appear to, that Hartley is indeed intent upon reducing the concrete world to measurable quantity. The real direction of his thought becomes strikingly clear when, in a very curious passage, he suggests that this comparison of integral mathematics and induction is the more exact because mathematical conclusions, arrived at by differentiation, are 'liable to the same Uncertainties, both in Kind and Degree, as the general Maxims of Natural Philosophy drawn from Natural History, Experiments, &.' It is not the objective relationship between mathematical ideas which interests Hartley but rather something entirely psychological: the intuitive coalescence of ideas which forms the basis of mathematical reasoning and is, he says, 'the highest Kind of Induction'. On any given occasion, he adds, our inference that two plus two equals four will be drawn from our experience of previous instances:

Where the Instances from whence the Induction is made are alike, as far as we know, to that under Consideration, at least in all things that affect the present Inquiry, it affords the highest Probability, and may be termed Induction, in the proper Sense of the Word. Thus we infer, that the Bread before us is nutritive and wholesome, because its Smell, Taste, Ingredients, Manner of Composition, & are the same as those of other Bread, which has often before been experienced to be so.<sup>25</sup>

The effect of these passages is not to pull down mathematics from its haughty position on the pedestal of certainty. Rather, by blurring the boundary between scientia (certain knowledge, best exemplified by the 'high' science of mathematics) and opinio (conjectural knowledge, typified by the 'low' sciences of chemistry and natural history), Hartley is able at once to allow that real knowledge may be found in fields other than mathematics ('it is a practical Error of great Importance to suppose that ... historical Evidences are inferior to mathematical ones') and to undercut the arguments of the sceptics.

If the conclusions of historical arguments ever seem less than mathematically certain, this, Hartley believes, is because of their greater complexity and also because the putative concurrent evidences may be questionable. For this reason, all manner of information, and as much of it as possible, must be brought to bear on any historical questions: 'the Discoveries of Natural Historians, Astronomers, Linguists, Antiquaries, and Philosophers of all Kinds, have brought great Light and evidence upon this Branch of Knowledge within the last Two Centuries; and are likely to do so more and more.' Hartley finds this method - the use of concurrent evidences drawn from a variety of sciences - well exemplified by Sir Isaac Newton's work on chronology, and so does Priestley, who devotes a whole lecture to it.<sup>26</sup>

But, notwithstanding all that Newton, Hartley and Priestley say about the dependable historicity of the scriptures, there can be no doubt that it is the truth of the scriptures that they principally intend to prove. In pursuing this end, Hartley, like Priestley after him, employs the methods of analogy and concurrent evidence. Firstly,

he explains that the Biblical writings, both the Old Testament and the New, resemble in the manner of their handing down to us those Greek and Roman works of philosophy, poetry and history whose genuineness nobody doubts. If the latter are dependable then so are the former. This, of course, is an ad hominem argument: Hartley praises Newton for using the scriptures as a means of correcting the errors of heathen histories and he intends here only to tell those who reject scripture that they cannot do so without also rejecting the classical writings for which they profess such respect. Naturally, the classical humanists thus addressed might answer that they believe the Greek and Roman writers when they relate common history but not when they describe miracles, and that they are prepared to serve the Jewish authors in the same way. But to this Hartley replies, after the manner of Charles Leslie, that the prodigies related in the Bible differ from those of classical mythology in that they are always described by eye-witnesses and were often of a public and long-lasting nature. Furthermore, the numerous particular circumstances - times, places and persons - mentioned in the scriptures argue for their historical authenticity. These circumstantial details enable us to ascertain the agreement of scripture with natural and civil history. Thus the Biblical account of the flood is borne out by what Edmund Halley and William Whiston have to say about the potential effects of the passage of a comet close to the earth.

Priestley follows Hartley in his approach to the validation of historical accounts but he has to meet a new and serious challenge which his master was able to ignore. In his Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, published in 1748, David Hume points out that the

evidence for the Christian religion must necessarily be less than that of our own senses: we must rely upon the testimony of the gospel writers, and, since they had no evidence greater than that of their senses, the evidence can only have diminished in its transmission to us, for no-one will place greater confidence in the testimony of another than in what his own senses tell him. 'But a weaker evidence can never destroy a stronger', and so the evidence that we have for miraculous events - the evidence of testimony alone - can never overpower the knowledge that we have acquired by our senses, which teach us that nature is governed by irrefragible laws and that miracles never happen. To say, as we surely must, that the raising of the dead is outside our experience is to say in fact that all experience is against it: 'And as a uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full proof, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle; nor can such a proof be destroyed, or the miracle rendered credible, but by an opposite proof, which is superior.'<sup>27</sup> But none of the miracles which history records, or which ingenuity has invented, is accompanied by such a superior opposite proof: none is reported by sufficient reliable witnesses to be believed; and Jewish and Christian testimonies are very far from reliable, presented to us as they are 'by a barbarous and ignorant people' in a book 'written in an age when they were still more barbarous, and in all probability long after the facts which it relates, corroborated by no concurring testimony, and resembling those fabulous accounts which every nation gives of its origins.'<sup>28</sup>.

Before dealing with these powerful arguments, Priestley makes it quite clear that he will not easily part with his belief in miracles. Some, he says, deprecate them as being inconsistent with God's wisdom: they contend that all all-wise deity would have made his work perfect from the start, so that it would not require his intervention. To this objection (which is the one that Leibniz had made against Newton's account of divine activity), Priestley replies that, though this sort of perfection may be aimed at by men - who cannot always be present during the operation of their works - it is unnecessary for God, who is always and everywhere present. 'Besides,' he continues, 'it is of the utmost importance to the great ends of the rational creation, that the Almighty maker should be considered as present with his works.' For all we know, indeed, the present scheme of things, which requires God's constant surveillance and occasional interposition, may be the best of all possible schemes.

Implied in this is a distinction between the divine scheme as it really is and the divine scheme as it is apprehended by mortal men. The latter version, arrived at through long observation of constantly-recurring phenomena, naturally excludes such singular events as miracles: the former, God's version (which, we may suppose, is infinitely more complex than any the mind of man could frame), may well include them. Thus miracles are not, properly speaking, violations of the laws of nature, 'because they are no more than the effects of an adequate power in nature, exerted at proper season'. Priestley's understanding of the word 'miracle' is, then, a properly Newtonian one, differing from the Leibnizian doctrine that, since God is wholly

separate from nature, all his acts must by definition be supernatural.<sup>29</sup> Of the great importance of miracles he elsewhere makes no doubt: 'The evidence of Christianity rests upon numberless, well-attested, astonishing, and uncontroled miracles. ...'<sup>30</sup>

Priestley agrees with Hume that the evidence for miracles must be the testimony of an observer; but, just as Hartley has met sceptical arguments by aggrandizing opinio, so Priestley suggests that the importance of testimony is much more general than Hume will allow. Here - following a path already beaten flat by a century's traffic of Anglican thinkers and divines - he maintains that not only is testimony our source of information as to the laws of nature; it is in fact the foundation of most of our knowledge. Even that knowledge which has come to us through our own observations must, once the moment of observation has passed, be recalled by memory, which is itself a form of testimony:

Now belief, which depends upon recollection, is somewhat similar to that which depends upon testimony. In one case we believe that we ourselves have seen a thing to be what we now apprehend it to be, and in the other case we believe that other persons have seen it to be so.<sup>31</sup>

Like Hartley (and, indeed, 'sGravesande), Priestley believes that there is little difference between historical and mathematical persuasion: we scarcely more doubt, he says, that Julius Caesar was killed in Rome than that two plus two equals four; if there is any difference in our degree of persuasion, it is very slight. Again following Hartley - and, implicitly, replying to Hume - he argues that, though the uncertainty which attends every testimony 'can never be wholly removed by any subsequent testimony', neither can that which attends conclusions drawn from self-evident truths, 'and especially when the chain of deduction is

of considerable length.' By now, Priestley has so prepared the ground as to be able to grant most of Hume's premises. He is happy to allow that testimony may be outweighed by superior evidence and that immediate sensory evidence is certainly superior; but, such evidence apart, any claim that is not impossible a priori may be proved by testimony.

Turning at last to Hume's own arguments, Priestley accuses him of arguing in a circle by asserting that miracles are contradicted by experience when what is to be proved is whether miracles really do occur. In the context of Priestley's discussion, this is a reasonable objection, though it is a poor piece of Humean exegesis. Hume's argument is directed not against the possibility of miracles as such but against the use of reports of miracles as the foundation of religion. His concern is to weigh testimony against experience, not to suggest that previous experience must weigh more heavily than perception in the minds of those who are actually witnesses of a miracle. However, Priestley, having raised testimony almost to the level of perception in his reader's estimation, feels able to ignore this fact.

He is able also to withhold his approbation from that eastern prince who, says Hume, refused to believe the first reports he heard from Europe of frozen water. Hume supposes that the prince 'reasoned justly'; the freezing of water, since it happens suddenly and not by degrees, is an event for which nothing in the experience of those who have not seen it can prepare them; the reports, though not contrary to the prince's experience, were not conformable to it and were, indeed, 'contrary to the rule of analogy'. According to Hume's definition, analogy - the foundation of all our reasoning on matters of fact - is

that form of inference which 'leads us to expect from any cause the same events, which we have observed to result from similar causes.' Its perfection and reliability will, in all cases, depend upon the similarity of the observed causes. If this is what analogy is, then the eastern prince certainly did reason justly according to its rules; and Hartley, whom Priestley follows in these matters, appears at first to agree with Hume that this is indeed what analogy is. He describes it as that method of inference which is based upon the enumeration of similar but not identical instances; a method more or less reliable as it is 'built upon more or fewer dependent or independent Evidences, &c.' But, similar though this definition may be to Hume's, it occurs in a general discussion of assent that begins with mathematics and ends with history, whereas Hume's definition is given in a chapter entitled 'Of the Reason of Animals': no question here of mathematics or of history. The assumption that testimony may be counted among the forms of evidence to be employed in the drawing of inferences, which is built in to Hartley's account, is excluded from Hume's. He considers testimony only in his chapter on miracles, which might appear to be of only marginal importance to the Enquiry and in which it is made clear that testimony is rather a second-rate sort of evidence.<sup>32</sup>

By his own and Hartley's lights, then, Priestley is justified in withholding his approval from the eastern prince's reasoning. He supports his case with an ad hominem argument, customary recourse of the exasperated common man against the obdurate sceptic: the 'actual power of testimony' is so strong that, were half a dozen reliable witnesses to attest to having met a mutual friend who had risen from the dead, no-one

could doubt it, 'whatever Mr. Hume or any other person may pretend concerning the natural incredibility of all accounts of miracles. ...'<sup>33</sup>

Having dealt thus with Hume, Priestley is able to set out his own 'Rules for estimating the Value of Human Testimony'. In this decidedly commonplace canon - the Institutes is, after all, a textbook - he follows Hartley, who follows Locke: the credibility of testimony must depend upon the number of witnesses and upon their situation and freedom from bias; dependent witnesses, those 'through whose hands the same narration is conveyed to us', are less to be valued than independent ones; a mark of reliability in a number of witnesses is their agreement as to the main outline of their testimony and disagreement as to details; minute agreement is a mark of collusion; the more improbable the alleged fact related, the more stringent are the demands that we make of the evidence. Priestley's intention as an historian is to furnish himself with as much concurrent evidence, drawn at best from independent sources, as possible. The Lectures on History reveal how extensive these sources may be: not only historical literature but also poems, speeches, diaries and letters; and not only literature but also monuments, coins, medals, customs and even language itself, for 'language takes a tincture from the civil policy, the manners, customs, employment, and taste of the nation that uses it. ...'<sup>34</sup>

It must be this need for concurrent evidence that prompts Priestley to catalogue at such enormous length the sources of historical information. The Lectures are heavy with a prodigious load of borrowed erudition. In five lectures, Priestley moves steadily along the ranks of classical historians, from Herodotus and Thuycdides to Velleius

Paterculus and Nicephorus Gregoras. In contrast to the disdainful Voltaire, he leaves us with the impression that the body of authorities to which we can turn is so great that, unless an improbably large number of classical historians were out-and-out liars, the received account of Greek and Roman history must be reasonably accurate. Turning to his own country, he relies upon Bishop Nicolson (one of that great company of late seventeenth-century English antiquarians at whom Bolingbroke was wont to sneer), whose English Historical Library furnishes him with a list of historians stretching from Gildas and Bede to Hall, Holingshead and Sir Richard Baker. From Nicolson also, as well as from other authors, he draws a formidable catalogue of unpublished sources: letters patent held in the Paper Office, leagues and treaties in the Receipt Office of the High Court of Chancery, in the Petty-Bag Office and the Chapel of the Rolls, and numerous other examples of the 'learned lumber' that Bolingbroke despised. It is safe to assume that Priestley himself wasted no time in puzzling over the Latin of medieval clerks or the handwriting of Tudor secretaries, but his very readiness to countenance such activities - the fact that he thinks mention of them fit for young ears - indicates a view of history very far from Bolingbroke's or Voltaire's. He does not hold, and will not allow his students to hold, that sceptical posture which can be maintained only at a fastidious distance from the sources. He wants his students to get their hands dirty, at least in imagination, and to learn something of the fine detail. the grain and the cross-hatching, of the historical picture.

In this he is not alone. Gibbon's work on the Roman Empire and William Robertson's on Scotland and America are but the most striking

examples of that new and laborious attention to detail and to documents that was a marked feature of the second half of the eighteenth-century. New information was coming to light, neglected sources were being combed, and even the scholars of the seventeenth-century, so long the objects of philosophical scorn, found in Gibbon a defender. Like many of his contemporaries, Priestley unites the serious interest in sources which characterised those scholars with the generalising, philosophical concerns of Bolingbroke and the philosophes. The Lectures on History and General Policy celebrate this marriage. Intended, like Bolingbroke's Letters on the Use of History, to serve partly as commentary upon selected historical topics and partly as a guide to sources, they measure with their greater attention to detail and to 'learned lumber' the distance that historiography had travelled since Bolingbroke's day. In this work of Priestley's, and even more in the care with which he prepared his histories of electricity and of optics, it is surely not extravagant to see something of the spirit which informed Edward Gibbon's more renowned history.<sup>35</sup>

#### IV.

The rich detail of the History of Electricity, unearthed by laborious research into original documents, and the wealth of source material to which Priestley alludes in the Lectures on History have their counterpart in his scientific work. In his time 'natural philosophy' was theatre: the philosopher, the itinerant lecturer, toured the country with his air-pump or his electrical Leyden jar, demonstrating God's power in spectacularly staged 'experiments'.

Priestley's own scientific activities were admirably suited to this sort of display - he was very keen that amateurs try their hands at it and he was himself a dealer in the equipment with which they could do so - but the general trend of his thought is away from such things. His emphasis in the preface to the History of Electricity is not on science as the scene of extravagant displays of divine power but rather on the progress of science as a demonstration of the constant hand of providence in human affairs. In science as in history, God is in the details. Special effects have their place, which is why he has defended miracles against Hume's scepticism, but we should not allow them to distract us from the pageant of which they are a part, which is why he is keen to assimilate miracles to natural laws. Helped by a concept of the divine which, like Hartley's, stressed God's immanence rather than his transcendence, Priestley is able to play down the divine irruptions in human history. The God in whom he is interested is not the God who made the sun stand still for Joshua but rather the God who constantly supervises his handiwork. Indeed, Priestley regarded the neglect of God's part in human affairs as one of the corruptions introduced into Christianity from pagan philosophy: 'When ... by means of this philosophy, the Supreme Being was made to disappear, and to withdraw himself from the affairs of men, a considerable change could not but take place in our ideas of his attributes and character, and consequently in the disposition of our minds with respect to him.'<sup>36</sup>

Priestley, like Hartley, deduces God's providence from his power, wisdom and goodness. He argues that, as matter itself is incapable of motion unless acted upon from without, so all the powers of nature, of

matter in motion, can themselves be only the effect of the constant activity of divine energy. But though divine providence may be deduced from the divine attributes, Priestley more commonly moves in the opposite direction, which is why he is so interested in the history of science:

knowledge, and a variety of improvements depending upon knowledge (all of which are directly or indirectly subservient to happiness) have been increasing from the time of our earliest acquaintance with history to the present; and in the last century this progress has been amazingly rapid. By means of increasing commerce, the valuable productions of the earth become more equally distributed, and by improvements in agriculture they are continually multiplied, to the great advantage of the whole family of mankind.

The results of this progress are far-reaching: with cultivation, the earth itself is becoming a better place, 'a more healthy and pleasurable place for its most important inhabitants'. If matters continue thus, it will 'become a paradise, compared to what it was formerly, or with what it is at present.'<sup>37</sup>

Of course, even on this happy planet there is evil, but all evils are partial and, in the long run, beneficial. Many things in nature - 'tempests, lightning, diseases and death' - may frighten us, but the great system of which they are a part produces so much more happiness than pain. If it is to operate by universal laws, it cannot operate without producing partial evils as well as general good; and if it did not operate by universal laws, we would not be able to govern our lives. for we would never know what to expect from one moment to the next.<sup>38</sup> Besides, the good always preponderates over the evil, Priestley concludes, echoing sentiments which he elsewhere quotes and which he thought very fine indeed:

All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee;  
All Chance, Direction, which thou canst not see;  
All Discord, Harmony, not understood;  
All partial Evil, universal Good. ...<sup>39</sup>

These lines of Pope's, the literary expression of a widely-held belief, remind us both of the popularity of the doctrine of providence and of the nature of what was believed in. Pope's providence, and Voltaire's and Leibniz's - the comfort of numerous men of all European nations, of many sects and parties, of various shades of philosophical and scientific opinion - was not the providence of Christian tradition. It paid no especial attention to the Jews or to the Roman Empire, nor did it address itself directly to the souls of the godly. It was not to be invoked as an explanation of any particular historical event, whether happy or unhappy. Instead, it was a providence that acted, as Pope explained, 'not by partial, but by gen'ral laws'. These laws, of which those discovered by Newton are the most striking, admit of no exception (the heavy object must tend earthward, whether it hit Aeschylus or Goliath): they are, however, part of a divine plan shaped so as to promote the ultimate good of the whole. So widespread was the belief in this plan that a deist like Voltaire and a Christian like Colin Maclaurin could join in denouncing Spinoza as an atheist who, failing to recognise the purposes of this great machine, could not understand even that the eyes were made for a purpose and that they therefore proclaim the existence of a divine artificer.<sup>40</sup>

Priestley devotes the last three of his Lectures on History to providence:

The noblest object of attention to an historian, and to every person who considers himself as a subject of the moral government of God, I have reserved for the last place,; and that is, the

conduct of Divine Providence in the direction of human affairs. This is the most sublime subject of contemplation that can employ the mind of man; and ... has the happiest tendency to inspire our hearts with the sentiments of piety and virtue.

At first sight, history, like nature, may seem a mere tangle of perplexities; but, properly regarded, it can be seen for what it really is: 'an exhibition of the ways of God,' which, as our knowledge grows, may soon come to rival nature as our principal means, scripture apart, of attaining to a knowledge of those ways. Seeming again, though less favourably, to echo Pope ('presume not God to scan'), Priestley admits that, 'It may, by some, be thought presumptuous in man to attempt to scan the ways of God in the conduct of human affairs.' But the same objection, he points out, might be made to the study of natural science:

Both methods are equally attempts to trace out the perfections and providence of God, by means of different footsteps which he has left us of them, differing only in this, that the one is made more distinct than the other, What is the whole science of physiology but an attempt to investigate the reasons, or final causes, of the structure of the several parts of nature, with a view to seeing farther into the wisdom and goodness of the Divine Being manifested in his words?<sup>41</sup>

The human anatomy is an organism directed towards certain ends. In studying its construction, we must look not merely for causes but for final causes, and not merely for final causes but for reasons. Priestley, like Maclaurin before him, assumes that ultimately physiological explanations will be teleological in form; a description of the function served by an organism will take shape as a description of the end which it serves in the bodily economy (a description, that is, of its final cause) or even of the reason why it was put there. And it was put there, of course, by an all-wise and benevolent creator; a fact which will doubtless guide the theologically-minded physiologist in

his researches. The historian must approach his own work in a similar way. Of each event he must ask what function it served, how it contributed to human happiness. That it did contribute, or will contribute, to general happiness is, of course, beyond doubt; the system of human nature and of natural laws which gave it rise was created and set in motion by the same all-wise and benevolent creator.<sup>42</sup>

Belief in God's wisdom and goodness is as axiomatic as the assumption of human rationality and it is not to be abandoned in the face of apparently contradictory evidence:

we never think we ought to give up our belief of the wisdom and goodness of God, because we are not able to see how every appearance in nature is reconcilable with them. ... Let an historian, therefore, attend to every instance of improvement, and a better state of things being brought about, by the events which are presented to him in history, and let him ascribe those events to an intention in the Divine Being to bring about that better state of things by means of those events; and if he cannot see the same benevolent tendency in all other appearances, let him remain in suspense with regard to them.<sup>43</sup>

It might seem that Priestley has here rather over-egged his methodological pudding. He informs the reader of the Institutes that the world in general and human history in particular proclaim the being of a providential God; in the Lectures on History, however, the existence of this benevolent being is presented as an assumption which ought to underlie the historian's work. But it cannot be both an inference and an axiom; it cannot be derived from evidence and at the same time be an unfalsifiable assumption guiding the examination of this evidence. Which then is it to be? To answer this question, we have to imagine Priestley as author of the Institutes turning to the unbeliever and asking whether the ever-increasing glories of creation do not

bespeak a benevolent and supreme architect. The unbeliever is being asked not to draw an inference but to share an attitude: to place himself here, where the world can be seen as an harmonious whole which cannot but be the work of benevolent intelligence, rather than there, from where it seems a mere inchoate flux. It is as though the lecturer's hand, sweeping outwards in expansive gesture, indicates not some logical derivation chalked on a blackboard but an electrical machine which exemplifies God's power even if it cannot prove his existence. Intellectual showmanship of this sort, rather than metaphysical argument, is what comes most naturally to Priestley (though, of course, he prefers accumulated detail to spectacular instances). There is no reason to doubt that his belief in God - which seems always to have been a deep, unshakeable conviction, not an inference or a deduction - did indeed serve just the purpose that he said such a belief should serve, that it caused him to look in human affairs for marks of progress and to suspend judgement where those marks appeared to be absent. Neither need we doubt that his belief was strengthened by a contemplation of God's works.

Here as elsewhere, the clear tendency of Priestley's thought is to emphasise not the great coups de theatre of the divine drama - the first born slain, the Red Sea parted, the water turned to wine - but rather those defter touches of the story in which the hand of the author is ever apparent. History is God's creation, moving, in obedience to a pre-ordained plan, towards a pre-determined end; we may, says Priestley, trace 'the series and connexion of events ... so that we may say the plan of this divine drama is opening more and more, and the grand

catastrophe growing nearer and nearer, perpetually'. But he would doubtless have agreed with Bossuet that, 'Except for certain extraordinary strokes, where God wished his hand alone to show itself, there has never been any great change which has not had its causes in preceding centuries'. In his wisdom, God 'prepared the effects in the most remote causes', and it is the historian's task to seek for these causes and, in doing so, to uncover God's 'secret dispositions'.<sup>44</sup> Priestly is as ready as Bossuet to allow for those 'extraordinary strokes with which God, by miraculous means, intervenes directly in human affairs. These miracles have however been few, and the age of miracles is passed. Priestley will certainly not admit as authentic all the miracles recorded by Bossuet's co-religionists and he devotes some space in the Institutes to trying to prove that there have been no miracles other than those described in the Bible. Elsewhere he suggests that:

We shall learn to respect the laws of nature the more, if we consider the extraordinary provision that the Author of Nature has made to preserve their uniformity, and to supersede the necessity of the frequent violation of them, which he has done by means of occasional and seasonable miraculous interpositions. In fact, the proper use of miracle has been to make more miracles unnecessary.<sup>45</sup>

As we have already seen, Priestley carries his love of order and harmonious scientific principles so far as to be prepared to assimilate even miracles to natural laws; and he is ready, it seems, to allow the historian to ascribe to natural causes even some of those events which the Bible calls miracles. Thus in his lectures On the Theory of Language and Universal Grammar, which he published in 1762, he suggests that, though the diversity of human language is held to have been produced by God's direct action in destroying the tower of Babel, 'it is

no impiety to suppose, that this, agreeable to most other operations of the deity might have been brought about by natural means'. And, like any secular-minded philosophe, like Voltaire or Montesquieu, he goes on to suggest what these means may have been.<sup>46</sup>

Nonetheless, Priestley's providence remains closer to Bossuet's than to any more profane model. Ronald Meek has attributed to Bossuet 'a classical statement of what may perhaps be called the providential version of the law of unintended consequences'. All political actions, says Bossuet, have such consequences; our governors, whatever they do, cannot help but minister to ends not their own:

God alone can reduce everything to his will. That is why everything is surprising when one looks only at particular causes, and nevertheless everything advances with regulated progression.<sup>47</sup>

It was soon understood that the working out of these consequences need not be seen as providential. In his Fable of the Bees, published in 1714, Bernard Mandeville observes that, 'Nothing was more instrumental in forwarding the Reformation, than the Sloth and Stupidity of the Roman Clergy; yet the same Reformation has rous'd 'em from the Laziness and Ignorance they then labour'd under, and the followers of Luther, Calvin, and others, may be said to have reform'd not only those whom they drew in to their sentiments, but likewise those who remain'd their greatest Opposers.'<sup>48</sup> The reform of the priesthood is, then, the unintended consequence of the the Protestants' action working itself out according to the laws of human nature. The reader is left to decide for himself whether or not these laws were established, with just <sup>these</sup> consequences in mind, by divine omnipotence. Mandeville had, in fact, begun to discern the operation of that Invisible Hand which Adam Smith was to, make

famous sixty years later in The Wealth of Nations. The hand, of course, is that not of God but of secular circumstance; it ensures that, from the private pursuit of personal gain, public good will arise. But Priestley, though writing long after Mandeville and freely acknowledging the importance of Smith's book, has made no attempt to move beyond Bossuet. The Roman Catholic Church, he explains, 'is prodigiously better than it was before the existence of protestantism. There are fewer abuses in the papal constitution than formerly; and popish princes, though they remain attached to the rites of the Romish Church, have, in fact thrown off all subjection to the pope.' Like Mandeville, he adds that the old Puritans and the modern Dissenters have performed a similar service for the Church of England.<sup>49</sup> But, though his illustration of the law of unintended consequences is the same as Mandeville's, his interpretation of it is Bossuet's.

Nor does he lack materials for such interpretations. Nothing - not even, as Christ tell us, the fall of a sparrow - can come to pass without God's knowledge. The divine hand is involved equally in all events, great and small, though we may more easily discern it in the great. It is never so apparent to us as when we see good brought out of evil, dire events springing from trivial causes, or purposes mistook falling on their inventors' heads: a King's desire to divorce his wife brought about the Reformation in England; the intolerable oppression of Phillip II of Spain resulted in the freedom of the Dutch States; the defeat of the Athenians before Syracuse is a terrible thing to read of in the pages of Thucydides, but it saved the rest of Greece form slavery and, since imperial nations can never themselves be free, it saved

Athens too.<sup>50</sup> Surveying this spectacle, Priestley was moved to a striking sentence that (except, perhaps, for its mention of liberty) could easily have been written by the Bishop of Meaux himself:

This is certain, that all the capital events in this world, which have contributed to bring about a better state of things in general, all the situations in human affairs favourable to liberty, virtue, and happiness, were brought about in a manner independent of the policy, the designs, or even the wishes, of all human beings, and must be ascribed wholly to the good providence of God, wisely over-ruling the passions and powers of men to his own benevolent purposes.<sup>51</sup>

Obviously, divine omnipotence could have ordered things otherwise, it might have made human nature and government perfect from the beginning, but the course that it did adopt must ipso facto have been the best: 'In short, it seems to have been the intention of Divine Providence, that mankind should be, as afar as possible, self-taught; that we should attain to every thing excellent and useful, as the result of our own experience and observation; that our judgments should be formed by the appearance, which are presented to them, and our hearts instructed by their own feelings'. When we have at last perfected our forms of government, we will enjoy our new state of felicity far more than we would if we had not had to progress from error to truth, from 'barbarous and imperfect systems of policy' to our more happy state.<sup>52</sup>

V.

Looking as he did on human history as a story of gradual amelioration, Priestley was not much disposed (at least at this stage of his career) to think in terms of discreet<sup>te</sup> revolutionary leaps. The word 'revolution' had a least two meanings in his time - it meant both a

complete overthrow of some existing order and a cyclical process, a revolving of things to their original condition - and it is presumably the less violent of them that he has in mind when he uses the word in his Lectures on History: 'the present happier state of things was brought about rather by an accidental concurrence of circumstances, than by any effects of human wisdom and foresight. We see the hand of Divine providence in these revolutions which have been the passive and blind instruments of their own felicity.'<sup>53</sup> But neither was he likely, as one who thought always of the golden age as being in the future, to embrace very readily the idea of a return to some earlier state of felicity. Thus we find in his writings no fond regard for that 'ancient constitution', guarantor of Saxon liberties, after which many of his contemporaries used nostalgically to hanker; and neither do we find any mention of the 'Norman yoke', supposed by many radicals to have destroyed those liberties. Priestley sees Saxon law as no more than embryonic feudalism and he describes the Norman conquest not as a revolution in the modern sense of the term, not as the imposition of foreign and tyrannical ways, but as the importation of a more perfect form of something already present.<sup>54</sup> Nor is the passing of this system seen as a sudden upheaval. The decline of feudalism, the rise of order 'out of this chaos and confusion', was a gradual process with a number of causes, social, economic and military: 'But what is most of all remarkable with respect to the feudal system is, that a form of government so ill calculated to secure the most valuable ends of society; a constitution so totally inconsistent with security and liberty, and so unfriendly to commerce and science; should, in several instances, have terminated, by the natural course of things, in

governments in which men enjoy the greatest security, together with all desirable liberty; and where the utmost scope is given to the genius of man in the extension of arts, manufactures, commerce, and science.'<sup>55</sup> This happy result, it will be noted, is attributed to 'the natural course of things', to divine providence working through the laws of human nature.

History is, then, a gentle slope, not a rugged cliff-face marked by sudden changes in inclination. Priestley devotes a lecture to periods in history, in which, having reached 'the Norman Conquest, by which the feudal tenures were established, and the whole system of the feudal law competed', he goes on to talk of the 'gradual declension' of this system. There is, however, one event of whose epochal significance he makes no doubt at all:

But the most important period in our history is that of the revolution under king william. Then it was that our constitution, after many fluctuations, and frequent struggles for power by the different members of it (several of them attended with vast effusion of blood), was finally settled, A revolution so remarkable, and attended with such happy consequences, has perhaps no parallel in the history of the world. This it was, as Mr. Hume says, that cut off all pretensions to power founded on hereditary right; when a prince was chosen who received the crown on express conditions, and found his authority established on the same bottom with the privileges of the people; so that there has been no difference between our kings and parliament since.<sup>56</sup>

There is little enthusiasm here for revolutions as such, and nothing at all like the enthusiasm professed by Priestley's fellow Presbyterian the Reverend Robert Fleming, whose Divine Right of the Revolution had first appeared in 1706. In this and other works frequently reprinted throughout the century, Fleming depicted human history as progressing through revolutionary violence: Moses, King David and William of Orange

were alike in being revolutionary heroes, the leaders of popular insurrections. Priestley will have none of this and, like Hume, sees the Glorious Revolution as a singular and unprecedented event ending the turmoil of earlier days and quite unlike the factional, aristocratic revolts of medieval times.<sup>57</sup> Being so singular an event, it need not be taken as a precedent. The British constitution, though not without 'some radical and very considerable defects', is so manifestly superior to others 'that there are few foreigners who do not give ours the preference to their own'. Revolution - or, indeed, the introduction of 'any material change into an established form of government' - is an extremely hazardous enterprise: 'No human sagacity can foresee what inconvenience might arise from it.'<sup>58</sup>

Influenced, perhaps, by this gradualist view of English political history, Priestley's picture of revolutions in knowledge is notably lacking in violence. I.B. Cohen has drawn attention to a concept current in the eighteenth century of revolution as a process involving two stages, 'in which first an existing or accepted system (whether of knowledge or of government) had to be destroyed, and then a new system had to be erected in its place', and he notes a number of uses of this concept in contemporary discussions of the history of science. Thus Jean d'Alembert, in the Discours preliminaire which he wrote in 1751 for the great Encyclopedie, praises Descartes as one who showed 'intelligent minds how to throw off the yoke of scholasticism, of opinion, of authority ...', and was 'a leader of conspirators who, before anyone else, had the courage to rise against a despotic and arbitrary power and who, in preparing a resounding revolution, laid the foundations of a

more just and happier government, which he himself was not able to see established.' And the year before, the Baron de Turgot had thus apostrophized his fellow countryman: 'Great Descartes, if it was not always given to you to find the truth, at least you have destroyed the tyranny of error.'<sup>59</sup> Priestley too (in his lecture on historical periods) accords Descartes something like this position:

The Saracens occasioned the revival of the Aristotelian philosophy in Europe, which no person had the courage to controvert before Descartes, who died about the time that Newton was born. In his time, however, the foundations of the true philosophy were laid by Lord Bacon, the work was prosecuted with much assiduity by Boyle, and carried by Newton to a great degree of perfection.<sup>60</sup>

But Priestley's language has nothing of the clarion quality of his French contemporaries': no political imagery here, no talk of conspirators, of the throwing off of yokes or the destruction of tyranny. Rather, this paragraph is merely the culmination of an account of the many revolutions (in the mildest sense of the word) of human knowledge. The arts and sciences, we learn, flourished in Greece, then in Rome, then in Constantinople, where they were preserved while 'all the rest of Europe was involved in the most deplorable ignorance and barbarity. ...' At this time, however, science was cultivated by the Saracens, who - diligent in their pursuit of mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and history - also translated into their own language all the most valuable Greek writings, particularly those of Aristotle. It was the Saracens who brought learning back into Christendom by way of Spain. At this time, then, the works of Aristotle were a beam of light in a gloomy and barbarous Europe, and only later was it necessary, or,

indeed, possible, for their authority to be challenged. Since the time of that challenge, progress has been rapid:

he who considers that no bounds can be set to our knowledge (since the works of God are, like their author, infinite), that every new discovery is but an opening to several more, and consequently, that the progress of real knowledge may be expected to go on, not merely in an uniform manner, but to be constantly accelerated; and who shall reflect upon the astonishing improvements that have been made in this branch, and indeed in all the branches of real knowledge, in little more than two centuries that have elapsed since the expiration of that long period of darkness, cannot help forming the most glorious expectations.<sup>61</sup>

Thus the History of Vision. Here, Priestley fits Descartes into this glorious story in a manner rather different from either d'Alembert's or Turgot's. He explains that, since the renaissance ('the revival of literature'), many people - 'Telesius in Italy, Lord Bacon in England, and others in different places' - had challenged Aristotle's authority but that none of them had sufficient reputation to set up in opposition to it; 'Indeed, nothing but some new and general system of philosophy could have answered the purpose.' Descartes' system, though it owed its establishment less to its creator's discoveries and good judgment than to 'the fertility and boldness of his imagination', did indeed answer the purpose. Like all new things it met with opposition, but soon it came nearly to rival the Aristotelian system in popularity; 'so that there was danger, lest the world, instead of being emancipated from servitude, should only have changed one master for another' adds Priestley, slipping at last, though rather casually, into political imagery. But all possibility of a new servitude was, of course, averted by Newton, whose philosophy 'bids fair to stand as long as that system, the great laws of which it so satisfactory [sic] unfolds.'<sup>62</sup>

Only a system, not a mere band of conspirators, could overthrow a system. Descartes' philosophy constituted such a system; he tried to philosophise 'after the manner of the ancients', disdainng experiment and attempting to deduce natural phenomena from preconceived first principles. Priestley is not at all surprised that this now discredited method of proceeding should long have been so popular:

It was a compendious road to universal knowledge, and peculiarly flattering to the ambitions of those who wished to appear as the heads of secret sects, and the founders of systems. We should also consider, that the amazing variety which we now find in natural powers and principles, though arising, we have reason to believe, from the greatest uniformity and simplicity in their primary causes, was a thing of which the ancients had no idea. Some one great key, that was able to unlock all the mysteries of nature, always appeared to them to be within their reach, and though so many of them had failed, it suggested no suspicion that one key would not answer the purposes, but only led them to try others.<sup>63</sup>

Thus we have an analysis of scientific revolution rather more complex than d'Alembert's or Turgot's. Human nature, we learn from Priestley's sympathetic account, is naturally attracted to system builders and their works. So much so, indeed, that the mere refutation of a system will not suffice to bring about its abandonment by the generality of men: there must first be another to replace it; better an erroneous system than no system at all. Descartes' work was valuable because it was strong enough to topple the Aristotelian system but not so strong as to become an unshakeable orthodoxy itself. It was in its turn supplanted by the Newtonian system and 'the more humble, patient, and laborious method of investigation. ...' Once more, we see how providence has again and again brought real good out of apparent evil: the Saracens, though infidels, preserved the Aristotelian philosophy; the Aristotelian philosophy, though erroneous, was water to the parched intellects of a

barbarous Europe; the Cartesian philosophy, though founded on mistaken conjecture and false principles, overthrew the Aristotelian system, as mere patient empiricism could not, and thus prepared the way for modern researches. The impression with which we are left is one not of revolution - a violent upheaval, suddenly shattering the Aristotelian fabric - but of revolutions, as of a spiral slowly twisting upwards.

Cohen points out that, later in his life, Priestley expressed the view, unusual for the times, that revolutions in science were not always progressive: 'Nothing is more common, in the history of all the branches of experimental philosophy, than the most unexpected revolutions of good or bad success.'<sup>64</sup> But even in one of his earlier works, he concedes that the spiralling is not always upwards:

The progress of human life in general is from poverty to riches, and from riches to luxury, and ruin: in Architecture, structures have always been at first heavy, and inconvenient, then useful and ornamental, and lastly real propriety and magnificence have been lost in superfluous decorations. Our very dress is at first plain and awkward, then easy and elegant, and lastly downright fantastical. Stages of a similar nature may be observed in the progress of all human arts; and languages, being liable to the same influences, hath undergone the same changes.<sup>65</sup>

This account of things - which, though it occurs in a course of lectures on language, is clearly and expressly intended to refer to 'human life in general' - is not at all what we would have expected from its author. It expresses a view popular with many of his contemporaries, who attributed the degeneration and decline of states to a lack of civic virtue. Nothing, they believed, was more likely to corrupt civic virtue than luxury; but unfortunately luxury was born of wealth, and nothing was more likely to promote wealth than the civic virtues of frugality and industry. There is little room in this pessimistic doctrine for a

theory of progress. The story of political life is one of decline rather than constant improvement, of a cycle of corruption which can be slowed down or arrested only by the steady maintenance of the public spirit.<sup>66</sup> To what, then, can we attribute this use by Priestley of a philosophical language quite antagonistic to his own?

One possibility is that what we have here is simply the case of a young man (Priestley was twenty-nine when these lectures were published) slipping carelessly into one of the commonplaces of the age. On the other hand, Priestley certainly did believe, even at this early date, in both progress and divine providence. The year before the appearance in print of these lectures, he had published a school textbook on English grammar, in whose preface he had informed his readers that:

We need make no doubt but that the best forms of speech will, in time, establish themselves by their own superior excellence: and, in all controversies, it is better to wait the decisions of Time, which are slow and sure, than to take those of Synods, which are often hasty and injudicious. A manufacture for which there is a great demand, and a language that many persons have leisure to read and write, are both sure to be brought, in time, to all the perfection of which they are capable.<sup>67</sup>

But here perhaps, in this very expression of faith in progress, we have an indication of how our question might be answered. Priestley believes in the progress of language and industry, but he believes also that both may be brought 'to all the perfection of which they are capable'; at which point, presumably, progress must have an end. He expands upon this theme in his lectures, illustrating it with 'a short history of the revolutions of the Roman language.' Here he explains that there are limits to the growth of a language, determined by the limits to the improvement of human life and the human mind. Once a people has words

and expression sufficient to convey the full range of ideas of which it is capable, any further modification of the language 'were absurd and burthensome'. So it is with trees: once they have attained their full growth, their 'redundant juices' will merely nourish destructive excrescences, fungi and mosses.<sup>68</sup>

As we have seen, Priestley thought that the art of government was still in its infancy. So were the natural sciences:

It may be said, that there is a ne plus ultra in every thing, and therefore in electricity. It is true: but what reason is there to think that we arrived at it.<sup>69</sup>

In science and in politics, we are to infer, the ne plus ultra is so distant that when it is attained the world will indeed look like paradise compared with today. So far are we from reaching perfection in these areas that, though not every step is a step forward, there can be no question yet of degeneration, nor, indeed, will there be any question of it for a very long time. But in more limited areas of human endeavour, perfection may be, and has been, reached; and, having been reached, it will be, and has been, lost. In his maturity, Priestley surely would not so readily concede that linguistic perfection may be so easily reached (for if the boundaries of improvement in language are also those of improvement in human life and the human mind, these boundaries must be very distant from us), but he was always able to admit that when perfection had been attained in any field, then corruption might follow. For which reason he detects something very like a cycle of corruption in the world of the arts. Painting, poetry and music may indeed reach perfection and, having reached it, can do nothing but decline. It is not so with science: Pope and others have

left us with as many valuable poems as we can be expected to handle; Newton has merely uncovered the illimitable possibilities that lie before us.<sup>70</sup>

And, of course, there was one area in which perfection was early attained: in religion it was reached in the early years of the first century and, after that, decay inevitably followed. It is for this reason, as we shall see in a later chapter, that so ardent a believer in progress as Priestley could write An History of the Corruptions of Christianity.<sup>71</sup>

## VI.

Writers on historiography, though they usually deplore Whiggism - the vision of the past as a triumphal progress and its use as a sanction for the present - are not infrequently guilty of it themselves. The Whig interpretation of the history of historiography sees in the closely-written, footnoted texts of nineteenth and twentieth century historians an efflorescence only dimly foreshadowed in the providential, exemplary or conjectural histories which preceded them. The authors of these earlier, primitive works are patted or slapped in so far as they succeed or fail to anticipate the standards of twentieth-century research. This is not, of course, a matter for criticism - an intellectual history without taint of Whiggism would be very colourless indeed - but it should urge us to caution.<sup>72</sup> Whig history, as Sir Herbert Butterfield pointed out, tends towards simplification, and this is a tendency which commentators on Priestley's historical writings have certainly not escaped. As an ecclesiastical historian, Priestley, says

Sir Leslie Stephen, is neither impartial nor very knowledgeable; and T.P. Peardon thinks him an advocate rather than a scholar.<sup>73</sup> Of course, simplification is not always falsification, and there is some truth in these charges: if one is convinced, as Priestley was, that history, though a mighty maze, is not without a plan, one will naturally proceed differently from those who think that there is no plan (or, indeed, no maze, just an overgrown thicket); one will be a topiarist, snipping away with one's scholarly shears so that the true millennial shape of things may be distinguished from irrelevant greenery. But Priestley never moved across the historical landscape with quite the clumsiness that Stephen and Peardon attribute to him; even empiricists are capable of agility, and to understand the cast of Priestley's mind as an historian we must seek its origins in the circumstance of his education as an empiricist.

The Newtonian world-view is geometrical, but few learned of it in its geometrical form. Many read the Opticks - a lively, empirical work, full of experiments and hypotheses, little encumbered with equations - but, naturally shy of mathematical physics, they would content themselves with abridgements and epitomes of the Principia. If these textbooks were not to be as incomprehensibly mathematical as Newton's own work, they would need to employ mechanical models. Often the same textbook would deal with both the Opticks and the Principia in similar terms, thus reducing any sense of distinction between them. The very title of 'sGravesande's book tells us that in it the 'Mathematical Elements of Natural Philosophy' will be 'confirm'd by Experiments', and the pages which follow abound in such experiments. Nor are these mere

thought-experiments or illustrations; they are performable, and both of 'sGravesande's two heavy volumes are full of pull-out engravings of the machinery (specially designed for the book) with which they could be performed. This, says 'sGravesande, will make the science easier to understand, for 'all Mathematical Demonstrations are abstracted'. And, most significantly, he adds that in this he is following 'the Example of the English, whose Way of teaching Natural Philosophy gave me occasion to think of the Method I have followed in this Work.'<sup>74</sup>

This is the style of English natural philosophy: easy, familiar, fond of experimental conjuring tricks, given more to striking metaphors than to mathematical abstraction. All Priestley's scientific works belong to this genre; he writes of his experiments in an anecdotal manner and criticises the more abstract style of scientific literature as too discouraging. Scientists, he says, generally write synthetically: they state as a proposition to be proved that which it took them many experiments to discover and they describe their experiments (or some of them) as though all had been made 'to verify a true preconceived theory'. This synthetic method is certainly the best

way of promoting the understanding of a science, but the analytic method is the best for promoting scientific progress. The History of Electricity, Priestley explains, has been written analytically; he has tried to describe how discoveries were made and with what intention. Even the genius of Sir Isaac Newton would seem a little less unapproachably great were his achievements to be recounted in this way.<sup>75</sup>

One of the effects of this conversational style is to make natural philosophy seem continuous with other activities. So the desire to be the Newton of the moral sciences - not an uncommon ambition in Britain in the first half of the eighteenth century - will appear quite attainable; success will not necessitate reducing the subject to mathematical formulae, because, as natural philosophers like 'sGravesande have shown, one can be impeccably Newtonian whilst still attending largely to empirical minutiae.<sup>76</sup> Priestly could, then, regard himself as a man of his time, imbued with the Newtonian spirit, without feeling obliged to reduce the complex phenomena of human history to points upon a philosophical graph paper. We have already seen how detailed his view of the past could be; it is a view that he extends to law as well. His Course of Lectures on the Constitution and Laws of England survives only as a syllabus prefaced by an introductory address, but this is quite enough to indicate that these lectures are not about jurisprudence: they do not seek to derive the principles of law from those of natural reason; instead, they deal with the structure of the English legal system, the constitutional status of regal and parliamentary authority, the powers of the higher and lower courts, the contents of common and of statute law. In his introductory address, Priestley points out that 'there is a necessity of obliging every member of the state to conform to the pre-established rules of it, whether he approves of it or not'; that laws are so complex that no-one could conjecture a priori as to their origins; and that, as many of them arose from circumstances that no longer exist, they cannot properly be understood without historical knowledge.<sup>77</sup>

There is no hint in any of this (as there might be if the author were a French philosophe) of a system of abuses crying out for reform, nor any suggestion that things ought to be reduced to more orderly, rational principles. As Priestley grew older his sympathy for what many thought of as a ramshackle and Gothic constitution markedly diminished, but in the seventeen-sixties he was still happy to approach the laws and history of his nation very much as a natural philosopher might approach physical phenomena: he brought principles to them, he drew principles from them (or claimed that he did), but he no more felt obliged to reduce them to his principles than natural philosophers felt obliged to reduce the natural world to mathematical principles.

Of course, it used to be alleged that the thinkers of the Enlightenment did indeed seek to reduce the complexities of human life to inert theory. It was widely supposed - and in some circles perhaps it still is - that they failed to recognise the diversity of human nature, that they thought it static and took eighteenth-century Western European man as their model for the whole race in every period of its history and in every corner of the globe. Hume's concise expression of this view has won for him the status of representative miscreant: 'It is universally acknowledged that there is great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nations and ages, and that human nature remains still the same, in its principles and operations.'<sup>78</sup> Now clearly, if history is to serve an exemplary purpose, if it is to furnish us with useful information about God's ways, some assumption must be made as to the sameness of human nature. It is not obvious, though, that this assumption need be other than a fairly minimal one. As Sir John Steuart

said in 1767, 'Man we find acting in all ages, in all countries, and in all climates, from the principles of self-interest, expediency, duty or passion. In this he is alike, in nothing else'. Five years later, Diderot explained that human beings have no more in common 'than a similarity of structure, the same needs, an attraction towards the same pleasure, and a common aversion from the same kinds of pain. ...'<sup>79</sup>

Of course, these assumptions are still either too basic or not basic enough. On the one hand, they will not provide the basis of a universal theory of human behaviour, because it is difficult to think of any form of human behaviour - however altruistic-seeming - that could not be explained in terms of self-interest. On the other hand, they will not help to explain people's own understanding of their behaviour, because their understanding of their interests will vary from time to time and from place to place. These are, however, the assumptions to which Priestley restricted himself; indeed, since his belief in that similarity of structure to which Diderot refers was founded in associationism, he could scarcely go beyond them. Hartley teaches that we bring nothing mental into the world; all the furniture of our minds is acquired from outside and arranged as associations dictate. It follows then that our mental furniture will be heavily marked by local styles. Naturally, there are constants - a chair must be a thing for sitting on, whether it be a Chippendale carver or the throne of Ozymandias - but very much depends upon geographical or temporal circumstance. If this were not so, then neither history nor geography would be as useful as they are. 'History ...', says Priestley, 'furnishes all that can be said upon the curious subject of national

characters, whatever hypothesis we adopt with respect to them; whether we plead for the prevailing influence of climate, or the infection of example and the force of habits of long standing.'<sup>80</sup> He is aware, too, that such characters may change with time; the Persians, now a most abstemious people, were quite the opposite in ancient times. And whatever the reason for these differences, there is only one way in which we can learn of them:

Experience and self-examination may assist us in adjusting the general theory of the human mind. But it is in history alone that we can see the strength of its powers, the connexion of its principles, and the variety to which individuals of the species are subject, together with many other particulars, equally curious and useful to be known by a person who is desirous thoroughly to understand this very important and interesting subject.<sup>81</sup>

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES.

1. Priestley [1806], pp.87-88, and [1788a], preface. Both internal evidence and a comparison with their published syllabus (Priestley [1765a]) indicate that these lectures were not altered in any significant detail for their publication in 1788; they can safely be taken to represent what their author thought in the seventeen-sixties. Of these three sets of lectures, only the first saw print; their author having decided that publication of the other two had been rendered unnecessary by the appearance of Blackstone's Commentary, Sullivan's Law Lectures and Robert Henry's History of England.
2. Priestley [1788a], p.xxii.
3. Ibid., p.xxxvi.
4. Ibid., p.2.
5. Priestley says (1806], p.78) that he 'composed the written first copy' of the Institutes whilst at Daventry. He also lists this work (ibid., p.93) with the 'tracts' written for the

use of his congregation at the Mill-Hill Chapel in Leeds (where he was minister from 1767 to 1773); by this he presumably means that for them he put it through another draft or into a publishable form.

6. Thomas Sprat, History of the Royal Society quoted in Douglas [1951], p.27. There is still no adequate general account of English historical writing in the eighteenth century; Black [1926] and Peardon [1933] are useful but pedestrian. The first chapter of Porter [1988] is, however, a brilliant sketch.
7. Bolingbroke [1752], pp.8-9.
8. Bolingbroke [1752], pp.14, 72.
9. See Black [1926], p.90.
10. Watts, Improvement of the Mind, quoted in Lincoln [1938], p.79.
11. Boswell [1791], 18 April, 1775 (ii, 165-66).
12. See Isaac Kramnick, editorial introduction to Bolingbroke [1752], p.xxxviii.
13. Priestley [1783b], pp.127-130. For Voltaire, see Black [1926], p.53.
14. See Black [1926], pp.56-57, 87-88.
15. Bolingbroke [1752], pp.37-40.
16. See Hazard [1935], ch.iii, especially p.224.
17. See Stephen [1876], i, 196-208.
18. See Voegelin [1975], pp.14, 16. In these matters Bossuet anticipates Burke ([1782], p.95): 'The individual is foolish ... but the species is wise, and when time is given to it, as a species it almost always acts right.' C.f. Burke [1790], p.183: 'We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and of ages.'
19. Voegelin [1975], pp.5-7.
20. Priestley [1788a], pp.9-11, 14. C.f., Bolingbroke [1752], pp.15, 80.
21. Priestley [1772-74], ii, 17-48.
22. Priestley [1788a], p.36.

23. 'sGravesande [1720-21], i, xxxvi-xxxvii.
24. Hartley [1749], i, 338. This argument was very popular with the Newtonians: see Hacking [1975], ch.xviii.
25. Hartley [1749], i, 342.
26. Ibid., i, 362. Priestley [1788a], pp.187-196. For Newton's work on chronology, see Manuel [1963].
27. Hume [1748], sec.x, pt.i, par.90 (p.115). C.f. Locke [1700], bk.iv, ch. xiv, secs.10-11. Locke remarks that 'no Probability can arise higher than its first Original.'
28. Hume [1748], sec.x, pt.ii, par.100 (p.130).
29. Priestley [1772-74], ii, 68-71. For a brief account of the difference between these two views see Wilde [1982], pp.101-104. Priestley's view of the relation between miracles and general laws is very similar to ~~Samuel~~ Butler's: see his [1736], pt.ii, ch.iv, secs.4-5. *Joseph*
30. Priestley [1771a], p.414. C.f. Priestley's [1787a], p.18, in which he says of holy communion that, 'This rite, therefore, is, in fact, one of the standing proofs of the truth of Christianity.'
31. Priestley [1772-74], ii, 78. For some of the seventeenth-century arguments which Priestley's so resemble, see Shapiro [1983], pp.95-99. 154-159.
32. Hume [1748], sec.ix, par.82 (p.104); sec.x, pt.i, par.89, pp.113-114); Hartley [1749], i, 344-345.
33. Priestley [1772-74], ii, 83-84.
34. Priestley [1788a], pp.42-70.
35. On these aspects of English historical writing in the second half of the eighteenth century see Peardon [1933], especially chs.iv and v, and Kenyon [1983], pp.63-64, 89-91. (Kenyon remarks (pp.59-60) of the Dissenting Academies - which 'spurned the parochialism of so much British historical writing' - that their interest in world history, though it 'produced a plethora of elementary "cribs", skeletal outlines of events and compendia of "useful facts", ... at the other extreme it produced the series of brilliant lectures delivered by the scientist Joseph Priesltey to his students at Warrington Academy. ... They, had an immense influence, particularly in America, where they were still being used and recommended in the 1880s, and it is not too fanciful to suppose that it is this and similar books which have made courses in 'World History' or 'World Civilization' a compulsory element in syllabuses of so many American colleges.') For Gibbon's

tribute to the scholars of the seventeenth century, see Douglas [1951], p.281.

36. Priestley [1770a], p.375. Priestley's role as someone who, though well-equipped to display the more dramatic wonders of science beloved of the itinerant lecturers of his time, preferred to concentrate on the gradually-unfolding phenomena of nature rather than on the single spectacle is explored in Schaffer [1983], esp. pp.22-31, and Money [1988]. On Priestley's work as an experimenter, see Schaffer [1984], pp.157-162; on the History of Electricity as an account of God's providence at work in the progress of science see McEvoy [1979], pp.5-6; on the role of the experimenter and the itinerant lecturer in English provincial culture of the eighteenth century, see Porter [1980].
37. Priestley [1772-74], i, 20-21.
38. Ibid., i, 23-25.
39. Alexander Pope, Essay on Man, i, ll.289-292. Quoted in Priestley [1777a], pp.204, 301. On each occasion Priestley quotes the lines as illustrations of some rhetorical principle, but it is clear from his first mention of them that he approves of their sense as well as of their sound. He introduces them as 'the following admirable lines of Mr. Pope', and he explains that, though they are cited as an example of wit, 'the extreme seriousness of the subject checks every tendency to smile, and with this, I think, the passage will lose the name of wit, in the modern sense of the word'. He goes on to quote ll.85-90 of the same epistle, describing them as 'truly sublime'.
40. Maclaurin [1748], pp.76-77. See also pp.29-30, and, for Voltaire, Hampson [1968], p.83.
41. Priestley [1788a], p.451-453.
42. Ibid., p.44.
43. Ibid., p.454.
44. On this aspect of Bossuet's work, see Meek [1976], pp.23-24.
45. Priestley [1787a], p.90. This sermon, on 'The Doctrine of Divine Influence on the Human Mind', was preached in 1779.
46. Priestley [1762], p.288.
47. Bossuet, Discours sur l'histoire universelle, quoted in Meek [1976], p.24n., and Brown [1984], p.68.
48. Bernard Mandeville, The Fable of the Bees [1714], quoted in Brown [1984], p.67.

49. Priestley [1788a], pp.460-461.
50. Ibid., pp.45-48. For other examples, see also pp.461-471.
51. Ibid., p.211.
52. Priestley [1768a], pp.140-143.
53. Priestley [1788a], p.8. On the concept of revolution in the eighteenth century, see Cohen [1976], pp.264-265; [1980], pp.40-41; and [1985], chs.xii and xiii.
54. Priestley [1788a], p.281. On the 'Norman yoke', see Hill [1958], ch.iii, and - for the use of the concept by Catherine Macaulay, an historian whom Priestley much admired - Peardon [1933], p.80. On the 'ancient constitution' see Pocock [1957].
55. Priestley [1788a], p.291.
56. Ibid., pp.220-221.
57. On these views of revolution, see Straka [1971].
58. Priestley [1788a], pp.10-12.
59. Cohen [1976], pp.270-274, and [1980], p.49.
60. Priestley [1788a], p.216.
61. Priestley [1772], p.30.
62. Ibid., p.97-98.
63. Ibid., pp.131-132.
64. Priestley [1790c], i, xxv, quoted in Cohen [1976], p.285, and [1985], p.225.
65. Priestley [1762], p.173.
66. For this view of history, see below ch.v, sec.iv.
67. Priestley [1761a], p.vii.
68. Priestley [1762], pp.173-186.
69. Priestley [1767], i, 56.
70. Priestley [1788a], pp.323-326. Priestley's disciple Thomas Cooper attained to heights of philistinism greater even than these: 'It is in our boyish years that the poets and novelists, the writers who are disgracefully employed in furnishing stimulus to appetities that require to be bridled, engage our

attention.' For this and much else in a similar vein see Kramnick [1986], p.9.

71. 'Had the form of church government that was in use among the primitive Christians been strictly adhered to, almost every corruption of Christianity would have been prevented, especially those that were occasioned by the encroachments upon the civil powers.' (Priestley [1770a], p.432)
72. For examples of the Whig history of historiography, see Collingwood [1946], Peardon [1933] and Thompson [1942] vol.ii. For the classic exposition and criticism of the Whig interpretation, see Butterfield [1931]. For a brief acknowledgment of the inescapability of Whiggism in intellectual history, see Hall [1983].
73. Stephen [1876], i, 435, and Peardon [1933], pp.60-62.
74. 'sGravesande [1720-21], i, ix.
75. Priestley [1767], ii, 169. I am indebted here to some suggestive remarks made by Schaffer in his [1980], pp.72-86, and influenced in their turn by the work of Gaston Bachelard
76. On the attempts made by Hume and his predecessors to apply Newtonian methods to the moral sciences, see Forbes [1975], ch.i, Passmore [1980], ch.i, and Norton [1982], pp.152-173.
77. Priestley [1765b], p.446.
78. Hume [1739/40], bk.i, pt.vii, sec.65 (pp.83-84). For examples of this charge, see Black [1926], pp.56, 95-99; Becker [1932], pp.95-97; Peardon [1933], pp.22, 28; and Collingwood [1946], pp.81-85. For a discussion of Hume's case, see Forbes [1975], ch.iv, and for a more general discussion see Brown [1984], pp.118-124.
79. Both quoted in Brown [1984], p.120. C.f. Priestley [1783b], p.68: 'the minds of men are in all ages similarly affected in similar circumstances. ...'
80. Priestley [1788a], p.418. On this aspect of Priestley's associationism, see Kallich [1970], ch.vi, esp. pp.232-233.
81. Priestley [1788a], pp.416-417.

CHAPTER THREE.

THE THEOLOGY OF ONE GOD AND A RATIONAL HEAVEN.

I shall not want Honour in heaven  
For I shall meet Sir Philip Sidney  
And have talk with Coriolanus  
And other heroes of that kidney.  
T.S. Eliot, 'A Cooking Egg'

I.

Though Priestley had left Daventry Academy 'with a qualified belief of the doctrine of atonement', he decided while at Needham Market to apply himself more closely to the question, and to this end he collected and arranged such Biblical texts as seemed to him to be relevant to it.<sup>1</sup> In 1761 he published some of his findings under a compendious title which puts succinctly his views on the subject: The Scripture doctrine of Remission, which shews that the Death of Christ is no proper Sacrifice, nor Satisfaction for Sin, but that Pardon is dispensed solely on account of Repentance, or a Personal Reformation of the Sinner. We can see in this early work the germ of much that came later in Priestley's theological development: textual analysis, guided by associationist philosophy, is brought to bear upon the scriptures in order to show that an orthodox dogma is without Biblical foundation. Here, as in his later writings, the effect of such criticism is to smooth out the differences between the sacred and the profane. Just as Priestley presents history in gradualist rather than cataclysmic terms,

so he denies that there are any decisive climacterics in the existence of the individual; and ultimately he will smooth out the differences even between the living and the dead.

In The Scripture Doctrine of Remission, the principal argument which Priestley offers for his views is from silence: neither 'in plain terms' nor 'by way of parable' does Christ say that he came to take on men's sins and offer himself in propitiation to God; and if atonement were necessary to salvation, it would surely be inconsistent with God's benevolence that so many good people be kept in ignorance of so important a matter. Priestley concedes that there are Biblical texts which, by referring to the Messiah as a sacrifice, seem to give support to the doctrine of atonement, but he urges us to remember that their authors are Asiatics, who 'go so far beyond us in the boldness and freedom of their figures.' Only on the assumption that they are intended figuratively can we understand the variety of words with which Christ's mission is described.<sup>2</sup>

Priestley's work on this subject was, perhaps, his earliest exercise in that historically-founded scriptural exegesis which was to be the basis of much of his theology. He was guided through this field, as through so many others, by the principles of associationist psychology. All languages, he maintains, are naturally poor; it has been necessary for their speakers to augment their vocabularies by forming 'artificial or compound' words, 'especially in treating of moral or religious subjects, in which our ideas themselves must necessarily be much compounded, and borrowed from sensible things'. However, it is in

the nature of association to give a factitious sense of reality to these terms of art:

what was at first evidently compounded or figurative, by frequent use ceases to be conceived to be so: compound ideas and expressions in time pass for simple ones, till, after a vigorous scrutiny, their derivation be seen, and they appear to be factitious. In like manner, it is very possible to call one thing by the name of another, by way of allusion only, till at last the allusion be forgotten, and the nature of the thing itself be mistaken.<sup>3</sup>

Priestley's enterprise is a sort of puritanical deconstructionism, assuming as it does the essential textuality of thought. He admits that compounded words 'very much enrich a language', that figurative language may 'enliven a discourse, give colour and strength to the expression', and even 'facilitate the discovery of truth', but he always assumes (and this is what makes his thought puritanical) that behind the figures is a truth that may be expressed without their assistance. Difficult though it is for modern Europeans to see through to the true meaning of a text written by ancient Asiatics - some of whom adhered to the literal meaning while others wandered from it in very different ways - we may, by examining the language and the circumstances in which it was written, and by comparing the figurative texts with the more literal, arrive at the truth of the matter.

And the truth of the matter is that forgiveness of sin proceeds from God's free mercy, that it is our character and good works which alone may make us worthy of this mercy. Christ's sermons 'are chiefly in a moral strain': he say nothing of atonement, but teaches that 'good moral habits and good works, the love of God, and the love of our

fellow-creatures, will, of themselves, effectually recommend a man to the favour of God, and intitle him to a place in heaven.'<sup>4</sup>

Jesus Christ, then, usually held to be a divine sacrifice offered up as nothing else could have been to propitiate divine justice, is a teacher and exemplar, not a sacrifice at all. But if he is not a sacrifice, then nothing in the scheme of things seems to demand that he be divine. It was, no doubt, a realisation of this that prepared Priestley for the final step. This he took at Leeds: 'By reading with care, "Dr. Lardner's Letter on the Logos", I became what is called a Socinian ...'<sup>5</sup>

Socinians follow the sixteenth-century Italian theologian Fausto Paulo Sozzini in denying Christ's divinity. They differ from Arians in that Arians, while denying the orthodox doctrine of the consubstantiality and co-eternity of the Father and the Son, will allow that the Son was created by the Father out of nothing as an instrument in the creation of the world. Socinians, on the other hand, will not allow that Christ had any being at all before his incarnation. He was, they believe, a man like other men, differing from other men solely in that he was entrusted by God with a divine mission. The Socinians' doctrine is, then, strictly unitarian. To teach it from the pulpit was still a crime in England.

## II.

It was in Leeds in 1771 that Priestley made his first major attempt at a theoretical justification of his new position. The Methodists, he says, then very numerous in the town, were listened to by

'many of the lower sort' of his own congregation. To win back these stray sheep, he published, 'in the cheapest manner possible', An Appeal to the Serious and Candid Professors of Christianity.<sup>6</sup> The Appeal is a pamphlet, concise and popular in style; presumably it was for the higher sort that Priestley published, from 1772 to 1774, the three volumes of his Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion. But though the Appeal is intended as a popular work and the Institutes as an elementary one, neither eschews controversy. The Christianity they expound is not orthodox; it is the Socinianism of Priestley's maturity.

Calvinism is an austere and imposing edifice, and so large that Priestley, though he had painfully made his escape from it, still stood in its shadow. Like Calvin, he was not a theologian, concerned with personal experience of God, but a systematiser; and his system is shot through with Calvinistic elements.<sup>7</sup> As we have seen, the Calvinist is a lonely and alienated figure. He knows that good works will not win him salvation - only God's gratuitous and incomprehensible mercy can do (or could have done) that - but, knowing also that good works are a necessary sign of divine election, he will order his life towards the methodical performance of such works. Man is too estranged from God to be reconciled with him, and the object of the Godly life is not reconciliation but obedience.<sup>8</sup>

In Calvinism, Weber remarks, 'real penetration of the human soul by the divine was made impossible by the absolute transcendentality of God compared to the flesh. ...'<sup>9</sup> Priestley's God, though less inscrutable in his decrees than Calvin's, is no more approachable. The Christian is calmly and constantly grateful to this God, but he is never

enraptured nor his soul ever pierced with divine love. True Christianity reveals itself not in transports of religious affection but in a sober and Godly way of life, methodically conducted. In all this, Priestley's theology seems not so much a reaction against Calvinism as a development of it. He has abandoned nothing of Calvinism's rationality, order and disenchantment, though he has quite lost its sense of individual alienation and isolation.

True Puritan anxiety was, of course, except in New England, a thing of the seventeenth century rather than the eighteenth (though its documents survived to trouble sensitive minds, as Priestley's Memoirs and Belsham's diary reveal), Relatively secure in the practice of their faith, Georgian Dissenters could allow themselves a certain complacency that was never available to their predecessors. We have only to compare the writings of John Bunyan with those of Isaac Watts to see how things had changed.<sup>10</sup> In this respect too Priestley's work is a development of what has gone before. The Reverend Thomas Walker, a predecessor of his at Leeds and one of those 'heretical ministers' who had frequented his aunt's house, had been an anti-trinitarian, sceptical of the doctrines of atonement and of original sin. These heresies had lost him many of his congregation, and so we may assume that Priestley - who found at Leeds 'a liberal, friendly, and harmonious congregation' with 'no unreasonable prejudices' - was left with the heretical or broad-minded rump.<sup>11</sup> Much more at ease, both economically and socially, than their Puritan ancestors, they learned from Priestley that they were to pursue an orderly and rational life, a life of bourgeois virtue in which the

Puritan's fearful sense of alienation had dwindled to a rather routine insistence on the Christian's role as a stranger in the world.

The God who presides over this ordered life is an intelligent uncaused first cause of the world. Moving along familiar Newtonian lines, Priestley argues that the admirable organisation of the universe, the fitness of things and the fittedness of them to each other, bespeaks the existence of this supreme artificer. More strikingly, he suggests that creator and creation must be coeval; for if there was ever a time when nothing but God existed, then an eternity must have passed before that time - an eternity in which God possessed but did not exert the power to create the universe - which supposes an infinite stretch of time in which God, contrary to his nature, possessed but did not exert all his perfections. The idea that God and the universe are coeval is preferable because it implies 'that there never was a time when this great uncaused being did not exert his perfections, in giving life and happiness to his offspring.' There is an infinity of creation in time and space: 'infinite space is replenished with worlds, in which the power, wisdom, and goodness of God always have been, and always will be displayed.'<sup>12</sup>

This is not a very Calvinistic view of the Deity. Calvin's God, like Newton's, created the universe by arbitrary fiat of his sovereign will; Priestley seems to be saying that God could not but have created the universe, that he created it because his own nature determined him to do so.<sup>13</sup> And, of course, a God in whom there is no unrealised potential is a God to whom we will not look for miracles, since he could not be more active in the world than he is already. Such a God will

reveal himself, as Priestley has indicated in his other writings, in the regular course of nature and of human history. He will not, of course, exert any direct influence on the human mind, which must mean that the Godly life consists not in waiting upon divine grace but in the methodical obedience of God's will as it is made known to us in scripture. Priestley's God, then, though he lacks the arbitrary and absolute will of Calvin's God, is no less distant or austere.

These are the views of God and of his providence to which reason ought to incline us. They are, however, only what might have been learned from nature, not what actually has been learned. A belief in a unified and beneficent God, though both rational and natural, will scarcely occur to anybody who has not been instructed in the matter. However, the historical priority of monotheism to polytheism, and also the fact that the Greeks were never sceptical about future rewards and punishments until they began to reason on the matter, may indicate 'that the most important doctrines of natural religion were communicated by divine revelation to the first parents of mankind.'<sup>14</sup> The importance of these doctrines is brought home to us by the references made to them in scripture; references so numerous and so strong that it may seem impossible that any who profess veneration for scripture should have ignored them, yet this was the very first corruption of Christianity: But though the infringement of the principle of divine unity was the first corruption, it may in fact be derived, as Priestley tries to show in the Appeal, from another corrupt doctrine: that of original sin.

If, as Priestley believes, to accept Christianity is to make a rational choice between alternatives, then it follows - contrary to the

Calvinists and the Methodists - that men have the power to do the will of God. It is clear from scripture, which exhorts us to turn from our evil ways and to make ourselves clean, that our repentance depends upon our own efforts; and would God have given us commandments which he had not given us the power to obey? To be sure, God has, Priestley argues in his published defence of the Appeal, subjected us to certain infirmities of body and soul, but these are intended to test and to exercise us. It may be that we suffer by Adam's sin, as anyone may suffer as a result of what his ancestors did, 'but it is not possible that we should have sinned in him.'<sup>15</sup> Here, crying out perhaps against a doctrine that had caused him so much anguish in his youth, Priestley demands to know how one may repent of a sin to whose commission one has not consented. And is not the monitory language of scripture, urging us to fly the wrath to come, incompatible with a doctrine that allows the human race no free choice?<sup>16</sup>

From this false and pervasive doctrine of original sin follows that of Christ's divinity, which is no less false and no less pervasive, which is quite without scriptural foundation and, indeed, contrary to God's first commandment. Its introduction (which, among other 'shocking corruptions of genuine Christianity', is to be attributed to Popery) was made to seem necessary by the dogma of original sin: 'So fatal have the consequences of the sin of Adam been represented, that you have been told that nothing but the blood of God himself could reverse them; and therefore you have been taught to believe, that Jesus Christ, whose proper title is the Son of Man, as well as the Son of God, was not merely man, but very and eternal God himself. ...' But it is clear that

Christ himself, who made no claims to omniscience, acknowledged God's power to be superior to his own. He was indeed especially approved by the Father, but only because of his perfect obedience to the divine will and his willingness to die for the benefit of mankind. Nor need the fact that he was 'made by the immediate hand of God' and born of a virgin make any difference to our view of him as a man, for Adam too was made by God's own hand. And because Christ, a man like us, has been resurrected, 'we have a more lively hope of our own resurrection. ...'<sup>17</sup>

Without the doctrine of Christ's divinity, Priestley continues, that of the atonement cannot stand, but is in any case unnecessary:

You have been taught by divines, that if Christ be not God, he could not have made an infinite Satisfaction for the sins of mankind. But, my brethren, where do you learn that the pardon of sin, in a finite creature, requires an infinite satisfaction; or, indeed, any satisfaction at all, besides repentance and reformation, on the part of a sinner?<sup>18</sup>

The orthodox answer to Priestley's question is that an offence committed by a finite creature may require infinite satisfaction if it is an offence against infinite majesty - the nature of the punishment is determined by the nature of the being offended, not by the extent or duration of the offence - and Priestley's failure to engage with this answer surely indicates a deficient sense of the holy.<sup>19</sup> In fact, his approach to the issue is hardly at all that of a theologian, exploring the paradoxical border lands between fallible humanity and the spotless object of its worship, but rather that of a defence counsel making a plea in mitigation. He concludes that there is no case to answer: even if our unworthiness were as great as Calvinists suppose it to be, it would still be finite and in need only of finite atonement. In fact, no

atonement is necessary. Though we cannot be justified by works alone and all stand in need of God's free grace and mercy, that grace and mercy arise solely from God's essential goodness.

How exactly, then, is salvation to be earned? What are the duties that we owe to our creator? Judaism and Christianity - alone among the religions of the world, Priestley believes - demand piety or devotion: 'a right disposition of mind with respect to God, and the actions which flow from that disposition.' There should be in this disposition nothing of the terror that a 'cruel or capricious being' might inspire; our love of God should be a filial love, flowing naturally from our gratitude for his providence and disciplined by prayer, which should keep us ever mindful of him. This business of keeping God in mind is something to which the authors of scripture pay very careful attention. They do not merely give us instruction 'but are more especially careful to inculcate the necessity of cultivating such an inward temper of mind as will form a complete character, which will lead us to the observance of every particular duty, and make the constant practice of it easy and delightful.'<sup>20</sup>

### III.

For Priestley, however, Christ's importance lies not principally in his moral teaching. The 'one great end of the life and death of Christ' was 'to give mankind the most satisfactory evidence of a resurrection and a future life. ...' It was very necessary that he should do so; reason and nature are much less reliable as sources of information about the after life than revelation and example.<sup>21</sup>

Nonetheless, Priestley does devote some space to arguments that may, he thinks, be adduced in favour of the idea of a life after death, chief among them a translation into his own more optimistic terms of a familiar Christian argument concerning the problem of evil. He has already argued that a sufficiently wide view of humankind and its history will reveal that good greatly preponderates over evil; but whatever the proportions in which good and evil stand to each other, their distribution is undoubtedly inequitable. The world is as perfect as we could wish it to be (given that ours is 'a state of trial and discipline in which to form virtuous characters) but the equation of reward and moral worth is clearly not balanced in this life, and so, since God is just, there must be another. Besides, that constant improvement in the knowledge and wisdom of our species which argues the existence of a benevolent deity is also an argument for an after-life; our capacity for improvement is clearly infinite but our lives are not: 'And can it be consistent with the wisdom of God, to leave his workmanship so unfinished, as it must be, if a final stop be put to all our improvements at death?'<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, Priestley later suggests that 'an enlarged acquaintance with the works and providence of God will make a considerable part of the happiness of the wise and good hereafter.' He had early, in the History of Electricity, given voice to his favourite theme of the inexhaustibility of nature; it always underlay his optimism, providing in this life a reason for believing in the hereafter, while in the hereafter it would provide the blessed with a pleasant occupation (for, in heaven as on earth, happiness would be of an active nature). In the

next world, not only our scientific but also our historical knowledge will be improved, because we shall be able 'to converse with the chief actors in all great events.' This increased knowledge will, of course, serve but to deepen our awareness of divine providence.<sup>23</sup>

The obvious and close connection between the mind of man and his body might seem, Priestley admits, to argue against the possibility of an after-life - 'To all appearance, they grow, decay and perish together' - but God, who created both, can if he chooses revive both: 'Admitting that death is an entire cessation of thought, similar to a state of perfectly sound sleep, or a stupor, yet, if the purposes of God's providence and moral government require it, he can make us to awake from this sleep at any distance of time. ...'<sup>24</sup> This is far from being the orthodox view, which is that there is an immaterial soul which is released from its fleshly prison at death, judged and sent either to heaven or to hell (or, according to Roman Catholic theology, to purgatory), there to await the final judgement, when it will be reunited with its resurrected body. Against this Priestley holds that the idea of the separate existence of the soul is an Eastern corruption, agreeable neither to scripture nor to the appearance of things. As to the latter: we know that when the body is asleep thought is suspended and that a blow to the head may well derange our thinking faculties: 'much more must all our faculties be deranged, and a period be put to sensation and thought by death.'<sup>25</sup> Priestley admits that certain scriptural texts seem to favour the doctrine of the separate existence of the soul; but the general arguments of scripture are, he maintains, against it.<sup>26</sup> Besides, if the soul were separable from the body what

need would there be for a resurrection of the dead? And why should there be a general judgement on the last day if each individual, except those still living at that day, will have been separately judged at his own death?<sup>27</sup>

In our life virtue and vice will meet with their just rewards, but, Priestley believes (contrary to orthodox Christian dogma), virtue alone will merit infinite recompense. If we have been virtuous, we shall, bodily imperfections laid aside, enjoy what scripture promises us: a state of 'indefinite and positive happiness'.<sup>28</sup> Our knowledge and felicity will continue to increase in the next life as they have in this, and, improvement feeding upon itself, virtue will daily become an ever more ingrained habit. Continuance in virtue, then, will merit continuance of reward; but the degree to which continuance in vice will be possible in the next life must surely be limited. The orthodox doctrine of eternal punishment is absurd and unjust - finite creatures are capable only of finite crimes, so how can they merit infinite punishment? - but, with virtue so with vice, perseverance fixes our habits and makes change difficult. It may be, of course, that the motives to virtue will be the same in the next life as in this, that the corrective mechanisms of pain and reward may operate in the same way, 'so that ... those who are not made virtuous by the sufferings and discipline of this life, will be recovered to virtue and happiness by the long continuance of unspeakably greater suffering; and of a much severer discipline in the life to come.'<sup>29</sup> But the force of habit is potent. The difference in flexibility of mind between a child and a grown man is very great; that between men as they are now and men as

they shall be after death may be so great that the reformation of one 'who dies a slave to vicious habits' may demand an incredible amount of time, if indeed it is possible at all. Might it not, then, be 'more agreeable to the analogy of nature' to expect that, as few seeds survive to become plants and few plants bear fruit, 'so the bulk of mankind, who never attain to any high degree of wisdom or virtue, should finally perish also, and be entirely blotted out of creation, as unworthy to continue in it; while the few who are wise and virtuous, like full ripe fruits, are reserved for future use'?<sup>30</sup>

There is no doubt that Priestley's reluctance to have much truck with an eternal punishment that is both genuinely eternal and genuinely punishing is to his credit. His voice may not be a lone one - Lord Shaftsbury, Thomas Burnet, Samuel Clarke, Isaac Newton and David Hartley had all been at least sceptical about the doctrine, while others had suggested that the fire of hell was a refiner's fire, purifying the sinner by consuming his sin - but he is by no means in a majority.<sup>31</sup> However, what is most striking about his opinion on the matter is surely not the comparative lenity of the fate with which he rewards the wicked but the mundanity of the heaven to which he condemns the virtuous.

St. Paul says that the trump shall sound and we shall be changed; Joseph Priestley says the the trump shall sound and things will go on pretty much as they did before, In the next world, our knowledge of God will be enlarged, not by direct acquaintance, not through the beatific vision, but by the very means that we have employed in our mundane life. To be sure, the means will be improved - our inferences will be more accurate and we shall meet Sir Philip Sidney and have talk with

Coriolanus - but they will, after all, be the same means. Now, we should perhaps hold back a little before criticising this dull picture of a celestial literary and philosophical society in permanent session. The words 'beatific vision' are resonant indeed, but in many orthodox minds they may have held place for nothing in particular: their use may indicate not richness of thought but poverty, a resort to splendid cliché where imagination fails. But even allowing for this, it is difficult not to feel that there is something constrained in a mind which apparently has no room for those experiences of timeless ecstasy which have given men a conception of heaven or those (perhaps more common) feelings of personal worthlessness which have made them feel worthy of perpetual misery. What is at issue here, of course, is not the truth of Priestley's opinions but their consistency. Was such etiolated doctrine consistent with his claim to be a Christian? Why should he have wanted to maintain both the doctrine and the claim?

His Calvinist background is not wholly to be blamed. Calvin, it is true, declined 'to speak or think, or even desire to know, concerning obscure subjects, anything beyond the information given in the Divine Words', and Calvinism, thus restricted in its range, was more a system of morals and of discipline than of theology; but this self-denying ordinance by no means bound all Calvinist imaginations.<sup>32</sup> John Bunyan, taking his pilgrims to the gates of the Celestial City, knew that 'the beauty, and glory of it was inexpressible', and he knew that even in his dream he could see little of it, for the pilgrims only were admitted, 'And after that, they shut up the Gates: which when I had seen, I wished my self among them'. But he knew also (because scripture had told him)

what was the principal glory of the city: 'In that place you must wear Crowns of Gold and enjoy the perpetual sight and Visions of the Holy One, for there you shall see him as he is.'<sup>33</sup>

Of course, much had changed since Bunyan dreamed his dream, and Priestley's theological rationalism has its antecedents in Churchmen such as Locke and Clarke and Dissenters such as Doddridge and Watts. But, for Doddridge and Watts at least, the search for some reasonable harmony between religion and the new science did not preclude a love for the rich melodies of traditional Christian symbolism. Doddridge, rationalist though he was, presents a vision of heaven (and it is a vision, not a philosophical prediction) that more resembles Bunyan's than Priestley's:

There all the millions of his saints  
Shall in one song unite,  
And each the bliss of all shall view  
With infinite delight.<sup>34</sup>

The case of Isaac Watts is even more striking. The three books of his Horae Lyricae abound in hymns which picture death not as Priestley sees it, as a transition to a state much like our present one, but as an utter change, and a change to be prayed for and longed for. This is orthodox Christianity, and the titles of these hymns clearly signal their author's preoccupations: 'Felicity Above', 'Death and Eternity', 'Pardon and Sanctification', 'Sovereignty and Grace', 'Launching into Eternity', 'Breathing Toward the Heavenly Country'. Whereas Priestley's after-life is resolutely corporeal, Watts' is quite notably not so:

Dead be my heart to all below.  
To mortal joys and mortal cares;  
To sensual bliss that charms us so  
Be dark, my eyes, and deaf, my ears.<sup>35</sup>

Turning to his Saviour, Watts reveals himself as something Priestley neither is nor wants to be: the self-conscious inheritor of the traditions and symbols of catholic Christianity. He can speak of Christ as 'the heavenly lover', of the sacrament as 'This heavenly flesh, this sacred food', and, in one of his best-known hymns, the crucified Son of God is depicted in terms quite different from what the author's Calvinism might have led us to expect:

His dying Crimson like a Robe  
Spreads o'er his Body on the Tree,  
Then I am dead to all the Globe,  
And all the Globe is dead to me.<sup>36</sup>

All this should be enough to convince us that the landscape of Priestley's theological thought is flat and unadorned because he wanted it so. The religious tradition in which he was raised did not lack an architecture both rich and antique with which he could have relieved these plain tracts, but he chose to ignore it. A remark of Watts' may help us to understand one reason why this should have been so:

'sometimes I seem to have carried Reason with me even to the Camp of Socinus; but then St. John gives my soul a Twitch, and St. Paul bears me back again (if I mistake not his Meaning) almost to the Tents of John Calvin.'<sup>37</sup> Watts is maintained in harmonic motion between these two points

because he believes that we should neither leave our reasonings behind us nor 'overleap the Bounds of faith, and give the Reins to all our Reasonings

upon Divine Themes in so wide and open a Field as that of Possibles and Probables.' But for Priestley, as we noted in the last chapter, the field of possibles and probables holds no terrors. He sees it not as a treacherous marsh but as the natural terrain of human thought. Here as elsewhere, some will be less sure-footed than others, but security certainly is attainable and some may hope to feel firm ground beneath their feet. Believing this, he can do without Watts' sort of balance: he need not tread a narrow path between the uncertainties of rational speculation and the certainties of faith and scripture; reason - as employed in historical, philosophical or scientific research - can give us as much certainty as we require. There is consequently all the difference in the world between the flat, dry light in which Priestley pursues his research and the brilliance that Watts celebrates:

Stand, and adore! how glorious He  
That dwells in bright eternity!  
We gaze, and we confound our sight  
Plung'd in th'abyss of dazzling light.

Faced with such a dazzling light, our vision confounded, what could we do but stand and adore? But has not Priestley told us that the 'happiness of heaven ... will not be of an indolent, but of an active nature'?<sup>38</sup>

Ceaseless and methodical activity in some public vocation is, of course, a well-known requirement of the Calvinist ethic. Puritans, ever the enemies of solitude and of cloistered virtue, were consequently the enemies of inactive contemplation as well: the rapturous acquaintance with God which Bunyan's prose promises and Watts' poetry anticipates is not a thing to be had before death. Richard Baxter may have called one

of his most famous works The Saints' Everlasting Rest, but this rest, he makes clear, is to be enjoyed only after a life of constant and systematic work. As he elsewhere says, 'work is the moral as well as the material end of power. ... It is action that God is most served and honoured by ...'<sup>39</sup> The Calvinist's relentless rationalism has left him with a picture of God as a remote and unapproachable sovereign and of the world as a place in which the supernatural has no part: a world in which rationally-ordered labour is an obligation of all men, both because it is a sign (though not, of course, an infallible sign) of Divine election and because it is a distraction from the temptations of the flesh. Priestley's rational theology leaves him with a God similarly remote and a world similarly disenchanted; but, with standards of proof less rigorous than those of the seventeenth century, he can employ a much more thorough-going rationalism. His willingness to settle for opinio and not to hold out for scientia even in religious matters gives him an enormously-expanded view of the prospects for human activity; his associationist psychology teaches him how such activity leads to happiness; his belief in providence naturally inclines him to think that God, who created the machinery of associations, desires and will promote this activity. God, who wants us to continue our scientific and historical research in the next world as in this, can hardly be expected to reveal himself to us if this will mean an end to all activity in the rapt adoration of which Watts speaks. It would appear, then, that our knowledge of God must always be inferential. And, since God is inexhaustible, there can be no end to the drawing of inferences: heaven is an eternal research project with limitless resources and no completion date.

#### IV.

'We have no sermons addressed to the passions that are good for anything,' said Samuel Johnson in 1778. Of elegance, he thought, there was no lack - 'every body composes pretty well' - and he reviewed the sermonisers of the day with a connoisseur's relish: '... Seed has very fine style ... Jortin's sermons are very elegant. - Sherlock's style too is very elegant. ...' But where was passion to be found? In the sermons of the Methodists, perhaps, but these Johnson thought no better than mob oratory.<sup>40</sup>

More than half a century earlier, Jonathan Swift had told preachers that it was their business first to tell the congregation their duty and next to convince them that it was their duty. As to 'this Talent of moving the Passions': those unfortunate enough to think that they possessed it should use it seldom and with caution, 'For ... Philosophers have long agreed, that Passion should never prevail over Reason.' Swift - who preferred a 'plain convincing Reason' to 'the Art of wetting the Handkerchiefs of a whole Congregation' - did not believe that impassioned oratory could be 'of any great use towards directing Christian Men in the Conduct of their Lives, at least in these Northern Climates. ...'<sup>41</sup> This widespread belief that reason and passion were incompatible was of the greatest importance to eighteenth-century religious thought in general and to Priestley's in particular. When Priestley addressed his Appeal to the Serious and Candid Professors of Christianity to a congregation exposed to the Methodist temptation, it was to win them from the dangers of enthusiasm, from passion unrestrained by reason.

Since 1739, John Wesley had been touring the kingdom to preach in open fields to huge crowds. His success was often spectacular, its effects epileptic: his hearers would fall to their knees, many crying out out aloud, many trembling convulsively. This may not have been the reaction that he was looking for - though he certainly believed that instantaneous conversion alone was valid - but these epiphenomena, though often short-lived, helped both to draw attention to the movement and to fix in the public mind its principle characteristics: passion and urgency. The reason why these qualities should have been so marked a feature of Methodist preaching is made clear in the following passage from one of Wesley's sermons, which at the same time powerfully, though rantingly, exemplifies them:

See! See! He cometh! He maketh the clouds his chariots! He rideth upon the wings of the wind! A devouring fire goeth before him and after him a flame burneth! See! He sitteth upon his throne, clothed with light as with a garment, arrayed with majesty and honour! Behold, his eyes are as a flame of fire, his voice as the sound of many waters!

How will ye escape? Will ye call to the mountains to fall on you, the rocks to cover you? Alas, the mountains themselves, the rocks, the earth, the heaven, are just ready to flee away! Can ye prevent the sentence? Wherewith? With all the substance of thy house, with thousands of gold and silver? Blind wretch! Thou camest naked from thy mother's womb, and more naked into eternity ...<sup>42</sup>

We see here a notable feature of Wesley's homiletic style: those frequent interrogations with which he draws his hearers in, forcing them to apply his teachings directly to their own lives. The language of Methodism was often vivid and colloquial, its imagery concrete, and so successfully did it work upon a working-class audience, that it posed a serious threat to the Dissenting sects, whose congregations were becoming ever smaller and more predominantly middle-class.<sup>43</sup>

Neither temperament nor literary gifts fitted Priestley for the role of hot-gospeller and he wisely did not attempt it. The title of his Appeal to the Serious and Candid Professors of Christianity told his readers what to expect, and the first page confirmed their expectations:

Let me intreat you therefore, my brethren, to give me a patient and candid hearing. Attend, in the spirit of meekness, to what I shall say from the earnestness of my heart; and exercise the reason which God has given you, upon this occasion, which is the noblest on which it can be exercised, and for which you may, therefore, conclude that it was principally given you.<sup>44</sup>

The reader is to understand that Priestley, though his tone is level and his manner sober, though he makes no overt appeal to the emotions, is every bit as sincere as the Methodists. Speaking from the earnestness of his heart, he begs for a candid hearing. By this he means, presumably, a charitable hearing, but the importance to him of candour as freedom from bias or prejudice is apparent throughout the pamphlet. Candour is important because the Christian life is founded upon an act of free choice, which, since it cannot be evaded, should be made rationally and knowledgeably. To make it in this way, with deliberation and not with the tearful rashness of a Methodist convert, is to make proper use of one of God's gifts. Religion and rationality alike proceed from God: 'They cannot, therefore, be contrary to one another, but must mutually illustrate and enforce one another.'

This confident assertion seems to place Priestley clearly in a tradition not merely of rationalism but of reasonableness; a tradition that stretches from Erasmus and Hooker in the sixteenth century to Priestley's masters in the eighteenth. It is, for example, not difficult to find in the works of those Anglican metaphysicians and

moralists of the seventeenth century who are known as the Cambridge Platonists phrases similar to those which Priestley uses. Thus Benjamin Whichcote states that in religious disputes 'nothing without reason is to be proposed; nothing against reason is to be believed'; and Henry More claims that, 'To take away reason is to rob Christianity of that special prerogative it has above all other religions in the world, namely that it dares appeal unto reason.'<sup>45</sup> But the apparent agreement between Priestley and these men masks a real and important difference. Priestley's reason, and Wesley's, is not the reason of Whichcote and More.

The philosophers of the mid-seventeenth century retained an Aristotelian concept of reason. Unlike later thinkers, they did not regard it merely as a calculative faculty, capable of assessing those facts and arguments that must be assessed if we are to attain our goals but itself incapable of setting us such goals. For Whichcote, More and their contemporaries, reason is capable not only of helping us to our goals but also of comprehending goals; or rather the goal, the telos which man will attain if he realises his ethical nature. In other words, Hume's assertion that 'Reason is, and ought to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them' is quite foreign to their thought.'<sup>46</sup> More, for example, does distinguish between reason and the passions, but he certainly does not believe that reason is incapable of motion unless stimulated and given direction from without. This is made clear by the words with which he defines the subject of his Enchiridium Ethicum: 'Virtue is an intellectual power of the Soul, by which it over-rules the animal

impressions or bodily Passions; so as in every Action it easily pursues what is absolutely and simply the best.' The best is whatever appears best to right reason, and this reason is not merely a ratiocinative faculty; it is a copy in the mind of man 'of that Reason or Law eternal which is registered in the Mind Divine.'<sup>47</sup> Reason enables us to see things as they really are; and seeing them thus, we will pursue the good and eschew the bad. To pursue virtue is to rectify our minds, to realise that potential which we all possess in some measure to see things as they really are. Believing this, More can speak as he does of the motives to virtuous conduct without lapsing into ethical egoism: his language is so often exhortatory because he is trying to draw from his readers what may be in them.

Between More and Priestley, however, falls the shadow of John Locke. Priestley and his fellow Dissenters, like Doddridge and Watts, followed Locke in maintaining that, though there were innate faculties - judgment, for example, was a divine gift - there were no innate principles: as Watts said, 'We are born ignorant of every good and useful thing.' For him and for all Locke's epigoni, reason is not, as it is for More and his contemporaries, a faculty capable of revealing to men the ends they should pursue. Instead, it has a much humbler function: the discovery and ordering of proofs, the perceiving of connections between them and the drawing of inferences from them.<sup>48</sup> It is difficult for anyone holding such a view of reason to give much of an account of judgment. Watts himself, in a book (known to the young Priestley) professedly intended to explain 'The Right Use of Reason in the Enquiry After Truth', says much about the acquisition of knowledge

but little about its use. The reader is advised to furnish his mind with 'a rich Variety of Ideas' - historical, political, geographical and scientific - because this will enable him 'to judge of Things aright', but the connection between judgment and knowledge is never properly explained.<sup>49</sup> That the one depends on the other is clear - in youth, experience is small and so judgement weak - but the closest Watts comes to describing the nature of this dependency is in a passage in which he explains that, as our knowledge of things increases, so does our knowledge of the differences between them, of the agreement and disagreement of ideas. But how do we come to recognise differences when we see them? How, in particular, do we do so when the differences are not physical or quantitative but moral or <sup>qualitative</sup> ~~quantitative~~? Locke's own short chapter on judgement does little to answer this question: it simply explains that judgement is rather a second-rate sort of faculty, supplied to us for our use where certain knowledge is not to be had.<sup>50</sup>

The empiricist picture of man with which we are here presented, a picture which came to be generally accepted in the early eighteenth century, is very different from More's. Man, as here depicted, does not have a single telos which he may discover with the aid of reason, a faculty which is a copy of divine reason and which may be so educated that he may learn to conform with this reason. Rather, man is a plain tablet upon which any number and kind of messages may be inscribed. His goals, salvation and the knowledge of God, are external. He must learn of them as he learns the laws of physics or of mathematics, by proof and induction, and he must compare them in his mind with other possible goals. Such an epistemology and philosophy of mind are likely to push

ethics in the direction of egoism. Moral education, no longer (as it had been for More) the realisation of dimly-perceivable potential, consists now in teaching people to know their interest and to assess theories accurately.<sup>51</sup>

The upshot of this is that the philosophers who flourished before Locke and those who came after them are very different from each other even when they seem to be most similar. Hartley and More, for example, both see the love of God as originating in gratitude for his bounty, but more important than their agreement is the fact that More can, as Hartley cannot, move easily from descriptive to prescriptive language. Hartley can make the move only by showing firstly that God exists and then that the love of God affords us a greater pleasure than any other love and 'is therefore our primary Pursuit and ultimate End.'<sup>52</sup> For him, then, the love of God is one among a number of sources of pleasures, all of which must be evaluated before we can decide which is the best (he first examines sensation, imagination, honour self-interest, concluding of each in turn that 'it ought not to be made a primary Pursuit').<sup>53</sup> Of course, Hartley believes that man and the world in which he dwells are alike the handiwork of a benevolent deity; and, this being so, it would be an odd state of affairs if the path of obedience to God's will did not lead also to happiness in this world or the next. Moreover, there is in Hartley's work what Leslie Stephen calls a 'queer mathematical mysticism': the world is so providentially arranged that the search for happiness, properly pursued, will lead at length to 'perfect self-annihilation and the pure love of God.' But the fact remains that Hartley's methods are egoistic as More's are not, that

Hartley must appeal to self-interest before he can appeal to reason. The moral sense, according to Hartley, is not innate but a product of the association of pleasurable sensations with certain objects. To be moral is not (as it is for More) to draw out what is within us, but to point ourselves in the right direction; a course which self-interest will dictate. More, on the other hand, writes in the evening of a tradition in which it was natural to think analogically and in terms of correspondence: man the microcosm mirrored the macrocosm of nature; human reason, which taught men how to behave, was a copy of divine reason, which ordered the universe. For him religious or moral performances arising from 'mere self-love' are 'at best but as preparations, or the more refined exercises, of a sort of theological Hobbianism.' Self-love cannot be the foundation of the love we owe to God and creation, nor can it 'raise the soul towards the Divine nature. Nothing can ascend into heaven but what comes down from it.'<sup>54</sup>

More's reason furnishes ends as well as means; Hartley's does not. Given the tools, Hartley's reason will finish the job; but it cannot choose its employer, and it is to this incapacity of eighteenth-century reason that we can ascribe the style of eighteenth-century sermons. If reason cannot act unless first the passions are engaged, then either the preacher must address the passions or he must address the reason while assuming that he and his hearers are agreed as to the direction in which reason must take them. The former approach issues in the eloquence of the Methodists, the latter in the prudential discourses of the Established Church and of the Dissenters. This is made clear by Isaac Watts, who is quite explicit about the psychological basis of

sermonising. He allows that too often preachers, instead of offering 'a pathetic address to the heart', furnish their hearers with a coldly rational discourse. But to address the heart and not the reason is to ignite the devouring flames of enthusiasm; reason, though incapable of action alone, is nonetheless the only faculty by which we can tell right from wrong. However, God has furnished us 'with those powers, which we call passions, or affections of the heart, in order to excite the will with superior vigour and activity to avoid the evil and pursue the good.' The art of the preacher lies in knowing how to address these passions in a proper manner.<sup>55</sup>

In the earlier part of the century, Anglican sermons - delivered, according to Oliver Goldsmith, 'with the most insipid calmness' - aspired more to the condition of polite letters than to that of spiritual exhortations. Dissenters, too, went to the meeting-house not to participate in an act of worship but to hear a 'Lord's Day Lecture', and at least one critic, writing in 1730, thought their prayers too short and their sermons too long.<sup>56</sup> It was the man whom Priestley calls 'the excellent archbishop Tillotson', who had died in 1694, who gave the age its tone. His published sermons - each of them proceeding from a dignified exordium by ordered stages and logical divisions - enjoyed immense popularity.<sup>57</sup> One in particular, comfortably entitled 'The Precepts of Christianity not Grievous', was the most popular of the eighteenth century; much reprinted, much parroted by lesser men on a Sunday morning. It preaches a religion which offers us both present pleasure, the 'satisfaction of having done our duty', and future rewards; a religion demanding rather fewer sacrifices than a modern

slimming plan. Human sinfulness is not an object of concern, nor the cross an object of contemplation. The preacher appeals to his congregation's prudence rather than their sense of unworthiness.<sup>58</sup> So do other Georgian preachers: Bishop Butler, who seldom mentions Christ or the Holy Spirit, urges his hearers to love God because 'it is reasonable and right so to do'; Bishop Secker teaches that Christianity is peculiar in that 'it makes Application to Men as reasonable Creatures', that it claims our assent by the proofs it offers and requires faith 'only because it produces Evidence for the Ground of our Faith'; and among the Dissenters, Philip Doddridge, though he believes that preaching should be done 'with an holy fervour and ardour', believes also 'that religion consists more in an intelligent, rational, and determinate choice of, the will than in any ardent transport of the affections.'<sup>59</sup>

It was this sort of thing that caused one of Doddridge's friends to lament the decline of faith and evangelical truth, and to complain that his ears were being continually 'dinned with reason, the great law of reason, and the eternal law of reason. ...'<sup>60</sup> Evangelical truth was, of course, what the Methodists claimed to be offering, and Anglican priests and Dissenting ministers alike were worried that such preaching would win their congregations from them. But Wesley himself was not one to decry reason. His task as he saw it was to teach people that God's grace, the only source of true happiness, was available to all; and, though he differed from his orthodox brethren in the sense of urgency with which he undertook his labours, on the importance of reason he was at one with them. He distinguished very clearly between the two

concepts of reason: reason as 'the faculty of reasoning, of inferring one thing from another', and reason as 'eternal reason, or the nature of things: the nature of God and the nature of man with the relations necessarily subsisting between them.' Christianity, he maintained, was agreeable to both kinds of reason; to the former because it was founded on the nature of God and of man, and to the latter because this kind of reason was a gift of God, to be used 'in searching out the things of God.' But to reason without true judgement is to reason from false premisses, and true judgement in matters of religion is to be had only from 'a clear apprehension of the things of God', which is an internal, spiritual sense:

What then will your reason do here? How will it pass from things natural to spiritual? ... What a gulf is here! By what art will reason get over the immense chasm? This cannot be till the Almighty come in to your succour, and give you that faith you have hitherto despised.<sup>61</sup>

It is apparent from this very clear statement of the problem that one kind of reason, 'the faculty of reasoning', has invaded the domain of the other. For that 'eternal reason, or the nature of things' of which Wesley speaks is much like the providential mechanism of Hartley's philosophy: by an application of ratiocinative reason we learn our place and God's in this order of things; we see then how Christian faith is in accordance with our best interests. Nothing that Wesley says leads us to suppose that 'eternal reason' alone is capable of inciting us to action. And that 'faculty of reasoning' which occupies much more of his attention is also incapable, as he recognises much more clearly than Hartley or Priestley, of bridging the gulf between the natural and the supernatural worlds. The bridge is, and can only be, God's grace,

penetrating the human heart in a moment of heat and passion while cold reason stands by helpless.

V.

In some measure, Priestley's style in his sermons, like that of the Methodists in theirs, is a reaction against what has gone before. This may not be immediately obvious: Priestley's sermons dwell in the light of common day, and the words with which Bishop Warburton described the style of Tillotson's preaching - 'simple, elegant, candid, clear, and rational' - surely name qualities which Priestley sought to bring to his own pulpit.<sup>62</sup> But though few tears can have been shed when Priestley preached, though he is not likely to have inspired instantaneous conversion, his sermons are fervent in manner as many contemporary sermons seem not to have been. Their style - measured but not unemotional, avoiding both the tearfulness of the Methodists and the austerities of the orthodox Anglicans - is the product of two aspects of his theology. On the one hand, he has abandoned the doctrine of predestination and so he must evangelise; on the other hand, he does not believe in the direct action of God on the human mind, and so he tries to persuade his hearers not to open their hearts to divine grace but to take thought.

This latter aspect of his theology is the subject of a sermon preached in 1779, whose published text bears an epigraph, drawn from the Essay on Man, which sets the scene for what follows:

... the first Almighty Cause  
Acts not by partial, but by gen'ral laws.<sup>63</sup>

God, the preface explains, certainly does act in the world, but always through secondary causes. The Calvinist doctrine of sovereign and irresistible grace is to be rejected: there is such a thing as grace, in that 'the agency of God upon the minds of men' is 'real and constant', but this agency, being always exerted through natural means, cannot produce change 'without proper opportunity, and especially without proper time ...' There can be no possibility of instantaneous or death-bed conversions.<sup>64</sup>

These things are told us for our comfort. Christianity, if it is a habit of mind and not a mysterious transport of the soul, is available to everyone, not merely to those who have undergone conversion. The Independents, he says in another work, 'require ... such an account of what they call experiences in religion, as there is not a shadow of ground for in the New Testament, and which few but enthusiasts will pretend to.' This concentration on 'the state of the heart with respect to God' is downright inimical to virtue. We can judge only of our outward conduct: these facts, 'plain facts, of which every man can judge by the evidence of seeing and hearing', are all that the early church concerned itself with. God intended us never to be without hope or fear: if we do our Christian duty, we will have reason to hope; if we do not, if we yield to temptation, we will have reason to fear. This is all the scriptures give us authority to say, To go further is to trespass upon uncertain and treacherous ground, where fools delude themselves into believing that they have felt what no-one could feel, and knaves delude others by adopting 'the peculiar style' required:

What can be more precarious than to judge of a man's fitness for Christian communion by certain internal feelings which are incapable of being described, except by strong metaphors; by a

kind of faith that is different from believing, and a new birth, that is something else than a change of affections and conduct, proceeding from rational motives; a new birth, in which a man is entirely passive, and to which nothing he does, or can do, does in the least contribute.<sup>65</sup>

This flight from 'strong metaphors' is, of course, a flight from any specifically religious literary style. Priestley was prepared to concede that figurative language might enrich a discourse - he had made this clear nine years before in the Scripture Doctrine of Remission - and he was even prepared to use it himself: he talks of Christ as a source of light and he goes on to explain (or labour) the metaphor. But, such mild figures apart, his language is religious only inasmuch as it employs the terms of the theological trade: 'grace', 'salvation', 'judgement', etc. His attitude, both puritanical and scientific, recalls that of the early Royal Society as recorded by its historian Bishop Sprat, who in 1667 praised 'a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expression; clear senses ... bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness, as they can ...'<sup>66</sup> In religion as in science Priestley wants plain facts, plainly set down. The inner, the fugitive, the unwilled, matters which must be spoken of metaphorically or not at all - those things which have commonly be considered the essence of spirituality - can have no place.

Like Sprat, Priestley advocates a empirical, prosaic prose as a specific against religious illuminism. Sprat's enemies were the millennarian sects of his time; Priestley's are the Methodists: 'my only question at present is this, -' says Wesley, '"is thine heart right, as my heart is with thine heart?"; and the question, like many of Wesley's, demands that the hearer look not only at his behaviour but

into his own soul, to see whether Christ is revealed therein, whether he lives in Christ and Christ with him, whether he loves God with all his heart, mind and strength.<sup>67</sup>

Only in 1791 did Priestley record at length his opinion of the Methodists and their founder. He admired John Wesley for his honesty and industry, his knowledge and intelligence, his unremitting zeal to secure his own salvation and to promote that of others, but he found him also to have been 'strongly tinctured with enthusiasm, from the effect of false notions very early imbibed.' Turning from Wesley - that unfortunate man, 'bewildered and distressed', uncertain of his salvation even after many years of good work - to the Methodists of 1791, Priestley congratulates them on having abandoned belief in instantaneous conversion and with it the miseries of uncertainty and soul-searching:

Besides, to judge by internal feelings, or emotions of the heart, which are the springs or causes of our conduct, is to invade the province of God, who alone knows, and judges by, the heart; whereas our actions are open to the inspection of all men. Men perpetually deceive even themselves with respect to the real motives of their own conduct, though they are, no doubt, more accessible to themselves than to others; but about the uniform tenor of their actions, there can be no mistake.<sup>68</sup>

Priestley's repeated insistence throughout his career as a preacher on an active rather than a reflective faith may appear to place him squarely in the camp of the author of 'The Precepts of Christianity not Grievous'. But while Tillotson too concentrates on behaviour, on earnest endeavour, on the performance of certain acts and abstention from others, he does not seem greatly impressed by the obstacles which stand in the pilgrim's way. Persecution is rare nowadays, a life of sin more burdensome than one of virtue, and besides, 'Some virtues plainly

tend to the preservation of our health, others to the peace and quiet of our minds; and which is somewhat more strange, to the advancement of our esteem and reputation: for ... men are commonly so just to virtue and goodness, as to praise it in others even when they do not practice it themselves.<sup>69</sup> But this broad highway, smooth and metalled, is not the one down which Priestley would have his hearers travel. His road is narrow and rocky; the surmounting of obstacles is an essential part of the journey.

These obstacles bulk so large in Priestley's mind because, though he shares with Tillotson an egoistic ethic, the psychological theory which he has inherited from Hartley does not allow him to see the mind as a completely unfettered agent in an ethical free market. On the one hand the power of association is such that the young mind will ever be prey to corrupting influences; on the other hand the power of habit is such that these associations may exert such a hold over the fully-formed mind that no promise of future reward may be enough to free it.

If these obstacles are to be surmounted, Christians must keep constant guard over their passions. They may not be able to prevent 'irregular passions & desires' from arising within their hearts, but they will refuse indulgence to such irregularities. They will not allow themselves to give way to anger. They will avoid temptation, eschewing those places and that company in which their virtue will be subjected to the greatest trial. And, of course, they will shun the distractions of worldly pleasure.<sup>70</sup> They will be, in the literal sense of the term, fearful. A proper fear of displeasing God, a fear that is not superstitious or enthusiastic, is a good sign that our hearts are right

towards the Almighty and that we are seeking his kingdom before all other things. (Thus far, and thus far only, will Priestley go in trying to persuade his listeners to tax themselves with the sort of questioning that Wesley demands; but the evidence sought in this interrogation is of an external and unambiguous nature: we can know that we fear God if we behave as God-fearing people behave and manifest a disposition to justify ourselves in his sight.) Christians should not, of course, fear calamity or affliction or the world's censure, but they should fear God and live with a quick sense of their own moral instability and of the dangers to which their resolution may ever be subject.<sup>71</sup>

Among the obstacles that stand between the Christian and the proper employment of this knowledge, prejudice is at least as formidable as the passions are. Indeed, Priestley sometimes speaks as though the passions are to be feared chiefly because they may obstruct a serious re-examination of prejudice. The healthy mind, free from passion, prejudice and enthusiasm 'is capable of judging fairly & justly concerning things & following without reluctance or restraint the dictates of reason.'<sup>72</sup> Prepossession and prejudice in judgement are the disorders to which the human mind is most subject, for long custom and the esteem in which we hold our parents and teachers cause us to be attached to opinions acquired in childhood and youth. But our passions are not to be despised; no part of us can have been made in vain, for we are the handiwork 'of a perfectly wise and good being'. Like reason itself, the passions were doubtless given us by a beneficent deity to be cultivated and exercised; and 'when they are constantly employed in such a manner as reason directs, then the mind is active, vigorous, and

healthful.' It is only the domination of the mind by some particular passion that renders it unsound:

So that the great art and business of life consists not in the vain efforts to suppress and destroy the several affections of our nature, but in exercising a wise government over them - proportioning our desires to the real value of things; gratifying our passions in their just and natural order, restraining and subduing them when they become impetuous and predominant, and regulating them according to the dictates of reason, moderation and virtue.

God has revealed to us our destination and he has given us maps and reason with which to read them; the passions are sails to hasten us on our way. But the wise man will employ reason not only to give direction to the passions but also to moderate, and indeed calibrate, them: 'he will proportion the degree of his affections by the nature of the objects on which they are placed. He will seek the most important blessings and the highest good with the warmest affections, and things of an inferior nature with restrained and moderated desire ...'<sup>73</sup>

The oddity of all this should be very apparent: Priestley believes that the passions are and ought to be the slaves of reason, but his reason is a faculty incapable of moving itself. Hence, surely, the shifty air with which he discusses the psychology of religious affection. He can slip only uneasily between prescriptive and descriptive language, because there is no other way in which he can move from the one to the other.

The account which he gives in the Institutes of the origin and nature of religious affection is very similar to Hartley's, employing, like Hartley's, an egoistic but divinely-ordered psychology. God, has furnished us with passions which incite us to certain pursuits; our duty

is to decide which passions to indulge and which pursuits to follow. The light of nature reveals to us two basic rules of human conduct: we must obey God's will and we must seek our own happiness; and, in fact, the second rule coincides with the first, because God desires our happiness no less than we do.<sup>74</sup> Passions, the springs of action, are of two kinds - the desire which we feel for objects of pleasure and the aversion which we feel from objects of pain - and they may be grouped according to their objects into five classes: the sensual pleasures; the social pleasures, the pleasures of self-love; the pleasures of association, whose objects, though not in themselves capable of gratifying our desires, afford us intellectual or imaginative pleasure by virtue of the ideas which association has transferred to them; and, finally, most refined of all our passions, the moral sense. Priestley reviews in turn each of these classes of passion, and like, Hartley, considers the degree to which their gratification should be our object. He concludes with no doubt as to which are the most important: they are those which form that sub-class of the social passions which Priestley calls the 'theopathic affections'.

Throughout his consideration of the passions, Priestley has awkwardly, and apparently unaware of what he is doing, mixed descriptive language with prescriptive, psychology with exhortation. In treating now of the theopathic affections, he sounds unabashedly like a man with a product to shift (and, indeed, rather like Tillotson). The love of God, we learn, does not interfere with any real gratification: by restraining our passions, it makes possible the proper enjoyment of them; it is consistent with a regard for our own greatest good and with

attention to the good of others; it is an antidote to the evils of this life, for all that comes to pass does so because of that divine will in which we should rejoice; it alone is a passion which will never want proper gratification and so will never occasion pain. We have only to consult the principles of right and equity to see that if a human father or benefactor deserves our love and obedience, God should command proportionately more.

A proper love of God is not, of course, either superstitious or enthusiastic. On the contrary, as Priestley told his congregations, Christianity gives to us that government over ourselves which is the very opposite of these superstitious passions. It gives us 'rational and consistent principles of Religion', encouraging free enquiry and the use of our understanding and judgment. It teaches us that God is 'possessed of all moral excellencies', is 'the righteous & merciful Govenour of the world' who will reward with eternal happiness all whose virtues resemble his. And, above all, Christianity has given us in Christ the best of examples. Secondly, 'Christianity hath a tendency to restrain those irregular passions which disorder & corrupt the mind.' The gospels teach us to regulate our appetites and passions. They teach us to 'abstain from all fleshly lusts which war against the soul and to cleanse ourselves from all impurity of the flesh & spirit, & perfect holiness in the fear of God.' Ultimately, Christianity is to be valued because it sets before us both a great prize and the means of winning it.<sup>75</sup>

Urgency without enthusiasm, egoism without complacency: these are the characteristics that serve to locate Priestley's sermons on the

theological map of his time. He rejects the complacent tone of the Anglican sermon because of the great sense of urgency which his associationism gives him: man comes into the world an almost infinitely malleable creature, but such is the effect of habit that his character soon hardens and reform becomes ever more difficult. So it is never too early to begin to acquire good habits or to place oneself within a Godly sphere of influence; and, while reform is possible even for the habitual sinner, degeneration is, by the same token, possible even for the virtuous, and so the Godly life must be one of constant care, never of complacency. But, though Priestley shares the Methodists' sense of urgency, he can share neither their belief in instantaneous conversion nor their emotionalism; God's operation on men's minds is always mediated through secondary causes, and those who would be Christians must calmly take thought and pay proper regard to these causes.

We can easily see that it is Priestley's love of objectivity, his distrust of the personal and the unverifiable, that move him in this latter act of rejection. And it is the same love, and the same distrust, that lead him also to turn his back on Anglican moralism; for in rejecting this moralism, he presupposes a picture of the human mind not as a thing obscure and subjective but as the creature of external circumstance. Similarly, it is his objectivism that closes to him the book of catholic Christianity from which Watts draws so much of his imagery: reason demands constant mental exertion, and so we need not expect ever to stand in rapt and silent awe before our Maker. Besides, a rational reading of scripture reveals to us that Christ saved us by his example and his precept, not by his blood.

VI.

A salient characteristic of radicalism is its tendency to eradicate distinctions not only between classes of men but also between different modes of discourse or categories of thought. Priestley's rather mundane eschatology demonstrates this tendency and so does his style of preaching. Both are founded on the assumption that the gradient of life is constant - there is no sharp incline, no crest of the hill - and Priestley's picture of the heaven towards which he hoped those who heeded his preaching would strive reveals that even death is not a crisis in human experience.

This antipathy to distinctions is even more marked in Priestley's introduction to the first volume of the Theological Repository. Here he explains that it 'becomes all friends of science to endeavour to find proper expedients for facilitating the extension of knowledge.' The best method of doing so, he believes, is to promote communication between those active in various fields of knowledge, and an essential first step in such commerce would be the publication of histories of the various arts and sciences. And, indeed, Priestley, in his role as anonymous editor, is able helpfully to cite an example of such a work: The History and Present State of Electricity. There are, in fact, close similarities between the preface to that work and the introduction to the Theological Repository. In both, Priestley urges the importance of histories of the various departments of learning as aids to the furtherance of knowledge in those departments; and in both he goes on to enjoin his fellow toilers to communicate their discoveries to each other.

This useful activity would be prodigiously facilitated, he suggests in the Repository, 'if the glorious scheme of an universal and philosophical language were carried into execution so that learned men might be able to correspond in it in one-tenth part of the time that it would require to make themselves masters of any other common language ...'<sup>76</sup> The assimilation of religious to scientific knowledge can scarcely be taken farther than this. Priestley, however, was impatient; other bodies of knowledge seemed to be progressing so much more rapidly than theology. He admired the protestants of the reformation but lamented that, while their reforms had been accepted, their example had been ignored: 'not a single step has been advanced in the period of about 200 years that have elapsed since their times and ours; a period in which there has been an almost total revolution in the whole system of thinking in Europe, and which has affected moral and theological subjects as much as any other.'<sup>77</sup>

Priestley was not alone in finding theological life too slow for his liking. Others too had contrasted the stagnation of religious thought with the rapid improvements that had taken place in other forms of knowledge as well as in technology and agriculture.<sup>78</sup> Such expectations followed naturally, of course, from the ethos of natural philosophy; if science, presented in a conversational mode, is made to seem perfectly continuous with all other areas of human endeavour, then any of these areas that do not resemble science in their progress will seem very anomalous indeed. The danger in this - a danger to which Priestley is clearly exposed - is that, as Michael Oakeshott puts it, 'when the scientist steps outside his own field he often carries with

him only his technique ...'<sup>79</sup> That is to say, the scientist, when he leaves the laboratory, cannot bring with him the practical knowledge which he has employed there and which is the principal part of his skill as a scientist. This practical knowledge, like all practical knowledge, can be used only in the specific situations from which it has emerged. By the same token, it cannot be taught in abstract but must be acquired in practice. Technique, on the other hand - which, with practical knowledge, is an essential part of any ordered human activity - can be taught: it can be formulated in rules and the rules can be learned. There is an obvious similarity between this technique and that new, spare concept of reason which began to emerge a generation or two before Priestley.

The decisive feature of the old concept of reason is not its supposed divine origin but its heuristic power, its ability to furnish ends as well as means. Technique, like the new reason, cannot furnish ends but skill can: 'A cook', says Oakeshott, 'is not a man who first has a vision of pie and then tries to make it; he is a man skilled in cookery, and both his projects and his achievements spring from that skill.' But the putative advantage of technique is its egalitarianism. Both Bacon and Descartes thought that they had discovered a technique of research with rules that could be written down, which would transform the art of discovery into a purely mechanical business; scientific method would be a machine by means of which laws of nature would be generated and in the operation of which all minds would be nearly on the same level. In the years after Bacon and Descartes technique was sovereign. There were all manner of books to tell the inexperienced how

to do things: how to think, to write poetry, to live. The complex traditions of English rights and liberties were abridged into a political crib, Locke's Second Treatise on Government, and religion found the greatest of its cribs in Paley's Evidences of Christianity.<sup>80</sup>

These two works - the former published in 1696, the latter in 1794; the first originating a mode of thought, the second consummating one - both frame and characterise Priestley's century. He certainly shared many of their assumptions: he had no time for privileged realms of discourse, whether that discourse was of the holy or of the noblesse. We examined in the last chapter the Baconian hopes embodied in his History of Electricity. This, more than any other of his major works, is a manual: it tells the reader as much history as he needs to know, abridges the known facts about electricity into a series of propositions (which, Priestley is careful to point out, are theory-free) and then encourages him to go forth and make some history of his own. 'Many modest and ingenious persons,' says Priestley, 'may be engaged to attempt philosophical investigations, when they see that it requires no more sagacity to find new truths than they themselves are masters of; and when they see that many discoveries have been made by mere accident, which may prove as favourable to them as to others.'<sup>81</sup>

But, as Priestley himself points out, electricity 'is a field but just opened', and therefore particularly welcoming to unskilled husbandry. An older and better established science may be less open to the amateur enthusiast. The apparatus with which chemical operations are performed may be simple, and the operations themselves easily conducted, but it would be a mistake to conclude from this that anybody

can conduct a chemical experiment: 'there are many little attentions and precautions necessary to be observed in the conducting of experiments, which cannot well be described in words, but which it is needless to describe, since practice will necessarily suggest them; though, like all other arts in which the hands and fingers are made use of, it is only much practice that can enable a person to go through complex experiments, of this or any other kind, with ease and readiness.'<sup>82</sup> This admonition, from Priestley's Experiments and Observations on Different Kinds of Air, published in 1774, is more than a warning about the need for mundane prudence in the laboratory. It clearly reveals his conviction that scientific discovery is not exclusively a matter of book-learning.

This conviction is accompanied by another: that scientific experiments are to be defined not in terms of a particular disposition of gases and fluids but in terms of the philosophy which directs that disposition. In 1775, when a certain Dr. Brocklesby accused him of scientific plagiarism, of copying another's experiments and giving his own names to the gasses produced thereby, he dealt lightly and pleasantly with his accuser. He compares Dr. Brocklesby to a Chinese craftsman who, trying to copy a European telescope, managed to reproduce everything except the curvature of the glass, and so built an instrument that resembled a European reflecting telescope in every respect except that of magnifying distant objects. Or perhaps Dr. Brocklesby is like Tobiah, the Tahitian visitor to the Dutch East Indies, who, strangely unsurprised by his first sight of a horse, turned out to be under the impression that he was looking at a dog, differing only in size from

those that he knew in his homeland. Tobiah and the Chinese workman both made the same sort of mistake, that of thinking that two things were alike when they were not, but Priestley extracts a further moral from the Tahitian's story. The untutored gaze of the Noble Savage, wise in its innocence, is not something that interests him. Instead he is impressed by the existence of important distinctions that are not apparent to the ignorant: had Tobiah been like Dr. Brocklesby, says Priestley, he might have complained that Europeans spend their time, frivolously and unphilosophically, in giving names to familiar things.<sup>83</sup>

Priestley's remark to Brocklesby that 'experiments that appear nearly the same with others, may, in reality, be essentially different from them ...' may be taken in two ways: as an admonition that a certain practical knowledge, such as the Chinese workman lacked, is necessary, or as a reminder of the importance of that theoretical knowledge which was lacked by both the workman and Tobiah.<sup>84</sup> In any case, we cannot help but draw from Priestley's remarks about chemistry two warnings: that only those with the requisite theoretical knowledge may know what a particular experiment really is, and that only those with both theoretical and practical knowledge can set up experiments and profit by their results. As observations on scientific method go, these are not very striking, but they do fit into the general pattern of Priestley's thought. His emphasis on the importance of both practical and theoretical knowledge is the scientific counterpart to his insistence that divine providence is to be learnt of in the complex detail of nature and history, not in instantaneous conversions or miraculous revelations.

Of course, it is associationism that shows how the mind manages this detail. Like knowledge, faith and persuasion admit of degrees. They are increased by the same means as those which generate them: attention to the evidence and contemplation of its objects. An account of the mechanism of generation is to be found in Hartley's Observations. Hartley distinguishes rational assent from practical assent, the 'Readiness to act in such manner as the frequent vivid Recurrency of the rational Assent disposes us to act'; but, whilst defining the latter in terms of the former (of which it is 'the natural and necessary Consequence'), he allows that either may be found without the other. Mathematical propositions, for example, admit only of rational assent (though why Hartley should believe this to be so is not clear), and practical assent, sometimes of the greatest consequence, may be generated without any prior <sup>rational</sup> ~~practical~~ assent. But even where practical assent has been produced alone, rational assent may still strengthen it. In religion, indeed, the two forms of faith 'are excellent means of begetting each other.'<sup>85</sup>

Priestley believes that Christianity demands practical as well as rational assent: 'a great deal must be done by a man, before he can be a Christian in the proper sense of the word, that is, not in name and profession only, but in deed and in truth; because a habit and temper is to be formed which can only be produced by the long continuance of proper actions.' Only by constant exercise can a Christian character be formed: 'Habits of mind are not acquired by putting cases, ... but by actual experience and feeling.'<sup>86</sup> Turning his attention to church discipline (in a pamphlet which one of his biographers found altogether

too illiberal), Priestley cannot think of the matter but in associationist terms. Men are trained to virtue, and good dispositions formed, only by discipline:

In what manner is it that any art, liberal or mechanical, is acquired? It is seldom or never by instruction only, but chiefly by the attention of those who are skilled in it to the trials and exercise of those who are to be instructed. It is well known that without some superintendence of this kind, bad habits will inevitably be formed, and the scholars will make no proficiency in any thing. Even science, where practice is not concerned, is never taught to any purpose, without frequent and careful examinations, in which actual proofs are given that the principles of it are understood, and that progress is really made in the attainment of it.<sup>87</sup>

Churches - 'Christian societies', as Priestley calls them - exist for the education of their members. Counteracting the insidious influences of the world, they help them to form good habits. It is for this reason that so much is expected of Dissenters, who do not labour under the prejudices which encumber the established church.<sup>88</sup>

Associationism must at first have appealed to Priestley as a powerful torch: a single clear beam, hard and straight, with which to pick out the details of any mental phenomenon, however obscure they might at first seem. But, in fact, as Hartley's laborious expositions reveal, associationist explanation tends away from simplicity: greater explanations beget lesser; parallel associations modify each other; the modified modifies the modifier, which, thus modified, modifies back, and so on. The result is that associationist theory has within it the potential to generate accounts of mental phenomena much more subtly-shaded than either Hartley with his habitual pedantry or Priestley in his usual haste would lead one to expect. (This is something to which historians of literary theory have, on the whole, been more alive than

historians of philosophy of or psychology; understandably enough, since the journey from Hartley to Coleridge must be through country quite different to that which leads from Hartley to Bentham.<sup>89</sup>) We saw in the first chapter how, according to Hartley, simple ideas of association have a tendency to form compounds by association, which compounds have in turn a tendency to coalesce into complex ideas. But things may be even more complicated than this, for, as Priestley remarks, 'all strong passions are liable to be transferred to indifferent objects, either related to the proper object, or those whose ideas are accidentally present to the mind, at the time that is is under the influence of such emotion or passion.' Hence arises that pleasure which, according to 'all poets and writers of romances', lovers take in everything belonging to or associated with the objects of their affections: 'Pious David envied even the swallows which had built their nests and laid their young in the House of God.'<sup>90</sup>

When associationist explanation proceeds in the direction of analysis, its aim is, of course, to simplify: mental phenomena are resolved into their simpler component parts. When, however, it attempts to proceed synthetically, to trace the coalitions into which simple ideas enter, it soon presents a very complex picture indeed. Of this Priestley, who spoke of association as 'that great and universal agent in the affections of the human mind', was well aware, as he made clear in his Lectures on Oratory and Criticism:

it is probable, there is not one sentiment of pleasure or pain that can be called intellectual (not being a direct impression upon some of the external senses) but what is more or less compounded of almost all the other intellectual pleasures and pains too. The principle of association is predominant in every thing relating to our intellectual faculties: and, in a situation so exposed as ours is to joint impressions, from a variety of

independent objects, our sensation cannot fail to be so commixed and combined together, that it must be extremely difficult, if not impossible, completely to resolve any one of them into all their [sic] separate, component parts.<sup>91</sup>

Clearly, if the mind is so subject to the impressions of its environment, we may expect that people differently-situated will have very different tastes. Hartley - though he believed that the love of God was a 'single criterion', common to all mankind - was happy to embrace this relativistic conclusion in the field of aesthetics. Priestley fights a little shy of it and appears torn between the subjectivism to which his psychologicistic theory leads him and the universalism to which his own predilections incline him. He points out had we all the same degree of sensibility, and were we all subject to the same impressions and influences, there would be no diversity of taste at all; but that the great differences among us in degree of sensibility and in situation lead us to be differently affected by the objects we encounter. This, he says, is why what is thought good taste in the East is not valued in Europe; and it is, of course, why the Asiatic metaphors of the Bible may take European readers by surprise. However, 'persons whose education and manner of life have been nearly the same' may be expected to have similar taste: 'And, from this principle, we may expect that, in consequence of the growing intercourse between all the nations of earth, and all the literati of them, an uniform standard of taste will at length be established over the world.'<sup>92</sup>

But at present we are not all exposed to the same phenomena, nor have we ever been. Though we may begin life as tabula rasa, the tablet is early written over with scribblings that - such are the effects of

association - soon become very complex and difficult to eradicate. This it is that rouses Priestley the preacher to his sense of urgency: for all that his attention is directed to good behaviour rather than to fugitive religious affections, he cannot allow himself the bland assumptions of a Tillotson. But neither can he confidently hope, like a Wesley, that a single thunderbolt of divine grace will make all well. Consequently, for him the Christian way must always be arduous.

Happily, associationism, which reveals to us the difficulties of our position, reveals to us also a number of solutions. Christianity can never, as the Methodists vainly boast, be the product of a single act of will; it is a 'habit or disposition of mind', which may be formed 'by a course of discipline and exercise, calculated to keep the mind continually impressed with a lively sense of the great truths of Christianity; so as to overpower the influence of the objects which surround us, and which are continually soliciting our attention. 'Man is by nature a social animal, and so nothing is better calculated to combat the malign influence of the world than are Christian societies. Worshipping and moving in such societies, Christians will mutually influence each other for the good. Even a mere external conformity with the standards of a Christian society may be useful: if the 'foreign corrupt influence' on a member's heart is not too strong, it will 'in time, produce a greater conformity of life, and of heart also.'<sup>93</sup>

It is difficult not to conclude that Priestley wanted things to be simple. He would have liked religion to be a matter of technique, its principles available to all, like those of the Franklinian doctrine of electricity, and available for translation into some universal

philosophical language. The central image of associationism, that of a mental machine obedient to universal laws, seems to promise fulfilment of such wishes. But the image of the mind which emerges from associationist analyses - that of an eddy of mutually-interfering currents, only gradually freezing into maturity - decisively denies all such promises.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES.

1. Priestley [1806], p.81.
2. Priestley [1761b], pp.26-27, 37-38, 46.
3. Ibid., p.vii.
4. Ibid., pp.20-21, 44-45.
5. Priestley [1806], pp.92-93.
6. Ibid., p.69. 'By this time, ' he adds proudly, writing in 1787, 'more than thirty thousand copies of the "Appeal" have been dispersed.' Thirty thousand, it may be noted, was precisely the number of people that the stentorian Methodist George Whitefield was said to be able to address at a single time.
7. On the difference between Luther, a theologian, and Calvin, 'a man committed to systematic innovation', see Walzer [1965], pp.24-25.
8. See Weber [1920], pp.113-115, and Walzer [1965], pp.24-25.
9. Weber [1920], p.113.
10. On the post-revolutionary cooling of Puritan zeal, see Walzer [1965], pp.319-320.
11. See Priestley [1806], pp.71, 92; Holt [1931]; pp.42-43; and Seed [1985], pp.306-314.

12. Priestley [1772-74], i, 15-21. For the originals of some of the Newtonian arguments that Priestley uses, see Newton [1730], query 28 (pp.369-370); Bentley [1693], sermon 3; Clarke [1705], pp.118-121; Pemberton [1728], p.405; Maclaurin [1748], pp.22, 381-382.
13. This is indeed a view to which Priestley later gave more explicit expression. See his [1787b], pp.63-64, 67. For a discussion of Priestley's relation to voluntarist thought, see McEvoy and McGuire [1975], pp.329-337.
14. Priestley [1772-74], i, 3; ii, 6-7.
15. Priestley [1771b], p.9. In his [1770c], p.440, Priestley points out that the evils we have inherited from our first parents are not moral but 'of a corporal and temporal nature, viz. labour, sorrow and death.'
16. Priestley [1770b], pp.389-390. He also condemns this doctrine of total depravity as he finds it in Anglican theology: see his [1769b], p.346.
17. Priestley [1770b], pp.391, 395.
18. Ibid., pp.397-398.
19. On this argument and early Socinian replies to it, see Walker [1964], pp.43-45, 129. It was clearly expressed in 1618 in the canons of the Synod of Dort in a passage which Priestley quotes in his [1782a], i, 263. See also his [1788c], pp.62-63.
20. Priestley [1772-74], iii, 78-80, 85-86 (c.f. Hartley [1749], ii, 331-336), 93.
21. Priestley [1769/73], 246, 261.
22. Priestley [1772-74], i, 153-155 (c.f. Hartley [1749], ii, 387). For the more familiar forms of the argument from evil for the after-life, see Hick [1976], ch.8.
23. Priestley [1772-74], iii, 186-187. For Priestley's early thoughts on the inexhaustibility of nature, see his [1767], i, preface, esp. pp.i-vi. For a discussion of this theme, see McEvoy [1979], esp. pp.3-6. In a later sermon ([1785], p.5), Priestley explains that 'the design of providence' is that this life should discipline us in the exercise of the faculties which we will need to use in the next world: 'moral virtues', 'patient inquiry, and close investigation of truth', and, of course, candour. In 1790, he told Richard Price that 'Every expression of your much valued friendship gives me particular pleasure, and I hope our correspondence will never be wholly discontinued as long as we live. I have indeed no idea of happiness than what will result from the society of such persons as you are in another world.' (Bodleian Library MSS.,

Eng. Misc. C.132 [Correspondence of Richard Price], ff.35-36: Priestley to Price, Birmingham, 29 August, 1790, also in Rutt (ed.) [1817-32], i(2), 79) Priestley was not alone in his views of the next world: the Scottish philosopher William Dudgeon (1706-1743) expected the after-life to be a society, a continuance of the present world, containing imperfections and inequalities, capable of progress. On this, see Forbes [1975], p.82.

24. Priestley [1772-74], i, 156-158.
25. Ibid., iii, 196-197. The orthodox account derives its authority from, inter alia, the parable of Dives and Lazarus; Christ's words to the thief on the cross (see below, n.32); and i Thessalonians, v, 23, in which St. Paul speaks of 'spirit and soul and body'. The bull Benedictus Deus (1336) of Benedict XII maintains that at the particular (as opposed to the general or last) judgement, the soul is sent either to enjoy the beatific vision, to purgatory or to hell. The immortality of the soul was defined as a dogma by the fifth Lateran Council (1512-1517). Chap. xxxii of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) states that after death the souls of men '(which neither die nor sleep), having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them.' The righteous are sent to heaven, 'where they behold the face of God' and await the redemptions of their bodies, and the wicked to hell (there being, of course, no other place but these two). All who are not still living on the last day will be re-united with their bodies, which will 'by the power of Christ', be either 'raised to dishonour' or, as justice demands, raised 'unto honor, and be made conformable to his own glorious body.' (Schaff [1877], iii, 670-671) There seems to be no authoritative Anglican pronouncement on the subject, though the burial service refers to the 'joy and felicity' which the souls of the righteous shall enjoy when they have been released from 'the burden of the flesh'. The authors of the thirty-nine articles had little to say about it, being concerned principally to deny the existence of purgatory, which had been abolished by Act of Parliament. For a brief account of primitive and later Christian views of this subject, see Hick [1976], chs. 9 and 10.
26. Priestley devotes a few pages ([1772-74], iii, 205-208) to those scriptural passages which seem to tell against his claims. They are: Luke, xvi, 19-31, in which Dives and Lazarus are represented after their deaths, the former in Abraham's bosom and the latter in the flames of hell; Luke, xxiii, 43, in which Christ promises the good thief on the cross that he will that day be with him in heaven; Philippians, i, 21-24, in which St. Paul says that he is torn between his desire to be with Christ and his awareness of the need for him to continue his earthly work in his fleshly body. To the first of these, Priestley replies (rather audaciously) that 'this parable is only a personification of what had no real sense', for in it

Christ 'does not speak of the soul being separate from the body, but of the whole man as having passed into the state of death, and therefore mentions the tongue of the rich man as tormented in a flame.' To the second, he replies (rather weakly) that 'this day' may signify merely that the promise was made that day, or that 'paradise' may be simply the state of rest between death and resurrection, during which time the virtuous are unconscious but 'secure under the protection of divine benevolence, and reserved for the accomplishment of its purposes in their favour.' To the last, he replies (rather tortuously) that the apostle speaks of death as gain because by it he would 'be delivered from a state of persecution and suffering', but that neither it nor a continuance of his present existence is the real object of his desire, which is 'to be delivered at once from mortality, by the coming of Christ, and so be immediately with him' (similar considerations may, he says, be brought to bear upon the interpretation of 2 Corinthians, ii, 8; for which see above n.25).

27. Priestley [1772-74], iii, 198. On the subject of the apparent superfluousness of the general judgement if there have already been particular judgments, see Walker [1964], pp.34-35, and Hick [1976], ch.x. Priestley's arguments do not quite meet the Calvinist doctrine as set out in chs.xxxii and xxxiii of the Westminster Confession (Schaff [1877], iii, 670-673). Here we are told that at death all souls return immediately to God and are sent thence to heaven or to hell according as they are righteous or wicked. There need be no judgement, God having preordained long ago who would be saved and who damned; he does not judge but issues decrees. At the last judgment Christ will be the judge. Before his tribunal, all who have lived on earth will 'give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds; and ... receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.' The oddity of the Presbyterian doctrine arises, then, not from its involving a superfluity of judgments - it has only one - but from its having any judgment at all; for nothing confessed at the last judgment can affect the soul's ultimate destination, which God decreed infinitely long ago.
28. Priestley [1772-74], iii, 183.
29. Ibid., i, 162. In that case it would be proper to call their punishment eternal because they might never come to know the happiness enjoyed by those whose course of virtue began earlier in their existence. Besides, Priestley believes, the word generally translated as 'everlasting' really not 'infinite' but 'of indefinite duration'. The word in question is presumably 'aionios', but, as Walker ([1964], pp.19-20) points out (though not apropos of Priestley), 'this interpretation is highly improbable since Christ [Matthew xxv] is clearly drawing a parallel between the eternity of bliss awaiting the sheep and the eternity of misery awaiting the goats. It can only stand if one also denies eternal life to the saved. ...'

30. Priestley [1772-74], i, 165-166.
31. To this list of doubters may be added the name of John Locke, but his views on the matter were not published until 1829. Newton's and Clarke's opinions were made known in 1730 by William Whiston in his Historical Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Dr. Samuel Clarke. See Walker [1954], ch.vi. For Shaftsbury and Burnet, two authors whom Priestley had certainly read, see ibid., chs.ix and x, and for other English authors see chs. vii and viii. Hartley (who quotes Whiston on the subject) certainly believed in post-mortem punishment of long duration and a corporeal nature and that the bulk of mankind were not intended for pure happiness, but he also believed what Priestley came later to believe: that ultimately all mankind would be made happy (see Hartley [1749], ii, 395-437).
32. John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion (translated by John Allen Philadelphia, 1921), i, xiii, 21, quoted in Walzer [1965], p.24.
33. Bunyan [1678], pp.169-170, 172. In support of his last statement, Bunyan cites i John, iii, 2. C.f., the Westminster Confession, ch.xxxii (Schaff [1877], iii, 670-671).
34. Philip Doddridge, first stanza of a hymn ('Ye Golden Lamps of Heaven, Farewell'), rpt., in Davison (ed.) [1973], pp.293-294. The idea that part at least of the joy of each saved soul will be derived from a contemplation of the joy of all the others is perhaps one that Priestley would have liked.
35. 'The Farewell', first stanza, in Watts [1709], pp.36-37. The titles are all taken from bk.i, 'Sacred .. to Devotion and Piety'. bk.ii, 'Sacred ... To Virtue, Honour, and Friendship', and bk.iii, 'Sacred ... To the Memory of the Dead', both contain many elegiac pieces in which similar sentiments are given voice.
36. Ibid., p.35, 'Christ Dying, Rising, and Reigning', l.1, and p.44, 'A Preparatory Thought for the Lord's Supper', l.16; 'Crucifixion to the World by the Cross of Christ' ('When I survey the wondrous cross'), 4th. stanza, rpt. in Davison [1973], pp.289-290. On this and other aspects of Watts' hymnody see Davie [1982], pp.71-72. Such language as Watts here employs surely gives the lie to Roland Stromberg, who - believing that 'Doddridge and Watts were fine neo-classical gentlemen and scholars, pious but restrained, abhorring enthusiasm' - follows the historian J.H. Colligan in attributing 'the decay of Dissent to a neglect of "churchmanship" - the elevation of individual opinions and rationalism above all elements of form and tradition - which seems to be another way of saying that eighteenth-century Dissenters were true children of the age of reason.' (Stromberg [1954], p.95, emphasis mine) What Stromberg says about Doddridge and Watts is true as far as it goes, though

smugly-phrased (and why should piety and restraint be unlikely bedfellows?); what he says about the decay of Dissent in general is plausible as far as it goes, which is hardly any distance at all; but what he says about Dissent in general has little to do with what he says about Doddridge and Watts, the latter of whom in particular was, as he have seen, very ready to speak in terms that were both communal and traditional in origin (which seems to be another way of saying that he was a true churchman).

37. 'To Pocyon. The Mischief of Warm Disputes and Declamations on the Controverted Points of Christianity.' ('Southampton, 1690') in Watts [1734], p.189.
38. 'God Only Known to Himself', first stanza, in Watts [1709], p.37, and Priestley [1772-74], iii, 184-185.
39. Richard Baxter, A Christian Directory, i, 375-376, quoted in Weber [1920], p.260, n.9. See also Weber [1920], pp.114-120, 157-159, 170-172 and Keeble [1982], p.77. C.f. Bogue and Bennett [1808-12], iv, 503: 'Industry, essential as it is to the cultivation of the soil, as well as to the progress of arts, manufactures, and commerce, will seldom be carried to the utmost degree, but by the influence of the religious principle. The temperance and frugality which husband the produce of labour, and leave to the individual a surplus to supply the demands of the state, must proceed from the prevalence of the mental over the sensual part of our nature: and the good order which leaves a government nothing<sup>d</sup> to fear from the open insurrection of the many or the secret crimes of the few, is most effectually secured by the fear of that supreme Ruler who can equally detect secret villainy, and punish prosperous violence.'
40. Boswell [1791], 7 April, 1778 (iii, 248). For Johnson's opinions of Whitefield and Wesley, see ibid., 30 July, 1763 (i, 459-460); 6 October, 1763 (ii, 79); 12 October, 1779 (iii, 409); Journal of a Tour of the Hebrides, 15 August, 1773 (v, 35-36). See also Downey [1969], pp.26-27.
41. Swift [1721], pp.278-280.
42. John Wesley, 'The Great Assize', a sermon preached St. Paul's Church, Bedford, 10 March, 1758, in Nye (ed.) [1976], p.72.
43. See Gilbert [1976], p.40.
44. Priestley [1770b], p.333.
45. Benjamin Whichcote, Moral and Religious Aphorisms (ed. W.R. Inge, London, 1930), 380, quoted in McAdoo [1965], p.34; Henry More, A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings (London, 1662), p.vi, quoted ibid., p.103.

46. Hume [1739/40], bk.ii, pt.iii, sec.3 (p.415). We can see this state of affairs beginning to change with the work of the Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth, who believed that reason as 'the vulgar physiology' conceived it, could not 'excogitate' ends and so could not originate actions. (In this he differed from his teacher, Benjamin Whichcote, who taught that the affections were blind in themselves and could only follow judgment.) But his argument is directed really against any physiology that separates the soul into various faculties. He wishes to assert not that the passions rather than the intellect must lead but that it is the whole man or soul that both understands and wills (Passmore [1951], pp.52-58). In this, however, as Passmore points out (pp.93-94), he closely resembles Locke.
47. More [1666], pp.11, 15.
48. Isaac Watts, Discourse on Education (in Works, v, 360), quoted in Lincoln [1938], p.69n; Locke [1700], bk.iv, ch.xvii, sec.3. For Locke's arguments against innate ideas, see his bk.i. For this new concept of reason, regarded 'rather as an acquisition than as a heritage', see Cassirer [1932], pp.12-15, and Lloyd [1984], ch.iii.
49. Watts [1725], p.55.
50. Locke [1700], bk.4, ch.xiv. The impossibility of equating knowledge, which involves judgment of relations, with sense perception, which cannot extend to relations, is discussed by Cudworth (who here invokes the Theatetus). See Passmore [1951], pp.32-38. Watts insists ([1725], p.110) that a judgment is an act of will and not 'a mere perception of the agreement or disagreement of ideas', but he does not develop the thought.
51. My argument here is indebted to MacIntyre [1981], ch.v.
52. More [1666], p.111, and Hartley [1749], ii, 309.
53. In fact, before proceeding from these to the love of God, Hartley ([1749], ii, 283-290) discusses 'The Pleasures of Sympathy', which, as they 'improve those of Sensation, Imagination, Ambition, and Self-Interest; and unite with those of Theopathy and the Moral Sense ... are self-consistent, and admit of an unlimited Extent ... may be our primary Pursuit.' But again his methods are egoistic. He shows how gratification of benevolent desires commends itself by virtue of its uniquely wide extent. The pleasures of sympathy are coincident with those of the love of God 'inasmuch as we are led by the Love of good Men to that of God, and back again by the Love of God to that of all his Creatures in an through him; and also as it must be the Will of an infinitely benevolent Being, that we should cultivate universal unlimited Benevolence.'

54. Stephen [1876], ii, 57; Hartley [1749], ii, 282; Henry More, 'Little Narrative of Himself' and letters iv and v, in Richard Ward, The Life of the Leaned and Pious Dr. Henry More (London, 1710), pp.14, 258, 274, quoted in Hoyles [1971], pp.33-34. Similarly to More, Ralph Cudworth holds that 'self-desire', the pursuit of 'private good', is the source of all vices. For Cudworth, says Passmore ([1951], pp.76-77), 'the "economic man" is the supreme type of viciousness; the supreme type of goodness on the other side, is love, disinterest, co-operative, spontaneous, beautiful, creative which "unites and conglutinates all together".' For the seventeenth-century concept of reason see Bethell [1951], ch.iii, whose discussion bears the imprint of Eliot's idea of a 'dissociation of sensibility'; Hoopes [1962], esp. chs.vii and ix; Lichtenstein [1962], pp.55-69, 133-155; Hill [1974], ch.iv; Mulligan [1984].
55. Isaac Watts, preface to Discourses of the Love of God, and the Use and Abuse of the Passions in Religion (rev. ed., 1732, in Works, ii, 279, 298) and An Humble Attempt towards the Revival of the Power and Grace of Christ (1731, in Works, iv, 26, 29), quoted in Rivers [1982], pp.130, 132.
56. Davies [1961], pp.73, 97.
57. Priestley [1783b], p.89, and [1769d], p.457. On the structure of Tillotson's sermons, see Downey [1969], p.25.
58. John Tillotson 'The Precepts of Christianity not Grievous', rpt. in Tillotson [1752], i, esp. pp.161-169. On Tillotson's sermons and their egoistic ethic, see McAdoo [1965], pp.173-179.
59. Butler, quoted in Downey [1969], p.46; Secker, Sermons on Several Subjects (London, 1770-71), quoted *ibid.*, p.93; The Correspondence and Diary of Philip Doddridge, (London, 1829-31, iv, 414-415), quoted in Rivers [1982], p.133.
60. The Rev. John Walker to Philip Doddridge (1744), in The Correspondence and Diary of Philip Doddridge, iv, 359, quoted in Davies [1961], p.97, and Watts [1978], p.465.
61. Wesley [1743], pp.28-35. Locke too makes this distinction, though he alludes only briefly to it ([1700], bk.iv. ch.xvii, sec.1).
62. William Warburton, Letters from a Late Eminent Prelate to One of his Friends (London, 2nd. ed., 1809), quoted in Sykes [1934], p.257, and Downey [1969], p.27.
63. Alexander Pope, Essay on Man, epistle i, ll.145-146, quoted in 'The Doctrine of Divine Influence on the Human Mind, considered in a Sermon, Preached ... in 1779', in Priestley [1787a], p.82.
64. 'The Doctrine of Divine Influence', in Priestley [1787a], pp.83, 89.

65. Priestley [1770a], p.404.
66. Sprat [1667], p.113. C.f. Bolingbroke: 'allegory has been always a principal instrument of theological deception ... I shall repeat what I have said already, that the philosopher or divine, who pretends to instruct others by allegorical expressions without an immediate, direct, and intelligible application of the allegory to some proposition or others, has nothing in his thought but the supposed allegory ... if he has anything there he distrusts, and dares not venture to expose naked and stripped of allegory to the undazzled eye of reason, it is too much even to insinuate in such a case, and especially on subjects of the first philosophy.' (Works, London, 1754, iv, 54-55, quoted in Hoyles [1971], p.145) Isaac Watts similarly distrusts 'words without ideas': see Hoyles [1971], p.167.
67. Wesley, 'Catholic Spirit', in Nye (ed.) [1976], pp.49-50.
68. Priestley [1791f], pp.iv-vi. Priestley's [1791f] is an introduction to a collection of Wesley's letters, published posthumously. 'No person of honour will even look into a letter not directed to himself,' wrote Priestley ([1791e], p.41) later in the same year when some of his own correspondence was exposed to unauthorized view.
69. Tillotson, 'The Precepts of Christianity not Grievous', in Tillotson [1752], i, 156.
70. Priestley, Ms. Sermons, Manchester College, Oxford: 'The Importance of Self govern-<sup>ment</sup>' (Leeds, 27 October, 1771), pp.15-16; two untitled sermons on Matthew xxiv, 12-13 (Leeds, 2 May, 1772), i, 11-12. All three of these sermons were also delivered at Calne in the late seventies and at Birmingham in the eighties. The latter pair were also given at Hackney in October 1792.
71. 'A Discourse on Habitual Devotion' (first published in 1782), in Priestley [1787a], p.118; Priestley, Ms. Sermons, Manchester College, Oxford: 'The happiness of fearing always' (Leeds, February, 1771), pp.1-5 (this sermon was delivered again at Leeds, twice in Birmingham, and at Hackney).
72. Priestley, Ms. Sermons, Manchester College, Oxford: 'The Spirit of X<sup>ty</sup> p<sup>t</sup> 3<sup>d</sup>', (Leeds, n.d.), pp.1-2. The sermon was also delivered at Birmingham in 1783 and at Hackney in 1792.
73. Priestley, Ms. Sermons, Manchester College, Oxford: 'The Importance of Self govern-<sup>ment</sup>', pp.1-3, and 'The Spirit of X<sup>ty</sup> p<sup>t</sup> 3<sup>d</sup>', p.4.
74. Priestley [1772-74], i, 73.

75. Priestley, Ms. Sermons, Manchester College, Oxford: 'The Spirit of X<sup>ty</sup> p<sup>t</sup> 3<sup>d</sup>', pp.9-11.
76. Priestley [1769d], pp.515-518. C.f., Priestley [1767], ii, vi-vii, xvi-xx. For the founding of the Theological Repository, see Priestley [1806], p.93. On the seventeenth-century projects, to which Priestley refers, to found a universal language, see Shapiro [1983], pp.242-246, 254-255.
77. Priestley [1769b], pp.349-350.
78. See Chadwick [1957], p.78 & n., Sykes [1959], p.175, and Barlow [1962], p.142.
79. Oakeshott [1962], p.29. Priestley's [1772-74], ii, 73 provides another and very striking example of the scientistic tendency in his thought. Here Priestley, having tried to show that both atheism and the persecution of the faithful have had a purifying effect on Christianity, concludes: 'Christianity, after having stood such a trial as this, will no more be exposed to such virulent attacks as before, but will acquire such a fixed character of truth, as it could never have obtained without the opposition which it has met with. Such has been the fate of all the branches of true philosophy, of the Copernican system, the Newtonian theory of light and colours, and the Franklinian theory of electricity.'
80. Oakeshott [1962], pp.13-15, 25, 91. Sir Karl Popper, writing from a philosophical perspective very different to Oakeshott's, also couples Bacon and Descartes as early votaries of a tradition of philosophical error; see Popper [1963], introduction, esp. pp.12-18. On Bacon's influence in the eighteenth century, see Schofield [1970], ch.v. esp. p.94.
81. Priestley [1767], ii, 166.
82. Priestley [1774-77], i, 6-7.
83. Priestley [1775a], p.78.
84. Ibid., p.11.
85. Priestley [1772-74], ii, x-xi, 70 and Hartley [1749], i, 325-326, 333.
86. 'A Sermon preached ... at Mill-Hill Chapel, Leeds, May 16, 1773', in Priestley [1787a], p.13; Priestley [1769a], pp.30-31.
87. Priestley [1770a], p.436. 'His scheme for church discipline, had it been adopted, would have made rational Dissent as illiberal ... as Scottish presbyterianism.' (Holt [1931], p.46)

88. Priestley [1768a], pp.xi-xii; [1769a], p.3; 'A Sermon preached December 31, 1780, at the New Meeting, in Birmingham ...' in Priestley [1787a], p.41.
89. In this respect, compare Albee [1901], ch.vi, Brett [1953], pp.436-447 and Warren [1921], ch.iii, with Abrams [1953], ch.vii, Bate [1946], pp.93-119, 138-139, Engell [1981], ch.vi, and Kallich [1970], chs. iv and vi.
90. Priestley [1777a], pp.94-95.
91. Ibid., pp.129-130, 231.
92. Hartley [1749], i, 442, and Priestley [1777a], pp.133-135.
93. Priestley, Ms. Sermons, Manchester College, Oxford: two untitled sermons on Matthew xxiv, 12-13, i, 4-5.

CHAPTER FOUR.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF MIND AND OF MATTER.

I am still attracted by everything in Hobbes: ... his distrust of concepts (what else is his 'materialism'?) ...  
Elias Canetti, The Human Province

I.

Joseph Priestley - though his work displays an abiding concern with certain epistemological issues, with the acquisition of knowledge, the validation of evidence and the operations of the mind - was in many ways hardly a philosopher at all. Setting out, as he did from time to time, along the road of metaphysics or of logic, he could seldom resist a detour into the broader, better-illuminated highways of psychology and empirical science. In two books, Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit and The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated, both published in 1777, he expounded very substantial philosophical doctrines - materialism and determinism - but in both these works (and particularly in the former), the weight of the argument is borne largely by scientific and biblical scholarship. For Priestley, materialism is not a way of looking at the world: it is the world looked at in a particular way, and that way was already fully developed when he turned to these matters.

The principle feature of this way of looking at the world is, of course, its aspiration to objectivity. This is why there is so much psychology in Priestley's philosophy: psychologism seeks to ground metaphysics and logic in the observable phenomena of human behaviour, so that no appeal need be made to anything that is not either objectively verifiable or at least capable of being inferred from the objectively-verifiable. Indeed Priestley was first provoked into philosophy by his discovery of a school of thought that seemed to him to deny the obligation to be objective. He addressed their work in 1774, in An Examination of Dr. Reid's Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense, Dr. Beattie's Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, and Dr. Oswald's Appeal to Common sense on Behalf of Religion, and, in doing so, addressed some very important questions of legitimation. These questions arise directly from one of the central intellectual problems of his age: the problem of scepticism.

## II.

Newtonian writers, such as those Priestley read as a youth, are resolute in their opposition to scepticism. They are to some extent fallibilists - 'after our most diligent labour,' writes one, 'the greatest part of nature will, no doubt, for ever remain beyond our reach' - but, though prepared to admit that there are many things that they do not know, they are most reluctant to admit that the things they do know are not known certainly.<sup>1</sup> And the things they do know are established by standards of experimental proof that are entirely psychologistic. Their rivals the Cartesians, seeking to deduce a

philosophy of nature from first principles rather than empirical evidence, need to point to objective relations between propositions in order to establish their theories. For the Newtonians, on the other hand, a valid experimental and inductive proof is a psychological relation between beliefs, which must be known to be certain beliefs. Proof of the phenomena is guaranteed by the 'lack of speculative bias', 'carefulness' and 'sagacity of the theoretician'.<sup>2</sup> Here their tone is unmistakably, though ambiguously, Baconian.

It is ambiguous because, though their cautious and humble methods are Baconian, their concept of knowledge is not Francis Bacon's, however much they might like it to be. There was no place in Bacon's philosophical schema for a theory of probability. He was devoted to mechanics, geometry and astronomy: the 'high' sciences, in which certainty was attainable, in which, according to his scholastic concept of knowledge, we seek scientia and not mere opinio. 'If we examine the texts of Bacon or Galileo,' says Ian Hacking, 'we find a world of first causes.'<sup>3</sup> But it was this very search for first causes that the Newtonians were proud to have abandoned: Newton had furnished not first causes but constant conjunctions. Better this, said his pupil Colin Maclaurin, than the methods of the Cartesians, who teach us 'the danger of setting out in philosophy in so high and presumptuous a manner. ...'<sup>4</sup> Their presumption lies in their belief that they know what first principles are and can deduce their philosophy from them. This is the sort of behaviour that earns them stern Newtonian rebukes like that which 'sGravesande administers. Let us confess our ignorance, he says,

rather than allow ourselves to be led astray by 'an immoderate desire of knowledge.'<sup>5</sup>

The Newtonians responded in two ways to this failure to find any first or efficient causes. Firstly, they modified scientific standards just enough to allow Newtonian physics into Salomon's House whilst shutting the door firmly on all rivals. This they did chiefly with the aid of the fourth of Newton's Regulae Philosophandi, those rules of philosophising with which he prefaced the third book of his Principia. Secondly, they emphasised those passages of Bacon's philosophy in which he recommended modesty, caution and a willingness to undertake long and arduous researches.

We have seen already that 'sGravesande's way of answering the sceptics was to point out that there is such a thing as moral, as well as mathematical, certainty. Pursuing this theme in the preface to his Mathematical Elements of Natural Philosophy, he launches into an assault on both scepticism and the fideism which it could be used to justify. There are those, he says, who 'argue that all our Knowledge of natural Things is imperfect; that our first Reasoning about them is built on Hypotheses; and that that Analogy, without which we can discover nothing in Physics, is to be referred to Hypotheses.'<sup>6</sup> By 'analogy' here is meant induction; so the position to which 'sGravesande is opposed is one of some sophistication, assuming as it does that inductions, though necessary to science, must be hypothetical in character. Faced with this very serious challenge, 'sGravesande appended to his preface an 'Oration Concerning Evidence', in which he discussed the issue of moral certainty.

Here, following Locke very closely (though without once mentioning him), he explains that, sceptical though we may be as to whether our perceptions correspond with reality, we cannot doubt that we have these perceptions nor that we are able to compare them one with another. Such acts of comparison are the foundations of mathematical reasoning; they supply us with a way of escape from that infinite regress with which some sceptics taunt us, claiming that a criterion of truth needs a criterion by which it can be known to be valid: 'the Evidence itself is the desir'd Criterium of Truth; viz, the very Perception of the Comparison between two Ideas.'<sup>7</sup> No doubt attends mathematical reasoning: we can know its objects fully and clearly because they are ideas and not things. This is what Locke calls 'intuitive knowledge', and the next stage beyond the intuitive is the demonstrative, in which the mind perceives the agreement or disagreement between two ideas not directly but by means of one or more intermediary ideas. According to 'sGravesande, mathematical reasoning is of this kind: complex quantities are broken down into their constituent parts and then reassembled step by step, every stage in the reassembly consisting of the comparison of ideas whose agreement or disagreement can be recognised instantly and intuitively. This method of analysis, comparison and composition may, says 'sGravesande, be applied to all sciences: it is only in its subject matter, quantity, that mathematics is unique; logic, ontology and pneumatology all deal, like mathematics, entirely in ideas. Thus it is that we are able to deduce the divine existence 'from such Notions, of which the Mind can in<sup>no</sup>wise doubt; which follows from the Nature of them.' The existence of an eternal, self-existent and omniscient God is mathematically certain. Nothing else concerning external reality is

demonstrable in this way, but we do know - and this is all we need to know - that there exists outside us an infinitely wise and truthful being through whose agency we acquire the idea of all other phenomena.<sup>8</sup> Though we may indeed be misled in our interpretation of these phenomena, it would be contradictory ('sGravesande continues) for us to suppose that God, having given us the means of acquiring ideas of external reality, would allow these means, properly employed, to lead us into error. God granted to man the enjoyment and use of the material world and, to this end, provided him with the senses. Given this fact, we can see that he must have ordained also the use of testimony and analogy, for these are necessary auxiliaries of the senses.

Like Locke, 'sGravesande sets up a division between the mind and the world which only an assurance of God's trustworthiness can bridge, but the chief message of his Oration is entirely optimistic. The book which it prefaces deals not only with mechanics and celestial motion, traditional staples of the 'high' sciences, but also with such 'low' matters as fire and air. Like Hartley, 'sGravesande believes that the divine warrant extends beyond intuitive knowledge to these humbler realms and that they too can enjoy scientia rather than mere opinio. Hume applies the term 'knowledge' only to pure mathematics; 'sGravesande argues that we are allowed a much more generous employment of it, and in order to do so he must considerably aggrandise certain other terms. Testimony, for example, was once a very modest sort of foundation for knowledge, but 'sGravesande values it as highly as Priestley is later to do.

He maintains of course, that we can know only the properties of matter, not the substance underlying these properties. We cannot know even the extent of these properties - nor fix, limit, or determine them a priori - for in any body there may always be properties of which we know nothing. After further examination, we may ascend to general laws of nature, such as Newton's first and second laws of motion, but we can never know whether such laws flow from the essence of matter or are the result of non-essential properties with which God has endowed it. Given this necessary limitation to our hopes ('Natural Philosophy explains natural Phaenomena, i.e. treats of their Causes'), we must conduct our research under the guidance of Newton's Regulae:

#### RULE I

We are to admit no more causes of natural things than such as are both true and sufficient to explain their appearances.

#### RULE II

Therefore to the same natural effects we must, as far as possible, assign the same causes.

#### RULE III

The qualities of bodies, which admit neither of intensification nor remission of degrees, and which are found to belong to all bodies within the reach of our experiments, are to be esteemed the universal qualities of all bodies whatsoever.<sup>9</sup>

But it is the fourth rule - which 'sGravesande, perhaps because he is working from the first edition of the Principia, does not mention - which is the most far-reaching in its implications:

#### RULE IV

In experimental philosophy, we are to look upon propositions inferred by general induction from phenomena as accurately or very nearly true, notwithstanding any contrary hypotheses that may be imagined, till such time as other phenomena occur, by which they may either be made more accurate or liable to exceptions.<sup>10</sup>

With the aid of this rule, Newton was able to effect that modification of scientific standards which legitimised his own theories and ruled out their rivals. Imre Lakatos argues that it was intended to make two particular kinds of criticism impossible: criticism of Newton's theories for their lack of self-evident foundations such as Descartes sought and criticism of them for contradicting a priori first principles. Furthermore, alternative hypotheses, which fit all the phenomena but have not been proven inductively, are ruled out.<sup>11</sup>

Newton himself was prepared to admit that induction could not provide demonstrations of general conclusions; but it was, he thought,

the best way of arguing which the Nature of Things admits of, and may be looked upon as so much the stronger, by how much the Induction is more general. And if no exceptions occur from Phaenomena, the Conclusion may be pronounced generally. But if at any time afterwards an exception shall occur from experiments, it may then begin to be pronounced with such Exceptions as occur.<sup>12</sup>

The implication here appears to be that, though induction cannot be infallible, its failures will, if we have been careful and thorough, necessitate no more than minor, ad hoc, changes in our conclusions. Lakatos claims, with some reason, that the effect of all this was to encourage dogmatism, but he goes too far when he suggests that 'Newton's authority strangled the development of Newtonian philosophy in Britain.'<sup>13</sup> There were philosophers who, whatever formal honour they may have done Newton's name, ignored the fourth rule and speculated

freely. Hartley was one of them and Priestley, his disciple, was another. It was this which earned them the opprobrium of more dogmatic Newtonians like Thomas Reid.

### III.

'sGravesande's methodological remarks are interesting chiefly because, prefacing as they do a Newtonian textbook, they indicate the way in which Locke's philosophy and Newton's physics were presented as two aspects of the same intellectual project. They represent the orthodoxy of the age; 'sGravesande has upgraded testimony and analogy, but he has left the human mind where Locke left it: at the centre of its own awareness, cut off from the external world, conscious only of certain ideas which may or may not accurately represent that world. The Reverend Thomas Reid, Professor of Philosophy at King's College, Aberdeen, was troubled by these pictures of a mind exiled and set out to find the wellsprings of their inspiration.<sup>14</sup>

The rot, he says, began with Descartes' philosophic scepticism. Descartes professed (absurdly) to doubt all but that of which he could be certain, and he decided at last that his own existence, confirmed <sup>as</sup> ~~at~~ it was in the inference cogito, ergo sum, was the one thing that could not be doubted. 'But why,' Reid asks, 'did he not prove the existence of his thought? Consciousness, it may be said, vouches for that. But who is voucher for consciousness?'<sup>15</sup> Of course, Reid continues, we - or, at least, the sane amongst us - do trust our consciousness, and we do so because our minds are so constituted that we must. But must we not also, for the same reason, take upon trust our own existence?

Besides, why, if we have decided to doubt everything, should we not doubt also the existence of a thinking subject? Once the sceptical enterprise is under way, there is no stopping it. Once we have reached the stage of doubting not only the existence of the rest of the world but even our own, then all coherence is gone; we can have no guarantee of anything. Descartes, Locke and the rest are better at creating doubts than resolving them. Having once allowed entry to scepticism, they cannot keep it out. Bishop Berkeley sought to secure the world against it by abandoning belief in a material universe, leaving merely the self and its ideas, but Hume destroyed even Berkeley's ghostly edifice 'and drowned all in one universal deluge' simply by drawing out the full implications of the philosophical system instituted by Descartes and continued by Locke and Berkeley. It is a received principle of his school 'that every object of thought must be an impression or an idea - that is, a faint copy of some preceding impression.' These ideas were originally intended to serve philosophy as intermediaries between mind and world. Berkeley, however, showed that appearances could be explained without the supposition of any world at all; ideas and the mind would do. But now Hume has shown that not even minds need be supposed to exist. Ideas, which 'seem to have something in their nature unfriendly to other existences', have colonised the whole universe: 'the mind is only a succession of ideas and impressions without any subject. ...'<sup>16</sup>

Reid has no quarrel with Hume's argument, only with his conclusions; and if sound argument leads to a conclusion as absurd and paradoxical as Reid believes Hume's to be, then there must be something

wrong with the premises. Clearly it is the 'theory of ideas', the doctrine that the mind perceives the world only through the medium of ideas, that is at fault. Abandon that - yield to the commonsense belief that the mind perceives the world directly, without mediation - and mind and world are at once restored. It is, of course, rather easier to call upon people to yield to common sense than it is to argue for the abandonment of a sophisticated philosophical doctrine. Reid's Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense, published in 1764, is dedicated chiefly to the latter, more difficult task: the work of his fellow countrymen James Oswald and James Beattie are shrill attempts to silence the clamour of scepticism and to reinvest common sense with the authority it is supposed once to have enjoyed. Beattie's book, at least, sold very well.<sup>17</sup>

#### IV.

There is an air of smugness about Priestley's Examination of the philosophy of Reid, Beattie and Oswald. That intensity of gloomy speculation, that relentless reiteration of unanswerable questions which caused Hume to fancy himself 'in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environed with the deepest darkness,' and from which he could find refuge only in the pursuit of mundane pleasures, in backgammon and good company, seems never to have troubled Priestley.<sup>18</sup> He is at ease in the world and, like a good Newtonian, knows what he knows. Reid and Hume are concerned with the status of our beliefs - both want to know whether any of them may be said to approach the condition of scientia - but, though Hume claimed to be applying Newton's

methods, and though a similar claim may be made on Reid's behalf, Priestley is a better Newtonian than either of them.<sup>19</sup> Unlike them, he is not really a metaphysician; he is not really interested in the logical status of claims to knowledge about the world nor in the structure of the arguments with which these claims are supported. Instead, he is interested in making claims and in arguing about them. The explanations in the child's-guide-to-philosophy with which he condescendingly prefaces the Examination are, for the most part, genetic: they are accounts, couched in the language of associationist psychology, of how the mind acquires its ideas. Priestley is not interested in the justification of induction, only in the justification of particular inductions. And his standards of justification are, like those of the Newtonians, psychologistic: in the making of inductions our 'experience' is instructed 'by much and varied experience.'<sup>20</sup> The result of this is that Priestley ends up saying something very like what he criticises Reid for saying: that we rely on induction because of the constitution of our minds.

Throughout the book his attention seems to be directed elsewhere than towards metaphysics; it is the political implications of commonsense philosophy that principally concern him. This is apparent in his very first mention of the commonsense philosophers, in the preface to the third volume of his Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion. Here, he says of 'Dr. Beattie, and especially of Dr. Oswald,' that they

represent common sense as superseding almost all reasoning about religion, natural or revealed. ... By the very concise process of an appeal to this principle, they say, that any man may fully satisfy himself concerning the truth of the being, the unity, the

attributes, and the providence of God, and also of a future state of retribution and even ... of the evidences of Christianity.'<sup>21</sup>

Priestley objects that these truths concerning God are not primary truths: they are not self-evident, not to be assented to without intermediary and more certain propositions. As we have seen, he believed that the Christian life must be founded upon an act of free choice and that, to assist men in the making of this choice, God had given them reason and the clear light of the gospel. Reason is a faculty which we must cultivate, ever wary of the corruption to which prejudice and superstition expose it. No opinion or doctrine, though we may have inherited it from our beloved parents or respected teachers, can be immune from rational scrutiny. To abandon reason, to abrogate free choice in matters of theology, is to lay oneself open to the sinister blandishments of Popery and established religion. Oswald and the others, Priestley believes, are each of them turning a disdainful and obstinate back on this, the only way to true Christianity. Why, he asks, do they object to reasoning in religious matters? And his answer is Newtonian (it echoes Maclaurin's treatment of his Cartesian adversaries): the Scottish philosophers object to reasoning in religion because they expect a kind or degree of evidence of which the subject will not admit. Their epistemology and Hume's criticism of miracles rest on the same error: a failure to place due weight on the importance of testimony.<sup>22</sup>

Earlier Newtonians had pointed out that an excessive zeal for mathematical proof would engender scepticism and that superstition was the counterpart of scepticism; Priestley, following them, asserts in the Examination that Reid errs in seeking 'a plenary assurance' for our

beliefs about the world.<sup>23</sup> Reid is troubled by Hume's discovery that, if ideas are our only objects of thought and have no existence except when we are conscious of them, then all objects of thought ('Body and spirit, cause and effect, time and space') have a merely discontinuous existence. This, says Priestley, is a 'pitiful sophism' and yet from it is derived all Reid's curious philosophy; for in order to avoid Hume's conclusions, he thinks it necessary to abandon Hume's theory of the mind and so to adduce the instinctive principles of common sense. But it would better if, abandoning the search for plenary assurance, he had contented himself 'with a reasonable degree of evidence'. The 'old hypothesis' could then have been retained: 'It suits every case of sensations and ideas; and therefore, according to the received rules of philosophizing, has a just claim to be admitted.'<sup>24</sup>

In fact, Priestley is able to salvage the old hypothesis only by ignoring the arguments that Reid set out to meet. We can be certain that the mind exists, he says, because 'mind' is merely the name by which we denote 'that to which certain powers and properties, ... as perception, memory, will, &c.' of which we are conscious, belong. But this is to ignore Hume's claim that in introspection we are conscious only of particular perceptions, memories, acts of will and so on. There is no way of getting to the powers of which Priestley speaks, let alone to the substance of which they are supposed to be properties. All we can know about is a bundle of properties. Nor does Priestley succeed in proving the continuous existence of ideas:

We have just the same reason to believe the identity of an idea, as that of an external body, or that of our own minds themselves. The idea that I have of my wife or child to-day as much resembles the idea I had of them yesterday, though some hours of sleep have intervened, as my house of to-day resembles my house of yesterday.

In this case I only judge by the resemblances of my ideas of it; and if the ideas of my house yesterday and to-day were not the same, I should have no medium by which to prove the identity of the house.<sup>25</sup>

As well as equivocating uneasily between 'my house' and 'the ideas of my house', this decidedly impatient argument is, of course, a petitio principii unless wife, child and house can be shown independently to be something other than ideas in the mind. Priestley believes that he has done this, though the task is rather perfunctorily performed.

The argument is similar to one of 'sGravesande's (ample proof of its Newtonian orthodoxy). 'sGravesande could provide no greater certainty than moral certainty that our ideas correspond to a real, external world; but he could, he believed, provide a mathematically-certain demonstration that there was a God, author of these ideas, who would not deceive us. Priestley arrives at similar conclusions. He cannot agree with what he takes to be Reid's basic claim - that to have perceptions is necessarily to believe that they are occasioned by external objects - nor will he allow that this claim, even if true, could be at all helpful. A belief, though ineradicable, may yet be 'no more than a prejudice, void of all real foundation.' 'sGravesande's point was that God was trustworthy; he had not given us mathematical certainty as to the existence of an external world, but he had given us the senses, testimony and analogy, which he intended should lead us to the truth. Priestley now proceeds to argue in a similar spirit. Why, he demands, should God have implanted in us 'a peculiar instinctive principle, merely for the sake of giving us a plenary conviction' of the existence of the external world, when he has left us with 'a kind of faith far inferior to mathematical certainty in things of infinitely

more consequence'? Furthermore, Reid concedes that there are no arguments by which it can be shown that there could be no sensation without an external world. It follows, then, if Reid is right about our instinctive beliefs, that God has implanted in all of us an ineradicable tendency to believe something which may not be true. But if this is so, then our belief in the existence of an external world must, contrary to Beattie and Oswald, be 'essentially different from that kind of evidence by which we are satisfied that two and two are four, which is independent of any arbitrary constitution whatever.' By their own standards, then the commonsense philosophers are able to offer only relative, and not absolute, truth.<sup>26</sup>

But what reason can we have for believing in the existence of an external world? Whatever that reason may be, it cannot be 'a mere unaccountable persuasion', as Reid supposes it to be.<sup>27</sup> And if we experience no such persuasion as this, then we should at least be prepared to entertain Berkeley's hypothesis that there is no external world and that all our sensations are occasioned by the divine mind. Priestley is ready to do so. He will not say that is impossible that Berkeley is correct, but asks us to consider whether it is probable that he is correct; for the philosopher with two rival hypotheses before him 'will consider which is the more probable as being more consonant to the course of nature in other respects.' We know that if half the world were to look into the night sky at the same moment, they would all report the same sight: moon, stars and planets. Now, it is possible that this happy agreement would have been produced by the direct action of the Almighty upon all those minds, but it is surely more probable

that the heavenly bodies really do exist and that our minds are directly impressed by them:

It is sufficient evidence for this hypothesis, that it exhibits particular appearances, as arising from general laws, which is agreeable to the analogy of everything else that we observe. it is recommended by the same simplicity that recommends every other philosophical theory, and needs no evidence whatever; and I should think that a person must have very little knowledge of the nature of philosophy, who should think of having recourse to any other for the purpose.<sup>28</sup>

This argument marks, in its various appearances, a fundamental difference between Reid and Priestley. Reid fears that to give a simple answer to a simple question may be to neglect a complex problem: but, as Priestley sees it, the trouble with Reid's system is that it is 'loose and incoherent'; it lacks 'the recommendation of that agreeable simplicity, which is so apparent in other parts of the constitution of nature.'<sup>29</sup>

It seems obvious that at the back of Priestley's mind when he writes about simplicity and about its use in deciding against Berkeley's idealism is Newton's first rule: that no more causes should be admitted into our philosophy than are necessary to explain the effects. Of course, it is typical of Priestley that he should apply to metaphysics a methodological rule of empirical science; but Newton's influence ran deep and spread wide, and Reid too brings Newtonian philosophy to bear upon his metaphysics. He differs from Priestley in the use to which he puts this inheritance and, crucially, on the question of simplicity and the value of hypotheses.

Newton's bold disavowal of hypotheses - 'Hypotheses non fingo' - was frequently cited by his followers, but in fact his use of the term

was neither straightforward nor invariably condemnatory, though it gradually became more so. However, despite his own use of hypotheses (most notably in the queries appended to his Opticks), he was taken at his word and his disciples followed faithfully with similar injunctions of their own.<sup>30</sup> The danger, they believed, was that a respectable use of hypotheses - as postulates, axioms, demonstranda - might easily lead to more questionable practices. It is certainly, true, says 'sGravesande, that, when in doubt, we may entertain hypotheses, and that such hypotheses are not to be completely condemned (they may be of service in reducing to rule and order a set of complicated facts or observations), but they should never be 'of so great authority as not to be overturned by contradictory observations'.<sup>31</sup> Reid, who had been trained in natural philosophy and was well-read in Newtonian literature, was no doubt familiar with these objections. He certainly believed that the infinitely-complex handiwork of the infinite author of nature was not to be fitted into the Procrustean bed of mere mortal hypothesis. He could hardly deny the importance of simplicity, but he was inclined to think that it had been over-emphasised: 'There is a disposition in human nature to reduce things to as few principles as possible. ... This love of simplicity, and of reducing things to few principles, hath produced many a false system. ...' And of these none is simpler, he implies, and none more false, than that of the great Descartes; though even the still greater Newton, who virtuously confined himself to more modest conjectures, was 'misled by analogy and the love of simplicity.'<sup>32</sup>

But Priestley's Newtonianism was, in part at least, refracted through Hartley's prism; and Hartley, alone of our Newtonian authors, is

undeceived by the form of the queries and unambiguous in his description of their content. He talks happily of Newton's 'conjecture', of his 'hypothesis' and of what Newton 'has advanced concerning the existence of this aether, and the properties and powers he has ascribed to it in ... the Questions annexed to his Opticks. ...' Hartley's chief concern is that, since we cannot help but form hypotheses, we should do so as clearly and as openly as possible so as to avoid confusion. He is quite prepared to entertain an hypothetical entity (such as the aether) even though its existence 'be destitute of all direct evidence', providing only that it will serve to account for 'a great variety of phaenomena.'<sup>33</sup>

Clearly, neither the rule of simplicity nor a well-trained skill in hypothesising will be of much help to Priestley in his dealings with Berkeley's idealism. He believes that the supposition that the material world exists is the simplest of those available; but in his version this supposition requires three entities (God, matter and minds), whereas Berkeley needs only two (God and minds). Nor will it do to say that the realist hypothesis 'is recommended by the same simplicity that recommends every other philosophical theory' and by the fact 'that it exhibits particular appearances, as arising from general laws, which is agreeable to the analogy of everything else that we observe.' The analogy is obviously false: as Newtonian philosophers we try to explain particular appearances by general laws which may themselves be tried at the bar of empirical experience; but no law which is intended to explain all appearances can possibly have the same empirical legitimacy, since empirical experience is precisely what it purports to legitimise.

Indeed, Priestley can hardly be said to have had an open mind on the subject when he takes for granted the very dichotomy which Reid has set out to attack and which he ought therefore to be defending; he begins the 'Introductory Observations' which preface the Examination with a description of what happens when 'our minds are first exposed to the influence of external objects. ...'

The trouble appears to lie in Priestley's impatience with metaphysical argument. When he talks of simplicity and of general laws, he is speaking the language of Newtonian science, not of metaphysics. Hartley (whose interests are, quite legitimately, psychological rather than philosophical) has at least some idea of how an hypothesis is to be subjected to empirical experiment; but when Priestley talks of Berkeley's 'hypothesis' he is not talking of anything that could be experimentally investigated, though he remains unwilling to bring to bear upon the question any more appropriate criteria.

V.

This unwillingness to speak any language but that of empirical science is most apparent when Priestley turns his attention to purely logical issues. His logic, like Hume's, is associationist and psychologistic: it is a descriptive science in which the operations of the mind are explained according to the laws of association. He distinguishes, as Hume does, between the logic of reason, of necessary truths, and the logic of understanding, of causal inference, but the distinction is not for him a strong one, though he begins by talking as if it were.<sup>34</sup> He may talk about classes of truths, about 'kinds of

propositions' which, 'being very different in their natures, require very different kinds of proof'; but, in fact, it emerges that he believes that different kinds of proof make for (rather than are required by) a difference between kinds of proposition and that classes of truths are really varieties of mental association. He is quite clear as to what sort of science he takes logic to be: 'as the doctrine of syllogisms was deduced from observation on reasoning, just as other theories are deduced from facts previously known; so the doctrine of propositions and judgment was deduced from observations on the coincidence of ideas, which took place antecedent to any knowledge of that kind.' The terms of logic - 'propositions', 'syllogisms', 'truth' - 'are things of art and not of nature.'<sup>35</sup> It is not clear that Priestley intends to proceed from this to the contention that logical connections are all merely psychological. Though he is apt to bracket necessary with contingent propositions, one of his arguments against the Scottish philosophers depends upon a clear distinction between these kinds of propositions; as we have seen, he argues that if Reid is right in thinking that our ineradicable belief in an external world may be mistaken, then Beattie and Oswald must be wrong in thinking that the existence of such a world is a self-evident truth, logically undeniable and, in Priestley's words, 'independent of any arbitrary constitution whatever.'

Nonetheless, the effect of his account of the two different kinds of propositions, like that of his account of testimony, is to weaken the division between scientia and opinio. By reducing all knowledge to psychology - explicable in mechanistic, associationist terms - he frees

himself even more decisively than Hartley does from devotion to mathematics as the paradigm of certainty. Mathematics pays the penalty for this; its truths are reduced to the status of tautologies, the very fate from which Locke was anxious to save them.<sup>36</sup>

Locke, indeed, was generally less of an empiricist than Priestley in his account of the operations of the mind. Priestley thought him 'hasty' in allowing for two sources of ideas other than the sensation: understanding and volition, two 'simple Ideas of Reflection', under which are subsumed 'Remembrance, Discerning, Reasoning, Judging, Knowledge, Faith, etc.'<sup>37</sup> It is better, Priestley, thought to suppose that all apparently automatic or pathological volitions are explicable in terms of association. Fear, for example, may be explained thus, and there is no need to have recourse, as Reid does, to an instinctive principle of fear. Nor need we follow Reid in invoking such principles to explain the involuntary motions of the body; for, since acquired skills, such as that of playing a musical instrument, may be carried out automatically while we are thinking of something else, we ought on Reid's principles to attribute each of them to 'some original instinctive principle', which would be absurd. This is unfair to Reid, who, as quoted by Priestley, talks only of unconsciously or involuntarily performed acts, not of the unconscious exercise of consciously-acquired skills. Priestley, however, clearly has his mind on Newton's first rule and the principle of simplicity: 'I think it more natural to say, that the association between the ideas of certain sounds and the cause of certain motions of the fingers become in time so perfect, that the one introduced the other, without any attention; the

intervening express volitions, previous to each motion, having been gradually excluded.<sup>38</sup>

Reid's error - the error, Priestley believes, of all commonsense philosophers - is to ascribe to instinct what has been acquired by experience and to experience what belongs to reason and judgement. The source of this error is the assumption that, because we sometimes seem to infer cause from effect without the aid of any middle term, then the inference is not a logical one. But it is logical, Priestley maintains, though the middle term is so rapid in its flight that we do not notice the medium of proof that has brought us to judgement.

These two conclusions - that all inferences are logical inferences and that logic is merely the verbal description of pre-verbal or even non-verbal operations of the mind - point towards an interesting implication which he is very happy to embrace:

If a dog can form the same conclusion from the same premises, I would not scruple to say that the dog reasoned as well and as justly as myself. I see no reason to deny brute animals the power of reasoning concerning the objects about which they are conversant. They certainly act as consequentially, as if they reasoned.<sup>39</sup>

We, however, possessing brains of greater capacity than theirs, have a greater store of ideas and associations. These associations will often check or interfere with each other, bringing us to that state of suspense which children seldom and brutes almost never know and which we call 'deliberation'; that period of quiescence during which the will determines how to act. It is when our minds are in this state that we can attend to their workings, and thus it happens that we have a concept of the mind and of its operations that must be unknown to children and

animals; it is not the ability to reason that they lack but only the knowledge that they possess this ability. However, though 'every perception may be resolved into a proposition, and therefore necessarily suggests a truth', some truths are apparent only in propositional form and are not composed of raw perceptions. They can be understood only by a mind capable of abstraction and so cannot be available to children or to brutes. Propositions regarding the existence of an external world are of this kind; belief in such a world cannot be universal, as Reid and his colleagues take it to be.<sup>40</sup>

Reid maintains that, for reasons unknown, sensation compels a belief in the present existence of the apparent object of sensation, just as memory compels belief in the past existence of its objects. Sensation and memory (but not imagination) are 'original principles of belief'. Another such principle, essential to the conduct of life, appears to be that of induction: 'Antecedent to all reasoning, we have, by our constitution, an anticipation that there is a fixed and steady course of nature; and we have an eager desire to discover this course of nature.'<sup>41</sup> This is a good example of what most annoys Priestley in the commonsense philosophers' work: 'scepticism and credulity go hand in hand'; obvious truths are frivolously doubted and questions that need never have been asked are answered with a frantic multiplication of instincts and original principles:

It is really astonishing that any man should ask the question that Dr. Reid does here, 'How come we to believe that the future will be like the past?' it is certainly sufficient to say in answer to this. Have we not always found it to be so? and, therefore, how can we suspect the contrary? Though no man has had any experience of what is future, every man has had experience of what was future.<sup>42</sup>

This is not what it so blatantly looks like: an example, more ingenuous than deceitful, of those many notorious attempts to use induction to justify itself. Logic, being for Priestley a merely descriptive science, cannot be used to justify anything; nor, concerned as it is with experience, can it have any truck with the future. To ask rhetorically, as Priestley does, how we can suspect that the future will not be like the past is to suggest both that such doubts are logically inappropriate and (what for him amounts to the same thing) that we are not really capable of harbouring them. How, indeed, could we be capable of harbouring them when induction - repeated sensations generating simple ideas, simple ideas coalescing into associations - is perhaps the most basic of our mental processes? What Priestley is saying, then, is that induction is an ineradicable principle of the human mind. This is, of course, just what he criticises Reid for saying.

## VI.

So Priestley's battle against Reid, Beattie and Oswald may be seen as a defence of objectivity and of a psychologistic logic against the fideists of the North. Reid is, of course, the opponent who most engages him philosophically; in dealing with the other two he is concerned, as he sees it, less with philosophical error, more with political bigotry (and the ratio of argument to exasperation drops accordingly; indeed, when he turns to Oswald he finds himself able to do little more than quote at length and then gasp with disbelief at what he has quoted). Consequently, his treatment of these two most clearly reveals his concern with issues of legitimation. It is Beattie and

Oswald, not the more capable Reid, who remind him that theological difficulties may beget metaphysical doctrines and that these metaphysical doctrines may have immediate political implications. Here Oswald, normally reckoned (and rightly) inferior even to Beattie in his philosophical abilities, emerges as the most significant figure of the three. His very flounderings bear eloquent testimony to a deep unease, even if he is unable quite to put his finger on what has gone wrong.

Oswald does try his hand at diagnosis, and his attempts all centre on the claim that reasoning has usurped the place of reason:

Ask the learned how we come to the knowledge of realities which are not the objects of sense, and all with one voice declare - by reason. If by reason they mean that faculty in man whereby he is distinguished from a brute or an idiot, they say well: but if by reason they mean, as they commonly do, the skill of investigating unknown truths by truths more known, which in the schools is termed logic, and in common conversation is called reasoning, they are much mistaken.<sup>43</sup>

According to Oswald, the human mind possesses three great faculties - perception, judgement and reasoning - and, though the first two are, within their proper spheres, almost infallible, we have allowed reasoning, and that alone, to get above itself: 'too much can hardly be said to persuade mankind to put less confidence in the faculty of reasoning, and more in the faculty of judgment, than they commonly do.'<sup>44</sup>

Oswald is never explicit as to what he means by 'reason' or by 'primary truths', though it is clear from his account that reason is the faculty by which primary truths are known and that primary truths are those truths which are known by reason.<sup>45</sup> We are, however, furnished with a list of some of them: 'The being of matter, the connection between cause and effect, the power of self-determination in animals,

the moral perfections and being of God, with the essential difference between virtue and vice. ...' This is a somewhat promiscuous catalogue for a man who is so stern about 'licentiousness in reasoning', and the truths listed in it appear to be simply those which Oswald happens to hold to be self-evident.<sup>46</sup> But they have, it seems, been drawn together thanks largely to Locke's mistaken zeal. Locke has tried to reconstruct them on a scaffolding of abstraction grounded in empirical foundations, 'and such knowledge must needs be precarious.'<sup>47</sup> It is precarious because Locke, by laying so much weight on those truths which may be discovered empirically, has encouraged scepticism with regard to those which cannot be discovered in this way. But it is man's ability to learn such truths that separates him from the animals. In ignoring it, philosophers have depicted man as an ingenious half-breed in whom are combined the sensory apparatus of the lower animals and a certain talent for ratiocination.<sup>48</sup> Hume - improving on Locke and seeking to explain the operations of the mind 'by the received doctrines of the connection and association of ideas' - has gone farther than anyone else in this regard, but he has ignored that 'vast treasury of truths' to which animals have no access: truths of art and science, of religion and morality, of politics, commerce and agriculture, which neither carrot nor stick will din into the animal mind.<sup>49</sup>

In all these errors of philosophy Oswald sees the effects of a very general bad habit: that of neglecting immediate truths and running after the more remote. Even the ancient philosophers were guilty of it: though all the phenomena of nature bear witness to the being of God, though there can be no serious doubt of this great truth, they would

insist on logical demonstration, and when reasoning failed them they fell into confusion and doubt. The incarnation of the Son of God ought to have ended all this perplexity, but it did not ('alas! the folly of the human heart broke out anew'), for now fresh disputes arose, the devotees of different 'incomprehensible doctrines' pronounced anathemas on each other, and, at last, as learning declined, all fell 'under the direction of crafty priests and interested statesmen. ...'<sup>50</sup>

The question of the burden of proof - where it lies and how it is to be discharged - is one that naturally recurs at times when legitimation is at issue. It troubles Priestley as much as it troubles the Scottish philosophers; his condemnation of their demand for 'plenary assurance', for more proof than the nature of the subject will allow, is not far removed from what Oswald has to say about the perennial folly of the human heart. Oswald's trouble, though, is that he is quite incapable of focussing his complaints. By fingering almost all the human race through almost all its history as the victims of a foolish lust for ratiocination, he leaves the reader in some doubt as to how anything can be called 'common sense' which is apparently so uncommon. He is better when he brings the story nearer to his own times. At the Reformation, he explains, half the Christian world, by reading the sacred books and appealing to them ('not reasoning from them,' Priestley notes drily), were persuaded to shake off 'the dominion of ignorance and error'. Unfortunately there now arose a new spirit of contrariety amongst the fledgling Protestants, their minds 'much exercised in subtile and hot disputes with the Romish doctors'; for, having split from Rome, they now split from one another, each sect defending its

creed with as much subtilty as had before been used against the Pope. And now arose the swarm of sceptics and atheists, who, claiming the same right as everybody else 'to sound unfathomable depths', argued against religion as subtly as the religious had argued against each other. The disputatious friends of religion leapt to the defence of their beliefs, little realising, confident of victory as they were, that it would be much better for them not to give legitimacy to a debate they could never win.<sup>51</sup>

Here, and in his refusal to countenance any proof of the existence of God, Oswald reads like one of those Pyrrhonian sceptics who used doubt as a weapon in defence of the Christian faith.<sup>52</sup> No purported proof of God's existence, he maintains, can withstand rigorous examination, nor could any proof, no matter how perfect, induce a belief in that existence stronger than the conviction that common sense alone can provide.<sup>53</sup> Yet he finds that even ministers of religion, 'forgetting the dignity of their character', have condescended to argue the case like lawyers in court: 'May not this be called, with great propriety a throwing cold water on religion? and ought it not to be considered as one of the chief causes of that insensibility to all its concerns, of which we so frequently complain?'<sup>54</sup> He has, of course, identified a genuine problem. The situation he describes - in which, as he says, scepticism is the reigning folly of the age just as formerly it was credulity - is exactly that which had earlier been brought about by the attempts to refute deism. He appears even to have understood that the choice now lay between embracing controversy as a way of life or finding an authority that could forever put an end to controversy. The

former choice (which, of course, was Priestley's) was unacceptable to him: in our present plight, he explains, candour will avail us little; not only is it seldom in evidence but it is quite useless in bringing a conclusion to disputes about religion. Instead, what is needed is authority, not the authority of the state ('for that is improper and dangerous') but that of the mind and its faculty of common sense.<sup>55</sup>

How, then, is common sense to prove its credentials? Here all the Scottish philosophers proceed along the same path, though with different degrees of agility. In the absence of any over-arching criterion by which the discoveries of common sense may be compared with those of reasoning or of received philosophy, it is necessary to show that we possess certain concepts which neither correspond to sensory impressions nor can have been deduced from them. If these concepts are indispensable to our understanding of the world, then they can be admitted as witnesses friendly to common sense. Thus Oswald remarks that we have a concept of something underlying those qualities which the senses reveal to us: we have not only perceptions of hardness, of coldness, and so on, but also ideas of things which are hard, things which are cold, and these ideas cannot be derived from the senses. Nor can the senses alone have taught us how to determine that one thing is bigger than another, for difference in size is no more an object of sense than are cause and effect, energy and power.<sup>56</sup>

There are passages similar to these of Oswald's in Beattie as well as in Reid, and they are not alone in their concern. In fact, to Priestley they sounded so like his friend Richard Price that he was surprised (or said he was surprised) that none of them should have

acknowledged a debt.<sup>57</sup> Like the Scottish philosophers, Price wants to demonstrate that our moral and intellectual intuitions are rational and objective, not merely the products of sentiment. Like them, he argues that sensation alone can give us no idea of substance, that only the understanding can reveal to us a distinction between the externals which are the objects of sense and the substance to which they adhere. Similarly he argues that our idea of solidity cannot derive from sensation, since included within it (and essential to it) is the idea of impenetrability, something of which we can have no actual experience. Other ideas too - those of inertial force, of duration, space, infinity, power and causation - can be seen to be the products of understanding, not of sense. In fact, the very business of comparing two ideas, which Locke takes to be the understanding's only function, involves the derivation of a new idea that cannot have come from the senses: to compare two angles and perceive their agreement is to become possessed of 'a new simple idea', that of their equality, which derives wholly from the understanding and is quite different from the idea of the two angles compared.<sup>58</sup> Sensory perception cannot give us such new ideas because sense 'lies prostrate under its object'; it is a wholly passive faculty, ignorant of what affects it, incapable of judgement or knowledge. In fact, all that it can give us are particular impressions, not general ideas. It is entirely different from the understanding.<sup>59</sup>

The same concern, though more eccentrically expressed, is apparent in another work whose unacknowledged influence Priestley thought he could detect in the commonsense philosophy: Hermes: or a Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Language and Universal Grammar by James Harris. Here

again - in a book which combines some quite sophisticated concepts with rudimentary argument and crude analysis - we find a writer concerned to ground ideas in something more objective than sensation. Harris tries to upend the empiricist axiom that there can be nothing in the mind that was not first in the senses. The mind, he insists, is not a cistern passively receiving ideas; on the contrary, ideas are so numberless and transient that the mind can do nothing with them until it has held them and fixed them. This task falls to one of its most important faculties, 'IMAGINATION or FANCY'.<sup>60</sup> Once the imagination - a cool air hardening the impression on the wax - has done its work, the collective and connective powers of the soul are able to do theirs, and what they do cannot be done by any of the five senses. Which of the five could perceive, say, 'the Union of the Odour and the Figure'? Plainly, this could be done only by some faculty more exalted in the hierarchy of powers than any of them. The fact is that the senses cannot yield real knowledge: 'SCIENCE and REAL KNOWLEDGE' can only be 'of that which is general and definite and fixed'. We do not proceed, as the empiricists suppose, from particulars to generalities, from sense to abstraction; forms intelligible are prior to forms sensible, declares Harris (running his Platonist colours up the mast), and particulars cannot be known until they are subsumed under general categories like 'man' or 'animal'.<sup>61</sup> For thought, like language, must be conversant with the general and the eternal before it descends to 'that infinitude of Particulars, which are for ever arising, and ceasing to be.'<sup>62</sup>

In their various ways, and with very different degrees of success, all these writers reveal a concern with the central flaw in Locke's

scheme: that, however refined and improved, it will not do what Hartley and Priestley want it to do: it will not give us a machine so fashioned that we can feed in mere sensations at one end and expect to get out at the other a sophisticated product that compares ideas, thinks new thoughts and harbours passions, desires and aversions. Unfortunately, though, the critic can offer little to anyone whose heart is set on such a machine. The blueprints are so impressive - so svelte and elegant, assuming neither innate ideas nor a teleological concept of reason - that any alternative is likely to seem a shoddy piece of wishful thinking. Oswald, it is true, tries to make his appeal to common sense look like an appeal to empiricism: a call to moralists and theologians to follow the physicians and the natural philosophers in giving up reasonings, hypotheses and general principles in favour of patient observation. He insists, moreover, and with some force, that he is talking about knowledge and not about mere feelings.<sup>63</sup> But to someone as devoted to objectivity as Priestley is, feelings are exactly what Oswald appears to be talking about. All might have been well, Priestley suggests, if the Scottish philosophers had assumed as elements of common sense only indubitable, self-evident propositions, the axioms from which all thought must proceed (he appears not to distinguish between the axiomatic and the self-evident); but they have gone farther than this: they have called 'sense' what has always been called 'judgement'; they have sought to introduce particular propositions as axioms, and this not on Lockean grounds of the agreement of ideas but merely because of 'some unaccountable instinctive persuasions, depending on the arbitrary constitution of our nature, which makes all truth to be a thing that is relative, to ourselves only, and consequently to be infinitely vague and

precarious.' Thus truth, once independent and absolute, acquires inverted commas. No longer can there be any appeal to reason, only to the feeling that something is true and incontrovertible. Conceit and arrogance will reign under the suzerainty of prejudice. Discussion will be ended and opponents treated insolently, as persons of no common sense.<sup>64</sup>

In fact, this reliance upon the merely subjective will be no less pronounced even if the writ of common sense is allowed to run no further than first principles: 'who is to tell us what are first principles?' asks Priestley, fearing, as an associationist, that too often first principles turn out to be habits of belief early acquired.<sup>65</sup> The Papist, he notes, supposes implicit faith in the church to be as much a first principle as faith in God, and it is a principle that acts upon his deluded mind as irresistibly as any of Beattie's or Oswald's do upon theirs'. (Frequently throughout the Examination Priestley finds that Rome provides him with an absurdity at which his reductio can be aimed; if commonsense philosophy can justify the excesses of the Harlot, then, we are encouraged to infer, that philosophy must be objectionable indeed.) While there is nothing particularly Protestant about this - Catholics as well as Protestants are called upon to submit to God's will - there are clear parallels between the dangers of this philosophy, as Priestley saw them, and those of the Calvinism he had abandoned. For the Calvinist everything that matters in human life depends upon a faculty, grace, with which very few are born and which cannot be acquired or even refined by human effort. Grace and common sense both leave the word of God in a somewhat marginal position. On the one hand,

if grace and grace alone is necessary for salvation, neither God nor anyone else can tell us anything pertinent to the case. On the other hand, if all our moral obligations are, as Oswald says, 'objects of simple perception and judgment to men of sense', it is again difficult to see what room there can be left for God's word.<sup>66</sup>

Now, common sense is by definition and (unlike grace), the inheritance of the great majority of mankind; but the appeal to common sense, as Priestley sees it, is similar to the appeal to grace in that it puts an end to all argument and to all striving. The cause of truth is ill-served by such resignation: it would be better served by 'a persuasion the very reverse of Dr. Beattie's, viz. that the faculty by which we perceive truth is the furthest possible from any thing that resembles a sense: that every misfortune we do, or may labour under, with respect to judgment is naturally remediable, and consequently that it depends upon ourselves, as far as any thing of practical importance is concerned, to be as wise, judicious, and knowing, as any other person whatsoever.' This tendency of both Beattie and Oswald to abjure all rational argument in religion seems to open the way 'for all the extravagances of credulity, enthusiasm, and mysticism'; and where Priestley finds these he seldom fails to find a spirit of persecution too:

... I am afraid we shall find these new principles extending their authority farther than the precincts of metaphysics, morals, religion, christianity, and protestantism, to which they have hitherto been confined. Papists may begin to avail themselves of them for the support of all those doctrines and maxims for which the powers of reason had proved insufficient; and politicians also, possessing themselves of this advantage, may venture once more to thunder out upon us their exploded doctrines of passive obedience and non-resistance. For having now nothing to fear from the powers of reason, and being encouraged by the example of grave divines and metaphysicians, they may venture to assert their

favourite maxims with the greatest confidence; appealing at once to this ultimate tribunal of common sense, and giving out their own mandates as the decisions this new tribunal.<sup>67</sup>

In other words, the spread of controversy throughout the intellectual world is not what Oswald takes it to be, a regrettable epiphenomenon of the Reformation, but rather the Reformation's greatest gift to humankind. Now nothing can be admitted as true but what is proved by sound reason. This was an issue that touched Priestley deeply; he was, he said - thinking perhaps of the Church under whose civil establishment he laboured or of the arbitrarily sovereign God who had so darkened his childhood - 'no friend to implicit faith, because, perhaps, it has been no friend to me. ...'<sup>68</sup>

## VII.

For all that Priestley writes sometimes as though he were prepared to admit certain general propositions as self-evident and indubitable, it is clear that for him no propositions are really to be allowed this privilege. Nor is there any reason why they should be if logic is merely a description of the operations of the mind. Moreover, it is possible to look upon matter itself in the same egalitarian light, and, once Priestley had realised this, he was off on the road to materialism.

Since the publication of Locke's Essay, the philosophical world had been haunted by his suggestion that, for all we know to the contrary, God might have given to matter the faculty of thought. It seemed to many to bring with it intimations of deism, of pantheism, even of atheism, and it was to be handled only with caution.<sup>69</sup> But caution was never prominent among Priestley's intellectual virtues and he rather

casually pulls out this dangerous weapon in the course of his quarrel with Reid. The provocation is Reid's sly version of that argument which all three Scottish philosophers, as well as Richard Price and James Harris, use against Locke's empiricism. Reid points out that we usually suppose our sensations to be given to us by the qualities of material bodies. But, though we have sensations of size, of shape, of motion and of other qualities, we have no sensations of the bodies in which these qualities are said to inhere. Nevertheless, we certainly have an idea of these bodies, and so the 'ideal' philosophy of Locke, Berkeley and Hume is faced with a dilemma ('an experimentum crucis, by which the ideal system must stand or fall'): either our ideas of extension, shape and motion have been derived from sensation or they have not. If they have not, then the ideal philosophy must fall because its dearest tenet is that all our ideas of the external world derive from sensation. If, however, these ideas have been derived from sensation, then the ideal philosophy stands and its claim that the 'material world, if any such there be, must be the express image of our sensations' is upheld. But the cost will have been high, for we are now back where Berkeley left us: with nothing to depend on but our sensations and with no way of knowing whether there is anything to which these sensations correspond.<sup>70</sup>

Priestley is not at all perplexed. He suggests that Reid has been 'misled in the very foundation' of his argument by the philosopher's habit of referring to ideas as the images of external things. Such language, he explains patiently, is merely figurative; it means not that actual shapes of things are impressed on the mind but that the brain

receives sense impressions 'and that between these impressions and the sensations existing in the mind there is a real and necessary though at present an unknown connection.' Of course, Priestley - eager for physical rather than metaphysical argument - has missed Reid's point. The distinction which he makes between impressions (the effects of the external world on the organs of sense) and sensations (the effects of these impressions <sup>on</sup> ~~of~~ the brain) is the very one that Reid will not allow, and cannot allow because he is questioning its validity. Priestley, to whom the distinction is fundamental, can only assume that Reid has made a silly mistake; if Reid can believe that mental images of things must resemble the things themselves, then he might as well deny 'that the sound of a musical string is caused by the stroke of a plectrum ... because he can perceive no proper resemblance between the cause and the effect, between the sound that is produced and the shape of the thing or things by which the sounds are made. ...' Yet it is clear, Priestley contends, that the sound is a necessary and not an arbitrary sign of the stroke of the plectrum, clear too that such sounds vary as the bodies which produce them vary.<sup>71</sup>

Now, the materialists of more recent times - those who contend that mind and brain are one and the same thing - have used an argument similar to this but different in one single important respect. Thus Paul K. Feyerabend asks:

Is not the seen table very different from the felt table? Is not the heard sound very different from its mechanical manifestations (Chladni's figures; Kundt's tube; etc., etc.,)? And if despite this difference of appearance we are allowed to make an identification, postulating an object in the outer world (the physical table, the physical sound), then why should the observed difference between a thought and the impression of a brain process prevent us from making another identification, postulating this

time an object in the inner (material) world, viz. a brain process?<sup>72</sup>

But Priestley, unlike Feyerabend is not seeking to establish the identity of two sets of phenomena, auditory and physical, mental and material; he is suggesting merely that one such set is the cause of another. This cause must operate somewhere, and so Priestley has decided that it must operate in the mind; mysteriously if the mind is spiritual, explicably if, 'as Locke and others suppose', matter is imbued with sentient power.<sup>73</sup> Refusing to allow that mental images must resemble their objects, he has avoided what the modern materialist U.T. Place calls the 'phenomenological fallacy'; refusing to identify sensations and brain processes, he has fallen into something very like it. According to Place this fallacy 'is the mistake of supposing that when the subject describes his experience, when he describes how things look, sound, smell, taste, or feel to him, he is describing the literal properties of objects and events on a peculiar sort of internal cinema or television screen. ...'<sup>74</sup> This Priestley is not doing, but he is making just that assumption which Place takes to be the basis of the phenomenological fallacy: the mistaken assumption that because things are known to us only by the physical sensations that they produce in us, the we must always begin with these physical sensations and infer from them the real properties of things. Rather, Place argues, it is only when we have learned to recognise the real properties of things that we can learn to describe our consciousness of them. This is, of course, very like what Reid says.

In Priestley's account, our growth to full consciousness is indeed an education in the making of inferences. We are told that the child

begins life without any notion of a difference between the external world 'and the immediate objects of his contemplation', that only by attending to the phenomena of sensation does he come to learn that it is not things themselves but only 'some affection of his senses, occasioned by them' that are really these immediate objects .<sup>75</sup> Believing this - taking it, indeed, not merely for truth but for truth universally acknowledged - Priestley is much puzzled by Reid's scepticism on the matter. 'It is very probable,' says Reid, 'that the optic nerve is an instrument of vision. ...'; to which Priestley replies that, if we can be so cautious about such a thing as this, then we might just as well say that feet and legs are only very probably the instruments of walking.<sup>76</sup> But Reid's meaning is quite clear and it is neither perverse nor paradoxical, as we find if we turn to the rest of the passage from which Priestley quotes. Reid is alluding to the received doctrine that impressions are made by rays of light on the retina and carried thence by the optic nerve 'to some part of the brain ..., called the sensorium' (eighteenth-century equivalent to the internal cinema of which Place speaks), where the mind, 'which is supposed to reside there', perceives them. He points out that optical investigation has carried us as far as the retina - we know that without a retina there can be no vision - and that it can carry no further: we can assume that the optic nerve is an instrument of vision, that it receives some sort of impression from the picture on the retina, but we can know nothing of what this impression is. We can, however, say that it is not in the least probable that the mind perceives the images on the retina, nor is it in the least probable that there is an image in either the optic nerve or the brain; the image on the retina is formed by rays of light, and whatever impulse might be

conveyed thence cannot, whether it be the motion of a subtle fluid or the vibration of the optic nerve's fibres, resemble the object which is before the perceiving mind. Furthermore, it is no easier to understand how the mind could perceive images in the brain than to understand how it can perceive objects in the external world: 'In a word, the manner and mechanism of the mind's perception is quite beyond our comprehension. ...' Such are Priestley's preconceptions that, though he quotes much of this argument, he completely fails to see the point of it. He is quite devoted to that analogy between the behaviour of bodies and the behaviour of minds which Reid recognises as the false and treacherous foundation upon which the theory of ideas has been built.<sup>77</sup>

The gist of Reid's argument is that to postulate a sensorium is to explain nothing, that it is merely to remove the problem to a point further within the skull. Priestley, who seems to take the sensorium's existence for granted, concentrates almost entirely on what Reid has to say about the optic nerve. Satisfied that eye, retina and optic nerve are necessary for vision because there can be no vision without them, satisfied also that the brain must be necessary for perception because disturbance of the brain causes disturbance of perception, he is satisfied that these conclusions are not made less certain by our inability to say exactly how the brain serves as instrument of perception.<sup>78</sup>

Later on in the Examinations, in the appendix devoted to Harris' Hermes, Priestley provides a summary of the position to which his defence of the theory of ideas has brought him:

nothing is more evident, than that the principle which we call mind, whether it be material or immaterial, is of such a nature,

that it can be affected by external objects, and that its perceptions correspond to the state of the corporeal system, especially that of the brain. And there is the same reason to conclude that this affection is natural and necessary, as that the sound of a musical chord is the natural and necessary effect of the stroke of a plectrum. If my eye be open, and a house be before me, I as necessarily perceive the idea of a house; or if fire be applied to any part of my body, I as necessarily perceive the sensation of burning, as sound follows the stroke above mentioned. If a due attention to these facts obliges to alter our notions of mind, and materialism, the received rules of philosophising compel us to do it. ...

It was in this passage that a contemporary commentator found the first intimations of materialism in Priestley's thought.<sup>79</sup> But here Priestley's materialism is encumbered, as it always would be, by his firm belief in the sensorium. Perceptions are said to 'correspond to the state of the corporeal system' - they are not identified with any such state - and, though the relation between brain-processes and perceptions may be one of cause and effect, it cannot be one of identity. We are said to perceive not the house but 'the idea of a house'. And we do not have ideas: we perceive them. It is obvious from this that perception is going to remain in Priestley's account a mysterious business and that structure alone is not going to be enough for his purposes. He needs to invoke a power of perception, and he is persuaded that this power will somehow be less occult if it is said to reside in matter rather than in spirit. Hence his enthusiasm for Locke's suggestion (an enthusiasm very clearly misplaced: Locke - who is concerned with epistemology, not with a theory of matter - says merely that, for all we know, God may have added to matter the power of thought).<sup>80</sup>

There is nothing anachronistic in criticising Priestley for his belief in the sensorium: it may not have been a universal belief in his

time, but it was certainly one which his contemporaries found it very difficult to escape. For example, we meet it in the Baron d'Holbach's System de la Nature, an essay in materialism too secular for Priestley's tastes (it was, he said, 'considered by many persons as a kind of bible of atheism'<sup>81</sup>). d'Holbach deals with the five senses one by one, and each receives the same treatment: first a bodily process is described; then it is explained that this process causes perceptions in the brain and that from these perceptions the brain breeds ideas; finally, we are told that 'this' (presumably the entire process) constitutes, forms, causes, or may explain (the word differs from case to case) the sense in question. Thought, d'Holbach concludes, 'is nothing more than the perception of certain modifications which the brain either gives itself, or has received from exterior objects.'<sup>82</sup> This assumption, that thought is not a process in the brain but the perception of such a process, takes its rise, perhaps, from some residual dualism too deep-rooted to be cast off or even noticed. It may also derive from Locke's pervasive influence; certainly Hobbes, writing before Locke, has few difficulties of this sort and is therefore able to wield an altogether more robust materialism. Without equivocation or hesitation he can explain that sense 'is some internal motion in the sentient', that is is, by formal definition, 'a phantasm, made by the reaction and endeavour inwards from the object, remaining for the same time more or less.'<sup>83</sup> Sense, we note, is the phantasm - it is not the cause of the phantasm or the act of perceiving it - and the phantasm is solely a matter of mechanics. This mechanics, a simple business of push and pull, is cruder than the physiology of vibrations, but it plays its part in an account of

perception that is both more clear than Priestley's and in some measure more sophisticated.

Priestley returned to the subject in 1775, the year after the Examination. Convinced that to know Hartley was to agree with him, he had decided that the best way to 'divert the attention of the more sensible part of the public from such an incoherent scheme as that of Dr. Reid, and to establish the true science of human nature,' would be to make Hartley's work better known.<sup>84</sup> Accordingly, he published his own edition of the Observations on Man and with it three prefatory essays in which the editor told the reader unequivocally what he was 'rather inclined to think' about the relation between matter and mind.

The Hartley who appears in Priestley's edition is slimmer than the original, less cosmic in his interests, more concentrated on the single issue of the mechanism of the human mind. Persuaded that only the doctrine of vibrations has given rise to the rumour that Hartley's system is 'difficult and intricate', Priestley has dispensed with the doctrine. But, though convinced, and rightly, that vibrations are not logically essential to associationism, he is sufficiently attached to them himself to discuss them at length in the first of his three essays. This begins as an exercise in Lockean orthodoxy: the mind, we learn (or rather we do not learn, since it is all so familiar), contains ideas and sensations which can have come only from the external world and so must have been conveyed thence to the mind by the external sensory nerves. But the nerves and the brain are material things, while the mind, ex hypothesi, is not, so Priestley is faced with a problem. He seems willing to allow that, ignorant though we are and must probably remain

about the nature of the mind, we may satisfy the demands of science if we are able to indicate 'a probable affection of the brain' which will correspond to the sensations and ideas of which we are conscious. (He always assumes, of course, not that we have sensations and ideas but that we are conscious of them; so consciousness itself remains unexplained.) Even this, he confesses, is to make everything except perception depend upon matter; and matter can take on even this last function if Locke was right and God has endowed it with the power of thought. So it is that Priestley now feels able to say that he is 'rather inclined to think' that man does not consist of two principle so different from each other as matter and spirit, that perception and the other mental powers are the products '(whether necessary or not) of such an organical structure as that of the brain', and that to have recourse to one immaterial principle of explanation is merely to confess our ignorance.<sup>85</sup>

It was this passage that Priestley, enlarging on the theme two years later in his Disquisitions Concerning Matter and Spirit, saw as marking a decisive stage in his conversion to materialism. He became convinced by it that, 'if we suffer ourselves to be guided by the universally acknowledged rules of philosophizing', we will find ourselves obliged to postulate in man nothing but a material body.<sup>86</sup> Of course, he still would not equate perception with processes in the brain, and in this new work he put the issue very succinctly: 'It is a very gross mistake of the system of materialism to suppose ... that the vibrations of the brain are themselves the perceptions.' He points out that we can easily conceive of vibrations unaccompanied by perceptions,

and so - ignoring the possibility that all perceptions may be vibrations even though not all vibrations are perceptions - he concludes that, since the two cannot be identical, we must suppose that the brain has not merely a vibrating power but 'has superadded to it a percipient or sentient power, like wise; there being no reason that we know why this power may not be imparted to it.'<sup>87</sup>

As Priestley admits, he has 'the universally acknowledged rules of philosophizing' to thank for these conclusions. But his use of them is contentious. Hitherto, he says, they have been used as guides only in the investigation of 'the causes of particular appearances in nature'; in the investigations of 'the most general and comprehensive principles of human knowledge', they have been disregarded and often, indeed, contradicted. This seems strangely inconsistent to Priestley. For his part, he says, he will adhere to the Regulae rigorously and uniformly in all his investigations, and he requires that his reasoning be tried by no laws but these.<sup>88</sup> But it is by no means clear that so generous an employment of these rules was what their author intended. To each of them Newton appends a gloss which serves to establish their jurisdiction quite precisely. Thus the second rule - which, following from the first, enjoins us to assign, 'as far as possible', the same causes 'to the same natural effects' - is illustrated by a number of examples carefully chosen: 'respiration in a man and in a beast; the descent of stones in Europe and in America; the light of our culinary fire and of the sun; the reflection of light in the earth, and in the planets.'<sup>89</sup> This is particularly important in view of the uses to which Priestley puts the second rule. For example, he argues that since resistance has

been shown in most cases to result from a power of repulsion, and in no case from anything else, the 'rules of philosophizing oblige us to suppose, that the cause of all resistance is repulsive power. ...' But it is surely stretching a point to suggest that the resistance of one magnet to another and the resistance to pressure of a solid object are the same effects in exactly the same way that the falling of a stone is the same effect in Europe as in America.<sup>90</sup>

But though the Principia gives no warrant for a use of the Regulae as wide as this, it is difficult to see how Priestley could have behaved otherwise. Entrapped, like 'sGravesande, within his Lockean ego, he nonetheless believes that testimony and the senses will furnish him with information as reliable and as useful as he needs about the outside world. Such information can, of course, be information about appearances only - we can know properties but not the substance that underlies them, we can know the laws of nature but not whether these laws are essential or are imposed by God - and, this being so, we naturally need principles of parsimony that will discipline our scientific ingenuity. The Regulae, extended by Priestley to realms where they have not before held sway, provide these principles.

As reported by Priestley, the conventional view of matter and spirit makes of them entities so different from each other that there can be no interaction between them. Matter has properties but no powers; it has length, breadth, thickness, and impenetrability, but it is inert and sluggish, incapable of moving itself. Spirit, on the other hand, has none of the properties of matter: it is quite without extension or indeed any relation at all<sup>to</sup>/<sub>^</sub>space, but it is capable of

self-motion and it possesses powers of intelligence and perception. Such a concept of spirit, Priestley believes, could be the product only of an abstruse and mistaken metaphysics. The truth, to which mature consideration guided by the rules of philosophising will lead us, is otherwise. It will be agreed that every material object, solid and impenetrable as they all appear to be, must be of some shape or other. It will be further agreed that no such body could keep its shape unless there was some mutual attraction between its component parts, some power keeping them either contiguous to or at a certain distance from each other. This power of attraction, then, is 'essential to the actual existence of all matter. ...' Without it, no body would be compact and impenetrable, even if its component parts were placed close together. In fact, as Priestley argues, with copious scientific illustration, it is very difficult to bring bodies into contact with each other, and this leads him to conclude that, just as bodies are given coherence by the mutual attraction of their parts, so they are given impenetrability by the repulsion of their parts.<sup>91</sup> If, then, it is difficult to bring bodies into even apparent contact with each other, and if neither they nor their component parts can be shown ever to be in actual contact, and if these phenomena can be ascribed only to a power of repulsion, then 'the established rules of philosophizing above recited' leave us with no alternative: we are obliged to ascribe all resistance, all solidity and all impenetrability to such powers.

Whence come these powers? If we argue that they come from God, we will be forced to conclude that there is in the universe no matter distinct from God and his powers. 'A strange opinion,' comments

Priestley, who believes that 'it is certainly more agreeable to the rules of philosophizing to consider all the constant effects of any substance as produced by powers properly belonging to that substance, whether they be necessarily inherent in it, or communicated to it.

...<sup>92</sup> But if we should consider as essential to matter those powers which it displays, we should also be careful that we attribute to it only those properties which appearances reveal it to possess. Applying this rule, we find that we can attribute to matter only powers of attraction and repulsion arranged in concentric spheres:

The principles of the Newtonian philosophy were no sooner known, than it was seen how few, in comparison, of the phenomena of nature, were owing to solid matter, and how much to powers, which were only supposed to accompany and surround the solid parts of matter. It has been asserted, and the assertion has never been disproved, that for any thing we know to the contrary, all the solid matter in the solar system might be contained within a nutshell, there is so great a proportion of void space within the most solid bodies. Now when solidity had apparently so very little to do in the system, it is really a wonder that it did not occur to philosophers sooner, that perhaps there might be nothing for it to do at all, and that there might be no such a thing in nature.<sup>93</sup>

This opinion, Priestley adds, is not his alone. He cites a long passage from his History of Vision in which he had referred to the theories of John Michell and of Roger Joseph Boscovich, who regarded atoms as geometrical points, having no ~~position~~<sup>magnitude</sup> but only ~~magnitude~~<sup>position</sup> and surrounded by alternating spheres of attraction and repulsion. No doubt he intended with these references to divest his doctrine of a little of its aura of novelty and eccentricity. The Abbé Boscovich, however, a pious Jesuit, was much put out to find his work used as a prop for the 'abominable, detestable, and impious' system of materialism. His remonstrances, addressed to Lord Shelburne, provoked a reply in which

Priestley explained that materialism was the only doctrine 'consonant to the genuine system of revelation' and that the 'vulgar hypothesis' was the foundation of the worst corruptions of Christianity and especially those of the antichristian and abominable Church of Rome. 'I am,' he said in conclusion, 'not without respect, but with much less than formerly. ...' This does not appear to have smoothed things over.<sup>94</sup>

The unmannerly tone of Priestley's reply to Boscovich indicates in some measure where his real interests lie and why his Disquisitions are so different to Boscovich's Theoria. Whereas Boscovich argues with subtlety and thoroughness towards a comprehensive physical law which he then proceeds to apply to mechanics and to physics (respectfully relegating God and the soul to an appendix), Priestley takes just twenty-three pages to overthrow, to his own satisfaction, the whole established concept of matter. None of his arguments is mathematical; little in them depends upon the findings of the natural sciences. He knows what he wants - not just a theory of matter but a theory of matter which will allow for a material mind - and he believes that now he has it. For, he argues, if matter alone is capable of supporting all known human properties, then to suppose a mind that is anything but material is to multiply causes without necessity in contravention of the Regulae. The known properties of matter are, he says, attraction, repulsion and extension. Mind possesses all these and two others: perception and thought. These, however, are 'never found but in conjunction with a certain organized system of matter. ...', and so we can conclude (the implicit reference here must be to the first rule) that they 'necessarily exist in, and depend upon, such a system.'<sup>95</sup> Priestley

needs only to show that matter may possess what he calls 'the power of simple perception' (which, very significantly, he defines as 'our consciousness of the presence and effect of sensations and ideas'). Given this power, all the other faculties of the mind 'will admit of a satisfactory illustration on the principles of vibration, which is an affection of a material substance.' Thus he will not brook any objection to his theory based upon some notion of the subtlety or complexity of thought as opposed to the simplicity of matter; by explaining how complexity may arise out of simplicity, associationist psychology has already answered these objections.<sup>96</sup>

From all this, we must, he believes, conclude that mind and brain are one and the same thing and that God and his universe are not at all what they have hitherto been taken for. The divine nature, it is true, is quite unlike the human, so man's materiality need not be taken to imply God's; but it cannot be allowed that God is immaterial if by that is meant what modern metaphysicians usually mean by it: that he has no property whatever in common with matter and bears no relation to space. Such a God would be debarred by definition from all communication with the world he had created. We may, indeed, say that God is immaterial in that he has powers and properties different from those of created matter; but may not the new concept of matter - as something from which 'as we may say, the reproach of matter is wiped off' - allow us to consider even the supreme being as material?<sup>97</sup>

## VIII.

This was an invitation that few were disposed to accept: the earliest critics of Priestley's materialism were hostile and not many of them brought a sympathetic understanding to their subject. Some thought that his opinions gave aid and comfort to atheism, and one anonymous author went so far as to say that they would encourage libertines to assault the wives and daughters of their neighbours.<sup>98</sup> Even a friendly commentator was disturbed to see the 'swarm of atheistic libertines' taking up Priestley's doctrines for their own licentious purposes. The 'hacknied cant of vulgar infidelity, prefaced with the name of a Mandeville or a Toland, ... lost nothing of its futility from such wretched authorities,' wrote Samuel Badcock. 'But when the name of Dr. Priestley was introduced to give it credit, that which was ridiculous by itself became serious from its connexion.'<sup>99</sup> It is curious that Badcock, writing in 1780, should have had to take his search for emblematic infidels back as far as Bernard Mandeville, who had died in 1733, and John Toland, who had died eleven years before that. In any case, Mandeville must be here merely to make up the numbers; he was supposed to be the enemy of virtue but he was not known to be a friend of materialism. John Toland, on the other hand - Locke's maverick disciple, self-proclaimed 'free-thinker' - was a much more versatile bugbear: mocking the church and the scriptures, confounding matter and spirit. At the beginning of the century he had been prominent in that rogues' gallery of materialists with whom Newtonian writers were wont to frighten their readers: Hobbes, Spinoza, Lucretius, Epicurus; men who showed the swarm of atheistic libertines how to sting.

The Newtonian universe was one in which God's providence operated constantly to animate lifeless matter and maintain regularity and order. The materialists, however, by teaching that matter was self-sufficient and self-animating, depicted a universe in which order was maintained without God's providence (and, by analogy, perhaps also a polity in which order was maintained without authoritarian government). This drew from the Newtonians an energetic response, much of it articulated in the annual series of lectures established in 1691 by the will of Robert Boyle to defend the Christian religion 'against notorious Infidels.' The Reverend Samuel Clarke had the free-thinkers in mind when in his Boyle Lectures he stressed Newton's doctrine that matter was 'brute', 'stupid', 'dead' and 'lifeless'; incapable of sense or movement without the external agency of God, only source of motion in the universe.<sup>100</sup>

It seems quite easy to draw a line (of affinity, not necessarily of filiation) back from Priestley to these free-thinkers, and perhaps even to implicate him in the schemes of political subversion that Toland and others had hatched in their coffee houses and secret lodges. In fact only one contemporary of Priestley's appears to have done this in any determined way: John Robison, Professor of Natural Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, who in 1797 published a most extraordinary book in which, as his title proclaimed, he undertook to furnish Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of Europe, Carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies. Like his more famous contemporary the Abbe Barruel, Robison saw the hand of Freemasonry in the French Revolution; he saw in Toland's Pantheisticon a pattern for Masonic ritual and in Freemasonry itself a

radical millenarian alternative to revealed religion. Freemasonry, says Robison, diverts our attention from God's providence and his promise to us of future happiness by making specious promise of perfect peace and happiness in this life. Its God is no God at all: 'God, without dominion, without providence, and final aims, is Fate.'<sup>101</sup> These are the 'detestable doctrines of Illuminatism', with which Priestley has openly sought to subvert a Christian nation. Priestley's espousal of pantheism is to Robison quite apparent:

Has he not been preparing the minds of his readers for Atheism by his theory of mind, and by his commentary on the unmeaning jargon of Dr. Hartley? ... For, if intelligence and design be nothing but a certain modification of the vibratiunculae or undulations of any kind, what is supreme intelligence, but a more extensive, and (perhaps they will call it) refined undulation, pervading or mixing with all other? ... As any new or partial undulation may be superinduced on any other already existing, and this without the least disturbance or confusion, so may the inferior intelligences in the universe be only superinductions on the operations of this supreme intelligence which pervades them all. - And thus an undulation (of what? surely of something prior to and independent of this modification) is the cause of all the beings in the universe and of all the harmony and beauty that we observe. - 102

This was the sort of criticism that Priestley had been at some pains to avert. He was not, he said, a pantheist, like Spinoza (who made God 'to be, as well as to do every thing'), because he allowed 'a source of infinite power, and superior intelligence' from which inferior beings were derived and from whose consciousness their consciousnesses were and would ever remain quite distinct. He agreed with d'Holbach (one of the principal inheritors of Toland's pantheistic materialism) that matter could not exist without powers, but he argued against him that these powers could have been imparted and organised only by a superior being.<sup>103</sup> Besides, his theory of mind, which is the principal object of Robison's animadversions, is not necessarily tainted with materialism.

Priestley certainly believed that his metaphysical, religious and political doctrines were related, but the relationship, though intimate, stopped well short of implication. He said quite explicitly that his Socinianism did not depend upon his theory of what he called 'the uniform composition of man' and that this theory did not depend upon his materialism.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, he was, as we have seen, arguing for something very like the uniform composition of man as early as 1772, when he told the readers of his Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion that mind and body appear to 'grow, decay and perish together' but that God can resurrect both after a period of death that has been 'an entire cessation of thought.' Moreover, in Priestley's time a number of distinguished and orthodox apologists had advanced the idea that men's hope of a future life lay only in the expectation that God would choose to resurrect them. As Samuel Badcock, pointing this out, remarked, 'Dr. Priestley stands not single in the argument.'<sup>105</sup>

Neither did Priestley stand single in the purely scientific argument: much of the story of matter-theory in the eighteenth century is the story of how Newton's doctrine that all causative action in nature is the direct consequence of God's will came to be supplanted by the doctrine that activity is inherent in matter. It is, indeed, scarcely surprising that more than one person's thoughts should have taken their course, since it is clearly indicated by two features of Newtonian theory itself: the paucity of matter in the universe and the primacy of forces. In his youth, Priestley had read the works of John Rowning, who had speculated whether every particle of a fluid might not be surrounded by alternating spheres of attraction and repulsion; and to

get from Rowning to Boscovich and the mature Priestley it is necessary only to realise that the solid lump on matter assumed to be at the centre of each sphere is quite superfluous to a coherent account of the phenomena.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, however obnoxious Priestley may have been, Boscovich's work answered a genuine need which British scientists felt most acutely. Robison himself, contemptuous though he was of Priestley's associationism and of the materialism of impenetrable matter, had no doubt that a true theory of matter must 'resemble Mr. Boscovich's in many of its features.'<sup>107</sup>

There is no doubt, however, that Priestley saw profound theological and political significance in his materialism. He provided some indication of what his new metaphysical discoveries meant to him at the beginning of the Doctrinē of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated, which came out as an appendix to the Disquisitions:

We ... are links in a great connected chain, parts of an immense whole, a very little of which only we are as yet permitted to see, but from which we collect evidence enough that the whole system (in which we are, at the same time, both instruments and objects) is under an unerring direction, and that the final result will be most glorious and happy. Whatever men may intend, or execute, all their designs, and all their actions, are subject to the secret influence and guidance of one who is necessarily the best judge of what will most promote his own excellent purposes. To him, and in his works, all seeming discord is real harmony, and all apparent evil, ultimate good.<sup>108</sup>

In this passage (complete with its concealed and halting quotation from Pope) Priestley places himself firmly in a very well-known tradition of Western thought: that of the great chain of being, in which every creature is a link, stretching from God, through the angels, to man and, beneath man, the brute creation. The idea that God and the humblest of his handiwork are part of one continuum is given much support by

Priestley's doctrine that all are made of the same matter; and clearly he agrees with Pope and many others that the chain is a hierarchy, because it is apparent that for him man, being both instrument and object, occupies a middle place in the scheme of things.<sup>109</sup> However, he gives us no reason to assume - as some of his more pessimistic and conservative contemporaries do - that man, occupying this intermediary place, is doomed forever to prudent mediocrity. On the contrary:

So long as we can practically believe that there is but one will in the whole universe, that this one will, exclusive of all chance, or the interference of any other will disposes of all things, even to their minutest circumstances, and always for the best of purposes, it is impossible but that we must rejoice in, and be thankful for, all events, without distinction. And when our will and our wishes shall thus perfectly coincide with that of the sovereign Disposer of all things, whose will is always done, in earth, as well as in Heaven, we shall, in fact, attain the summit of perfection and happiness. We shall have a kind of union with God himself; his will shall be our will, and even his power our power; being ever employed to execute our wishes and purposes, as well as his; because they will be, in all respects, the same with his.<sup>110</sup>

In other words, the chain of being will be wound up into one tight and tangled ball. We can find strong intimations of this in Hartley, but Priestley is encouraged in his eschatological hopes not only by a psychological theory that shows how our desires may be one with God's but also by a metaphysical doctrine of the unity of all substance. By 1777, he had already written his most important political text, An Essay on the First Principles of Government, but here we can see how materialism gives a new intensity to the vision which illuminates that work: a single will governing all the universe, a single overpowering end to which all effort - political, religious, scientific and technological - must be bent. The universe thus ordered is, of course, a deterministic one, but the knowledge that this is so should not,

Priestley maintains, lull us into apathy; our own actions and decisions are necessary links in the causal chain, and so the success of our ventures can depend only on ourselves. Moreover, once we see that our moral constitution is, like everything else in nature, the product of established laws of cause and effect, then we will realise that it is upon ourselves and ourselves alone that our moral improvement depends. So the knowledge that our minds are subject to natural laws should no more encourage us to neglect their improvement than the knowledge that vegetation is subject to the same laws should encourage a farmer to neglect his crops.<sup>111</sup>

The contribution of Priestley's materialism to his political thought - strengthening as it did his self-confident individualism, adding new lustre to his materialism - was, then, to encourage him in the pursuit of ideas which had long held his attention. So also in the realm of theology: he was later to write that he had been 'greatly confirmed' in his Socinianism by his discovery of the material composition of the mind.<sup>112</sup> It was, however, not his materialism so much as his associationism that over the next ten years guided his work along the lines sketched in the Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity:

And the more we understand of human nature, which is an immense field of speculation, barely opened by our revered master, Dr. Hartley, the more closely, I doubt not, shall we perceive how admirably is the whole system of revealed religion adapted to the nature and circumstances of man, and the better judges shall we be of that most important branch of its evidence, which results from considering the effects which the first promulgation of it had on the minds of those to whom it was proposed both Jews and Gentiles. Let us then study the Scriptures, Ecclesiastical history, and the Theory of the Human Mind, in conjunction; being satisfied, that from the nature of things, they must, in time, throw a great and new light upon each other.<sup>113</sup>

Pursuing this programme, Priestley was able, he thought, to show not only how the Christian revelation was adapted to the minds of those to whom it was proposed but also how it became corrupted by false philosophy. He knew that this philosophy was false because it denied the material composition of the soul; he sought to explain its rise and dissemination in an account which owed a great deal to associationism, which remained, in religion as in politics, the most important, as it had been the first, of his philosophical loves.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES.

1. Pemberton [1728], p.4. For a useful account of scepticism in the eighteenth century, see Norton [1982], pp.255-264.
2. See Lakatos [1978], pp.208-209.
3. Hacking [1975], p.28. The particular scholastic concept of knowledge to which Bacon was dedicated was not, as Hacking seems to believe, the only one, though it had probably prevailed since the early fifteenth century. See Brown's [1987] critique of Hacking. See Shapiro [1983], ch.ii, especially pp.18-27, for an account of how the Royal Society 'to a very considerable extent, quietly abandoned Bacon's philosophy of science while continuing to pursue Baconian projects.'
4. Maclaurin [1748], pp.76-77 (see also pp.29-30). In the same passage he criticises Descartes and Spinoza for rejecting from philosophy any consideration of final causes. But it is clear that he means only to censure them for regarding the universe as a self-sufficient machine and for laughing 'at those who imagine that the eyes were designed for seeing, or the sun for giving light.' Here he seems to have in mind Newton's magnificent outburst on the subject in his [1730], pp.369-370.
5. 'sGravesande [1720-21], i, ii. See also Hacking [1975], pp.181-183
6. 'sGravesande [1720-21], i, xii.

7. Ibid., i, xxxviii. C.f. Locke [1700], bk.iv, ch.i, sec.1: 'sometimes the Mind perceives the Agreement or Disagreement of two Ideas immediately by themselves, without the intervention of any other; And this I think we may call intuitive Knowledge.'
8. 'sGravesande [1720-21], i, xli. See Locke [1700], bk.iv, ch.ii, for what is evidently the prototype of 'sGravesande's argument for the existence of God and the reliability of the senses.
9. Ibid., i, 2, and Newton [1726], p.398.
10. Newton [1726], p.400.
11. Lakatos [1978], p.207. Feyerabend's treatment of this rule in his very perceptive [1970] is similar.
12. Newton [1730], p.404, quoted in part in Lakatos [1978], p.215.
13. Lakatos [1978], p.221.
14. Reid's exercise in the history of ideas has long since been superseded. For a brief view of a more modern account of things, see Popkin [1980], pp.39-76 and Norton [1981].
15. Reid [1764], p.10.
16. Ibid., p.18.
17. On the origins of the commonsense theory, see Grave [1960], especially ch.i.
18. Hume [1748], bk.i, pt.iv, sec.vii (p.269).
19. On Hume's Newtonianism, see Passmore [1980], especially chs. i and iii; on Reid's, see Laudan [1970].
20. Priestley [1774b], pp.xl-xlii.
21. Priestley [1772-74], iii, vii.
22. Ibid., iii, x. For Oswald's objection, see his letter to Priestley in Priestley [1774b], pp.348-354.
23. 'sGravesande was one of these earlier Newtonians (see his [1720-21], i, xii). Pemberton was another (see his [1728], p.28) and so was Maclaurin (see his [1748], pp.5-6).
24. Priestley [1774b], pp.62-64.
25. Ibid., p.65.
26. Ibid., pp.41-47.

27. Ibid., p.61.
28. Ibid., p.lix. This argument is clearly a favourite of Priestley's. Of the hypothesis that the external world exists, he says (on p.43 of the same book) that: 'It is quite sufficient if the supposition be the easiest hypothesis for explaining the origin of our ideas. The evidence of it is such that we allow it to be barely possible to doubt of it: but that it is as certain as that two and two make four, we do not pretend.' The argument appears again on p.152.
29. Ibid., p.6. For Reid's views on the matter, see his [1764], ch.vi, and Grave [1960], pp.143-145.
30. Maclaurin ([1748], pp.9-10) accounts for the queries by telling his readers that Newton, having 'discovered new and wonderful properties of light' by the correct and careful methods, and finding on his way many other interesting things that could not be established with equal certainty, separated them from the rest of his work 'and proposed them under the modest title of Queries.' It is, he says, greatly to Newton's credit that he thus refrained from presenting conjecture as fact; in this way, he 'secured his philosophy against any hazard of being disproved or weakened by future discoveries.' A similar fear of disproof seems to have motivated Newton in some of his amendments to the first edition of the Principia, in which some 'hypotheses' were turned into 'phaenomena' and others into 'regulae'. According to I. Bernard Cohen, Newton originally intended to imply by the words 'hypotheses non fingo' nothing more than a refusal to conjecture as to the cause of gravity. It was only in response to an objection of his editor, Roger Cotes (who, in turn, had probably been provoked by complaints that Newton's system contained 'occult qualities'), that he added the passage beginning 'Quicquid enim ex phaenomena non deducitur Hypothesis vocanda est. ...' and the objection to all hypotheses that follows it in the third edition. However, according to Cohen, he uses the word 'hypothesis' in no less than nine different senses; and of these only one, 'philosophical romance', seems to have caught the attention of his followers. (Cohen [1956], pp.138-141)
31. 'sGravesande [1720-21], i, ii, xii, and Maclaurin [1748], pp.3-4.
32. Reid [1764], pp.262-263. See also Laudan [1970], pp.110-111.
33. Hartley [1749], i, 14 (my emphasis). Hartley uses the word 'hypothesis' in the second, third, fourth, sixth and particularly the seventh of Cohen's nine senses. C.f. pp.345-346: 'So it is useful in Inquiries of all Kinds, to try all such Suppositions as occur with any Appearance of Probability, to endeavour to deduce the real Phaenomena from them; and if they do not answer in some tolerable Measure, to reject them at once; or if they do, to add, expunge, correct, and improve,

till we have brought the Hypothesis as near as we can to an Agreement with Nature. After this it must be left to be farther corrected and improved, or entirely disproved, by Light and Evidence reflected upon it from the contiguous, and even, in some measure, from the Remote Branches of other Sciences.'

34. These terms, 'logic of reason' and 'logic of understanding', are Passmore's. See the discussion of Hume's logic in his [1980], ch.ii. For Priestley's attempts to distinguish between different kinds of proposition, see his [1774b], pp.xxxvii-xliv, and [1777a], p.9. Behind Priestley's account of propositions, it is fairly easy to detect what Hartley ([1749], i, 325) says about assent. Reid's views on the distinction between necessary and contingent propositions were, at least in 1785, considerably more developed than Priestley's. See his [1785], essay vi, chs.v-vi.
35. Priestley [1774b], pp.xliv, xlvi-lix
36. Locke [1700], bk.iv, ch.viii, sec.8.
37. Ibid., bk.ii, ch.vi, sec.2, and Priestley [1774b], p.5.
38. Priestley [1774b], p.69.
39. Ibid., p.81. Priestley's argument here is with Reid [1764], ch.iv, sec.i.
40. Priestley [1774b], pp.xlvi-lix, lxi-lxiii, 331.
41. Reid [1764], pp.105-106, 197-199.
42. Priestley [1774b], pp.85-87.
43. Oswald [1766/72], i, 233
44. Ibid., i, 24-25, 171 (misquoted in Priestley [1774b], p.229).
45. They are obviously not just logical truths, since Oswald is critical (ibid., i, 57) of 'the modern hypothesis' according to which primary truths must be deduced 'by trains of subtile reasoning' from either the axioms of logic or the evidence of the senses.
46. Ibid., i, 93, 109.
47. Ibid., i, 71, quoted in Ardley, p.27. Ardley is one of Oswald's few modern friends, perhaps his only friend. Unfortunately, faced with the job of clearing his hero of the charges of pomposity, dogmatism and persistent refusal to argue a point, Ardley dodges the task by exhibiting exactly the same faults himself. His book is, however, useful as a guide across the flatlands of Oswald's unrewarding prose and as a source of quotations (of which he makes lavish use).

48. Oswald [1766/72], i, 171-172.
49. Ibid., i, 111 (quoted in Ardley [1980], p.37).
50. Oswald [1766/72], i, 51-52.
51. Ibid., i, 52-54, and Priestley [1774b], pp.204-205.
52. Oswald ([1766/72], ii, 59, quoted in Priestley [1774b], p.289) even goes so far as to oppose Newtonian attempts at geometrical demonstration of God's existence with a disproof of his own, and he suggests, in Epicurean style, that 'unlimited revolutions of matter' could in time have generated a universe quite randomly.'
53. Oswald [1766/72], i, 92, 353-354, quoted in Priestley [1774b], pp.228-229.
54. Oswald [1766/72], i, 56, quoted in Priestley [1772-74], iii, xix, and [1774b], pp.257-258.
55. Oswald [1766/72], i, 10-11.
56. Ibid., i, 105-106, 191-192.
57. For Beattie's arguments, see his [1774], pp.38-39; for Reid's, see his [1764], ch.v, especially sec.v, as well as Grave [1960], pp.16, 161-177. Price's Review of the Principal Questions in Morals was first published in 1758, six years before Reid's book, eight years before Oswald's and twelve before Beattie's. (The second edition - to which Priestley refers and which I have used - came out in 1769, the more familiar third edition in 1787). According to Grave ([1960], p.9) there is no evidence that Reid depended on Price. Beattie ([1774], p.x) expressly disclaimed acquaintance with Price's work.
58. Price [1769], pp.23-39. For a discussion of this aspect of Price's work, see Thomas [1977], ch.iii.
59. Price [1769], pp.19-20. See Peach [1985] for a sketch of the two schools of British moral thought: the school of reason, founded on a belief in the rational and objective basis of moral intuition, which included Price and Reid; and the school of sentiment, laying stress on the affective basis of morality, which numbered among its members Hume and Bentham (and, we may add, Priestley).
60. Harris [1751], p.314. For Harris' rejection of the cistern analogy, see p.v. To the modern reader this will, of course, recall Sir Karl Popper's rejection, in the name of realism, of what he calls 'the bucket theory of mind'. See Popper [1972], ch.ii.

61. Harris [1751], p.362n., 368-372, 381.
62. Ibid., p.77.
63. Oswald, [1766/72], i, 116-118, 121-122, 140-143. See also Ardley [1980], pp.38-41.
64. Priestley [1774b], pp.121-122.
65. Ibid., p.133.
66. Nonetheless, Oswald wants to claim the scriptures as 'the true, if not the only, source of sound philosophy and good sense, on these subjects'. See Oswald [1766/72], i, 271 (wrongly cited by Priestley as p.24) and ii, 203, quoted in Priestley [1774b], pp.244-245, 252.
67. Priestley [1774b], pp.134-135, 161, 200-201.
68. Ibid., p.202.
69. For an account of the discussion provoked by Locke's suggestion, see Yolton [1983].
70. Reid [1764], p.128. See also Grave [1960], pp.13-16.
71. Priestley [1774b], pp.30-31.
72. Feyerabend [1963], p.97.
73. Priestley [1774b], p.32.
74. Place [1956], p.29.
75. Priestley [1774b], p.lvi.
76. Reid [1764], p.156, quoted in Priestley [1774b], pp.32-33.
77. See Grave [1960], pp.27-28, 133-134.
78. Priestley [1774b], p.36. 'I may conjecture, he concludes, 'that the brain itself may be the ultimate cause, or I may substitute something else that I may think better adapted to the purpose, that is, to suit the phenomena.'
79. Ibid., pp.339-340. 'I find the first free avowal of an inclination to adopt the scheme of materialism in his animadversions on a passage in the learned Mr. Harris's *Hermes*. These animadversions were annexed to his reply to the SCOTCH DOCTORS. ...' Badcock [1780], p.7. (This pamphlet was published anonymously and without date of publication; I have supplied the details from the Dictionary of National Biography.) Badcock may have in mind not merely the passage I have quoted but the whole of Priestley [1774b], pp.339-345.

80. Locke [1700], bk.iv, ch.iii, sec.6.
81. Priestley [1787b], pp.160-174. For an interesting account of French materialism that places d'Holbach at the centre of the movement, see Gellner [1964].
82. d'Holbach [1770], i, vii.
83. Hobbes [1655], ch.25, par.2.
84. Priestley [1774b], p.xi.
85. Priestley [1775b], pp. xii.
86. Priestley [1777b], pp.xiii-xiv.
87. Ibid., p.91.
88. Ibid., pp.1-2.
89. Newton [1726], p.398.
90. Priestley [1777b], p.11. This was the nub of part of a critique of Priestley's methods written (but not published) by Thomas Reid (University of Aberdeen, Reid Mss: Ms 3061/24). For discussion of Reid's criticisms of Priestley see Wood [1985].
91. See Priestley [1777b], pp.12-14, for these examples. C.f. Priestley's letter to the Rev. Joseph Bretland, Leeds, 7 March, 1773 (in Schofield [1966], p.117), which indicates that these ideas had been in his mind even before he published his [1774b].
92. Priestley [1777b], pp.12-14.
93. Ibid., pp.8-9. For the history of this 'nut-shell' theory of matter, see Thackray [1968] and [1970], pp.3, 22, 55-69, 102-103 (which deal with 'sGravesande's treatment of the idea).
94. Boscovich's letter to Shelburne appears not to have survived; the phrase I have given is quoted by Priestley in his reply (19 August, 1778, in Schofield [1966], pp.166-168). Answering Priestley, Boscovich speaks of materialism as 'a doctrine that I detest and abhor as impiety in religion and senseless to sound philosophy.' (Boscovich to Priestley, Bigno near Sens, 17 October, 1778, in Schofield [1966], p.169) For Boscovich's thought, see the essays collected in Whyte (ed.) [1961], especially those of Markovic, Schofield, Whyte, and Williams. Boscovich was so far from identifying mind and brain that he would not allow that anything certain could be said as where the seat of the mind might be situated and he insisted that his very definition of matter denied it any capacity for thought or volition (Boscovich [1763], arts. 153-157, 531-537).

95. Priestley [1777b], p.26.
96. Ibid., pp.83-84, 87.
97. Ibid., pp.109, 112.
98. Badcock [1780], p.23, quoting 'a writer who called himself a CHRISTIAN.' For a modern account of the critics of Priestley's materialism, see Yolton [1983], pp.115-125.
99. Badcock [1780], pp.vi-vii.
100. See Jacob [1976], especially ch.vi, and - for a more extended discussion of materialism - Jacob [1981]. On the Boyle Lectures, see also Redwood, chs.iii and iv.
101. Robison [1797], pp.181-182, 184. For his remarks on Toland's Pantheisticon see pp.153-154. For a more detailed account of Robison and his strange book, see Morrell [1971].
102. Robison [1797], pp.367-368.
103. Priestley [1782b], p.241 and [1787b], pp.162-163. For d'Holbach's role in all this, see Jacob [1981], pp.262-263.
104. Priestley [1777b], pp.355-356.
105. Badcock [1780], pp.43-46.
106. See Heimann [1973], Heimann and McGuire [1971], Schofield [1970], pp.34-39, 235-273, 277-282, and Thackray [1970], pp.52-66, 82, 102-104.
107. Robison, Lectures in Physics (delivered at Edinburgh from 1785), quoted in Whyte [1961], p.104. Robison's attack on Priestley is used by Steven Shapin to illustrate the supposed political significance of Priestley's materialism. Shapin claims that in the mid-seventeen-seventies Priestley set about creating 'a hierarchy-collapsing strategy' with which to give voice to his 'social antipathy' to Newton's theology and that of the Boyle lecturers. Robison's work encourages Shapin in this belief: 'The Tory professor,' he writes, 'specifically identifies Priestley's matter-theory as subversive of correct moral order ... took it to be part of a strategy designed to materialise the universe, to restrict the scope of spiritual powers, and to break down crucial boundaries between mere matter and ruling spirit.' (Shapin [1980], pp.118-119, 124) But, though Robison was indeed opposed to Priestley's doctrine of the material composition of the mind, to Hartley's theory of vibrations and to French materialism, he could not with reason or justice object to Priestley's materialism per se, nor detect subversion in it, since both he and Priestley found so much wisdom in Boscovich's doctrines. As to Shapin's opinion that Priestley, politically or socially motivated, set out to create

a hierarchy-collapsing strategy, it is difficult to square this with the account that I have given of the origin of Priestley's materialism. Shapin ascribes to Priestley a belief and an intention: a belief in the political significance of Newton's matter-theory and an intention to replace it with a theory that he found more congenial politically. But earlier in this chapter, I tried to show that Priestley found himself on the road to materialism after setting out to refute what he thought to be the dangerous epistemological errors of the Scottish philosophers. This account and Shapin's would appear to be reconcilable only if, even as Priestley wrote the Examination, he had another, greater, enemy in mind. But if we are to assume this, then we must further assume that he worked backwards, first identifying the salient and politically-significant points of Newtonian matter-theory (its insistence that matter is inert and depends upon God for its animation and organisation), then producing an alternative theory (that matter is self-sufficient and partakes of the nature of mind). Having done this, he published, we must assume, at carefully-spaced intervals, a series of books that would make it seem that he had arrived at his theory by a comparatively innocent - and, indeed, comparatively Newtonian - epistemological route. It may be, of course, that Priestley set out with innocent intentions but then discovered himself to be nothing less than a Samson malgre lui, bringing hierarchies down about his own surprised and delighted head. But even if we allow this, we must allow that he covered his delight and his tracks by disclaiming kinship with the likes of d'Holbach and Spinoza and by insisting emphatically on the role of divine providence in the world. (A useful review of these arguments is that of Cantor [1982], who points out (pp.47-48) that Shapin's thesis depends upon an idea of 'Newtonianism' as a category of analysis defined by a certain theory of matter, which many historians have now abandoned. He also observes (pp.48-49) that Shapin's thesis 'as it stands ... is open to many counter-examples: for example, George Berkeley, a High Anglican monarchist bishop would on this account sit with Priestley, a radical and Dissenter, since both employed "hierarchy-collapsing strategies" in their matter-theories.')

108. Priestley [1777c], pp.viii-ix.
109. The classic discussion of the chain of being is, of course, Lovejoy [1936]. See especially chs.vi and vii.
110. Priestley [1777c], pp.xii-xiii.
111. Ibid., 99-100.
112. Priestley [1783b], p.v.
113. Priestley [1777c], pp.xv-xvi.

CHAPTER FIVE.

THE POLITICS OF COMMERCE AND OF CANDOUR.

Sometimes it seems impossible and I  
dream of a candid attic somewhere, all  
white and empty, looking over trees.  
Then I finger the gold brocade curtains,  
with their tasselled gold tie-backs ...

Anita Brookner, Look at Me

I.

'For my own part,' wrote Priestley in 1776, 'I endeavour to think as little as I possibly can (which, however, is not very little) of Politics, and apply myself to pursuits in which I meet with less cause of chagrin, and in which I hope I am not uselessly employed.'<sup>1</sup> It was a forlorn hope: the literary companion to Lord Shelburne could scarcely be deaf to the reports of high politics, nor could the self-appointed spokesman of Rational Dissent expect to be free for long from politics and chagrin. However, Priestley obviously wanted to think of himself as a man dragged reluctantly from his study by the importunity of public affairs. The implication that politics had become so noisy and so dangerous that no door could be shut against them is part of the story that he has to tell about the state of the nation in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

The story goes that, after years of persecution under the Stuarts, Dissenters found ease and toleration in the reign of George of Hanover and in that of his son. But under the third George, the story continues, things began to change, the influence of the court began to increase, that of Parliament to diminish, and so the Dissenters, natural friends to civil liberty, were drawn reluctantly into the politics of opposition.

This story fits well into the received account of English history (or, at least, with the account that has been received from Whig or Whiggish historians), according to which the accession of George I put an end to the ferocious party struggle that had marked English political life since the Glorious Revolution and the nation became a one-party state while its political elite gave itself up to tranquil corruption and the pursuit of place. This elite, men of property who had done well out of the Revolution, formed the oligarchy which was to govern the land for a hundred years. All executive power was theirs and so was parliament, a docile body easily controlled by a few grandees whose patronage lesser men had to court if they wanted a sinecure, a pension, a military commission, preferment in the church, a post in the civil service or any of the other good things that government had to offer.<sup>2</sup>

However, of those who were denied a place at the table not all were prepared to keep quiet about their exclusion. In London and the provinces, the 'middling sort', Priestley's sort, were growing in number, in economic influence and in political awareness. But they were not growing in political power, and more and more they felt themselves to be excluded. As keepers of ledgers - heavily and regressively taxed

to pay for the corruptions of government - they suffered from the economic insecurity that resulted from the very widespread use of credit, and they objected strongly both to the uncertainties of the patronage system and to the inconsistent and capricious way in which the law was applied.<sup>3</sup> According to J.H. Plumb, this political public grew as the electorate diminished. Ambitious, intelligent, articulate and unenfranchised, its members began to turn their attention to extra-Parliamentary campaigning, and naturally this altered the political atmosphere. They formed clubs and societies in which to discuss the issues of the day and they were the proprietors of a vigorous and blossoming press.<sup>4</sup>

Though the Whigs and their successors were to remain fixedly in power until well into the nineteenth century (the received account continues), the accession of George III in 1760 brought to an end the serenity with which that power had been exercised. There had been little local difficulties before, of course - Jacobite invasion, quarrels over the excise in 1733 and the Gin Act in 1736, and a period of parliamentary unrest from 1754 to 1757 - but the events of the seventeen-sixties were something new: 'Seven ministries came and went,' says John Brewer, 'parliamentary opposition grew apace, the radical press burgeoned, and crowds became both more frequent and more prominent.'<sup>5</sup> Sometimes the crowds became riots, and people were shot dead in the streets who had turned out in support of that astonishing demagogue and hero of the people, John Wilkes. Whig opinion had it at the time that the fault lay with the young King himself, that he sought to unbalance the constitution and arrogate to himself and to his friends

the power which had been so beneficently wielded by the great families of the land.<sup>6</sup> Though there is little basis for the accusation, it is certainly true that the third George was not content, as the first two had been, to leave all those oligarchs to the unprincipled enjoyment of office. He came in and they went out. Not only were the old gang who had governed in the previous reign swept from office, but so were even the humblest of those who had acquired place or emolument under them.

Thus the received account. Revisionist historians have challenged it in significant details. It is now asserted that opposition and electoral strife were not brought to an end in the early years of the reign of George I, that the excluded did not all bridle at their exclusion, that there was nothing extraordinary about the ministerial crises of the seventeen-sixties and that the Wilkes affair was a mere political meteor, rapid in its passage and having no permanent effect on the configuration of the political heavens.<sup>7</sup> But whatever the truth of the matter, it remains the case that Priestley and many others believed, or claimed to believe, that there was indeed something sinister about the young King's friends. Nor was Priestley alone in finding the events of the day striking and unprecedented. 'By 1770 the "present discontents" were well nigh an obsession,' writes Brewer. 'Government, opposition and radicals all addressed themselves to the problem of disorder. ...'<sup>8</sup> Occurring in the midst of these discontents and contributing to them, the Wilkes affair may have left the political order unchanged, but in two respects the movement was undoubtedly significant: as H.T. Dickinson remarks, 'it established the first political society to campaign for a reform of Parliament and it immersed

a mass audience in its own political ideas and in the political debate in general.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the effects of the movement on this 'mass audience' were short-lived and local. Perhaps it does not represent the escape of the long-repressed resentment of the unenfranchised, anonymous masses. However, its importance to a group of urban intellectuals, vocal and discontented, cannot be denied, for it was neither slight nor transient.<sup>10</sup>

Of these Priestley was a distinguished member. The political discontents of the seventeen-sixties more or less coincided with his entry into the great metropolitan world. Before, in the fifties and early sixties, he had been an obscure provincial preacher. In the mid-sixties,, however, he began to play his part on a larger stage: he visited London, became a Fellow of the Royal Society and a member of what Benjamin Franklin called the club of 'Honest Whigs'.<sup>11</sup> And. at the same time as Priestley began to move more at large in the world, the world itself began to seem a more lively place: it afforded the twin spectacles of instability and possibility. Many men, certainly those amongst whom Priestley spent his time, were exercised by the former spectacle, and it would be surprising if Priestley - himself adherent to a philosophy which depicted order as arising by Divine Providence out of chaos - were not to catch some of this concern. Moreover, certain responses to instability ran much against the grain of his own thought and by stinging him into response, made him articulate his own political ideas. This he did initially in 1768 in his Essay on the First Principles of Government, and on the Nature of Political, Civil and Religious Liberty (a copy of which he sent to Wilkes 'as a small

acknowledgement for the many personal civilities he has received from him, and more especially for what he owes him as ... a lover of liberty.'<sup>12</sup>) As he began, with this and other works, to engage in the controversies of the day, so he tried to grasp the possibilities for radical reform that offered themselves. To do so he had to persuade others to see the world as he and Rational Dissent saw it. Consequently, he had to convince them that he spoke not for a narrow vested interest but for a community whose concern for justice, affronted by the corruptions of government, had dragged it protesting into the political arena.

It seems appropriate then, to delay our examination of the Essay until we have looked at those pamphlets, published a little later, in which he wrote of the Wilkes affair and of the Dissenters' new role (reluctantly undertaken, of course) as members of a loyal opposition.

## II.

Not every myth about the politics of Dissent may be laid at Priestley's door. A number of historians have claimed that Dissenters, legally barred from Parliament and from public office, took no active part in politics until the French Revolution roused them from their quietist slumbers. It is further suggested that this very exclusion preserved their radicalism in all its native purity: there was nothing that could force them to compromise and nothing to diminish the sense of grievance that exclusion inspired in them.<sup>13</sup> This assumption, that Dissenters were excluded not only from office but from the very electorate, is quite mistaken. Many of them did, of course, come from

those sections of the urban middle classes that were not to gain the franchise until the nineteenth century, but religious dissent was not in itself a legal reason for denying a man the vote; if it had been, Priestley would scarcely have written a pamphlet advising 'protestant dissenters of all denominations' how to vote in the general election of 1774.<sup>14</sup> Often, those Dissenters who possessed the vote were very ready to exert the influence it gave them: their power was important in several constituencies and sometimes it was decisive.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, the elite of Rational Dissent were political and they were radical, and their noisy eloquence has persuaded many historians to equate religious and political dissent and to ignore those loyalist Dissenters who were enemies to insubordination at home and revolution abroad. As for Priestley himself, most prominent apologist of Rational Dissent: he is so loud in his protestation that Dissenters must by their very nature be friends to civil liberty that it is easy to overlook his repeated insistence that Dissenters as such have 'no peculiar principles of government at all.'<sup>16</sup> The two claims are reconcilable, of course, but together they seem decidedly disingenuous. Priestley does indeed wish to father certain political principles on his fellow Dissenters but he wishes also to imply that these principles, being dictated by reason, are such as no reasonable person could take exception to. The claim that Dissenters have no political principles of their own is, then, an ideological one: it is a way of excluding from the thinking world all who reject those principles that Dissenters do in fact hold; it is a way of representing the interests of Rational Dissent as the common interests of all thinking people.

It is also of a piece with the claim that he makes in his Essay on the First Principles of Government that he does not speak the language of party. At a time when parties were still thought of as factions, as bodies of men united for no other purpose than the pursuit of their personal interests - when party was 'that hideous monster', 'the greatest evil of this poor country' and 'the madness of many for the gain of a few' - Priestley was naturally anxious to show that he and his fellow Dissenters were not just out for what they could get.<sup>17</sup> His view of party was as low as anybody's: in a sermon first delivered in 1771 he warned of 'the man who hath no rule over his own spirit' that, 'In all affairs in which the publick interest is concerned he will be directed more by his attachment to a party & by inclination and humour than by the sober dictates of wisdom & the love of his country.'<sup>18</sup> The Dissenters, Priestley implies, are neither so whimsical nor so narrowly self-interested as this. Of course, they are concerned with civil liberty, especially in so far as its abridgement by the Test and Corporation Acts seriously disables them, but in this they are moved by the most generous motives: 'So long as we continue dissenters, it is hardly possible that we should be other than friends to civil liberty and all the essential interests of our fellow citizens.'<sup>19</sup>

In describing the political affiliations of Dissent, Priestley has in fact two claims to make, one theoretical and the other historical. The theoretical claim, whose validity he often takes for granted, is that the logic of the Dissenters' situation obliges them to advocate not only the reform of Test and Corporation Acts but also other reforms in the state. (Here he is projecting onto his co-religionists concerns

which are largely his own.) The historical claim is that Dissenters have in fact advocated such reforms and it is part of that Whig story with which this chapter began.

Priestley's tale is one of suffering bravely born, the memory of which has given the Dissenters their zeal for civil liberty. In 'the imperious reign of queen Elizabeth, and the more oppressive reigns of the Stewarts', many thousands of Puritans, 'man of whom the world was not worthy', suffered fines, confiscations, cruel punishments and even exile to the inhospitable shores of North America rather than abandon God's cause, the cause of truth and liberty.<sup>20</sup> This cause, battered by the Tudors, was nearly done to death by the their successors. They, however, were so bold in their attempts to enslave the nation that at last it rose in its own defence. The battle lines are depicted for us in primary colours: on one side are ranged King Charles and his haughty gang of Papists and High Churchmen, all bent upon absolute despotism of the French or Spanish kind; on the other side, muskets primed in defence of its 'natural and civil rights', is nothing less than 'the nation, not the Dissenters only. ...'<sup>21</sup>

But before long this boldly-sketched account of the Great Rebellion runs into difficulties, and these difficulties arise directly from Priestley's wish to depict Dissent as both politically neutral and conducive to a love of civil liberty. The Dissenters, he says, finished the war, as they had begun it, friends to monarchy; but it is the military leaders who 'will necessarily give the law to the state in all convulsions of this nature,' and in this case they happened to be Independents and republicans. Few but they wanted to cut off the King's

head (though he deserved nothing less than a thousand deaths for what he had done), but nobody had the power to stop them. Their action was, however, dictated solely by political principle and not by religion.<sup>22</sup>

Here is Priestley's dilemma. He has said that Dissenters have no political principles peculiarly their own; he has said that they are friends to the English monarchy; so clearly he cannot approve of this project to found a republic. But neither can he approve of what he calls 'the usurpation of Cromwell', for Cromwell was a dictator and Dissenters are friends to civil liberty. What then would he have approved of? Surely not the restoration of the dead King's son, 'an avowed papist' whose 'uniform aim was to establish Popery in this kingdom. ...'<sup>23</sup> The necessary admission - that the King was beheaded because he stood in the way of a political settlement whose architects were indeed motivated, in part at least, by theological doctrine - is never made, though Priestley does at one point confess that the trick cannot be worked, that the Puritans cannot be depicted as friends alike to monarchy and to what he calls liberty. The liberty they sought was liberty for themselves alone. Had they been able to do so, they would have established a tyranny as severe as that of their enemies.<sup>24</sup>

Since then, however - and despite severe persecution under the restored Stuarts - the Dissenters have been the true friends, perhaps the truest friends, of their country. They have educated it in the ways of civil liberty, they have opposed the worst of its rulers and been loyal to the best. But such loyalty may no longer be rewarded: 'that those who actually guide the measures which are now carrying on in this country, are equally enemies to civil liberty and to you, can no more be

doubted, than that William III, of glorious memory, and the two first princes of the house of Hanover, were friendly to both.'<sup>25</sup> This was written in 1774, when the anxieties of Priestley and his radical friends had begun to find new focus in the American colonies. But it was a more local event that, they said, had first alerted them to the extent of ministerial corruption. Many Dissenters, said Priestly in 1769, 'from the force of habitual attachment to the present reigning family', continued to support the administration, but things had been materially altered by 'the late vote of the House of Commons in favour of Mr. Luttrell.'<sup>26</sup> The great political drama of which this vote was an incident clearly interested Priestley greatly and he took to the stage himself (though masked), writing, as he tells us in his memoirs, 'some anonymous pieces in favour of civil liberty during the persecution of Mr. Wilkes. ...'<sup>27</sup>

The 'persecution' began in 1762, when a general warrant was issued for the arrest of 'the authors, printers and publishers of a seditious and treasonable paper, entitled The North Briton', and the author, the notorious John Wilkes M.P., was committed to the Tower of London.<sup>28</sup> Sharp-tongued and witty, Wilkes had long been a thorn in the ministerial flesh, but, nonetheless, his arrest had disastrous consequences for the government. Not only was it a clear breach of parliamentary privilege; it was also a vicious stroke of precisely that arbitrary justice that the middling sort found intolerable, for it was made on a warrant that mentioned nobody by name and was defended on grounds 'of state necessity'. This is one of several infringements of 'the great privileges of Englishmen' which Priestley sets down in his bill of

indictment against the administration. By construing censure as libel, he goes on, they have restricted the liberty of the press, 'that great security for every branch of our liberty, and the scourge of their arbitrary proceedings. ...'<sup>29</sup>

The courts found in Wilkes' favour, declaring that parliamentary privilege had indeed been breached, that general warrants were illegal and that state necessity was no defence. The government returned to the attack, this time trying to nail their enemy as author of an obscene and blasphemous poem, and Wilkes was already an outlaw when, in 1768, he was returned as member for Middlesex. He surrendered to his outlawry and it was while his case was before the courts that there took place the bloodiest of the riots that are associated with his name. At least eleven people, Wilkites and innocent bystanders, were killed as a result of what Priestley condemns as unnecessary and unconstitutional recourse 'to that great engine of arbitrary power, a military force. ...'<sup>30</sup>

As on a contemporary playbill, tragedy was succeeded by a comic after-piece. Wilkes, convicted of indecent publication and seditious libel, was expelled from the House of Commons on a Government motion. The freeholders of Middlesex - many of them middling tradesmen and manufacturers - elected him unopposed: the House re-expelled him; the constituency returned him yet again, and the House expelled him for the third time in three months. For the fourth election, the Government, every bit as tireless as the freeholders of Middlesex, found a candidate, one Colonel Luttrell, to stand against Wilkes. He polled 246 votes to Wilkes' 1143. A crowd of several thousand made its way to the King's Bench Prison to congratulate the winner, but the House of

Commons, unmoved by the spectacle, voted by a majority of 197 to 143 'that Henry Lawes Luttrell Esq. ought to have been returned a member for Middlesex and not John Wilkes Esq.'<sup>31</sup>

By this act of folly, the executive had made Wilkes into a truly national hero, for they had struck not just at him but at his electorate and, as they were told by many thousands of petitioners, at the constitution itself. Priestley had no doubt about the matter: 'The great Bill of Rights has been invaded by a repeated refusal, to admit the first county in England, to judge of the fitness of the person who shall represent them in parliament. ...'<sup>32</sup> The confrontation with Wilkes could now be depicted as a battle between the freemen of England and the oligarchs of Westminster for the freedom of election. It was at this time that a group of metropolitan radicals, aldermen, lawyers and clergy, founded the Society for the Supporters of the Bill of Rights, the first political society of the century to campaign for radical reform of Parliament, for more frequent elections, the ejection of 'placemen and pensioners' and 'a more fair and equal representation of the people.'<sup>33</sup> This, clearly, was a programme with which Priestley could sympathise. 'The corruption of their representatives,' was, he said, what the people of England had most to fear, 'as being most liable to subject them to arbitrary power.' He cites two causes of corruption: firstly, the presence in Parliament of many 'placemen and pensioners, and those who are in expectation of emoluments of that kind', and, secondly, the long duration of parliaments, which made of a seat in the Commons an investment capable of yielding seven years' return. Together these circumstance enabled the Court to secure and control a permanent

majority. Both arose from the same original cause: an inequitable system of representation whereby most of the members represented 'inconsiderable towns' whose few electors would vote as directed by the landowner or 'other adherent to the court' whose sole property the seat was.<sup>34</sup> This analysis underwrites a programme of reform that is neither democratic nor original. Priestley, at one with the Supporters of the Bill of Rights, demands no more than opposition Whigs had been demanding for most of the century.

'It has been said,' Priestley remarks, 'that a great part of the resentment of the court against the Dissenters has arisen from a notion that they were the chief abettors of Mr. Wilkes; and I believe that, in general, they were the friends of his cause, because it was the cause of liberty and of the constitution.'<sup>35</sup> He is careful to explain that the Dissenters played no greater part in Wilkes' affair than any other patriots, except in so far as, being so dependent on public liberty, they naturally had a greater interest than others in its defence. But he must have known full well that Dissenters were not necessarily lovers of liberty for all, certainly not of liberty as he understood it (he had said as much when discussing the Presbyterians of the seventeenth century). Besides, his kind of Dissent is radically different from the orthodox kind: neither Calvinist nor trinitarian, it is largely negative, consisting of the rejection of corrupt doctrine, and it depends for its propagation on the clash of opinions in public and the mutual interference of associations in the mind. It is a form of Dissent to which few subscribed: Presbyterianism may have been going Priestley's way, the way of Rational Dissent, but there were still

orthodox Dissenters, like the Independents and the General Baptists, who remained loyal to Calvin; and orthodox Dissent had always been ready, as militant heterodoxy was not, to circumvent the Test and Corporation Acts by way of occasional conformity.<sup>36</sup> Priestley, however, represents the political principles of Rational Dissent as something to which all Dissenters must necessarily adhere; and, since he says that they have no political principles peculiarly their own, it is easy to depict them as people sensitive not merely to their own needs but to those of the country at large. Needing civil liberty more than others, they are its particular friends. Its friends are their friends, and so they have always been grateful adherents to the House of Hanover. The implication is clear: surely only some very singular and unprecedented breach of the constitution could have driven such loyal subjects into opposition.

This is how Priestley sees the parliamentary vote in favour of Luttrell.<sup>37</sup> At least one of the reasons for his adopting this attitude can easily be inferred: if the intellectual universe is to be in all respects - intellectual, moral and theological - a place in which there is nothing that is merely inherited, nothing that is unquestioned, nothing that is not freely chosen, then it will be better if there is free debate and a multiplicity of sects. There can be no orthodoxy, no establishment. ('In the present state of christianity, I am for increasing the number of sects rather than diminishing them,' Priestley wrote in 1770, when it was suggested that Dissenters act in concert with reforming clergy in the Church of England.<sup>38</sup>) Hence the need for that free market in opinions which is his idea of civil liberty. The government's ineptitude in dealing with Wilkes has afforded him an

opportunity of pressing even more strongly his claims for civil liberty; and he is able to magnify the threat to liberty by asserting that even the Dissenters, hitherto the House of Hanover's most loyal subjects, have been driven into opposition by the dark schemes of the young King and his ministers.

But there were those who, in the face of instability, wished to strengthen the unity of the state rather than weaken it. They provoked Priestley's only substantial treatise on politics.

### III.

Like many a contemporary work, Priestley's Essay on the First Principles of Government begins with one of those punctiliously humble prefaces in which the author explains that only the importunity of his friends has persuaded him to place his thoughts before the public. Priestley's friends, the 'several persons who were pleased to think favourably' of his Remarks on Dr. Brown's Proposals for a Code of Education, had told him (or so he tells us) that what he had said in that work about civil and religious liberty 'had placed the foundation of those most valuable interests of mankind on a broader and a firmer basis, in consequence of my availing myself of a more accurate and extensive system of morals and policy, than was adopted by Mr. Locke, and others who formerly wrote upon this subject.' So he has written, he says, a new and more general treatise, incorporating into it the substance of the earlier work. He is, however, anxious to point out that he intends 'no more than to consider the first principles of civil and religious liberty'; for more detailed and extensive information, the

reader is referred to the lectures on history and civil policy which the author intends to publish 'in due time.'<sup>39</sup>

These prefatory remarks of Priestley's are more than throat-clearing. From all this modesty, mock-modesty and self-advertisement emerge three significant facts: that the Essay grew out of a work on education; that its author believed that he enjoyed 'a more accurate and extensive system of morals and policy' than Locke; and that it was intended to guide or supplement empirical research, not to replace it. These three facts are all intimately connected with each other, and what binds them together is associationism. Priestley's advantage over Locke is that, coming after Hartley, he can wield that 'more accurate and extensive system' from which he has learnt both of the fundamental importance of education and of the difficulty of 'arguing a priori in matters of government.'<sup>40</sup> For the Christian associationist, history must be a collection of minutely-organised particulars ordered by a few general descriptive principles. And a few general normative principles will, it is hoped, govern the activities of men, the actors of history. The descriptive principles are, of course, those of associationism, for the mechanism of associations is the means whereby divine omnipotence operates on the world. Since nothing but good can come of God's decrees, the normative principles can be quite modest in scope, instructing men merely to refrain from standing in the way of progress (which in any case they can only delay, since the glorious outcome is predetermined).

This belief in God's role in history gives content to Priestley's idea of liberty and makes it something more than a negative desire for

freedom from restraint.<sup>41</sup> Man, alone of all created beings, possesses a mind of boundless comprehension, a mind capable of surveying not only the present but also the past and the future. At every instant a great variety of ideas are ready to crowd in upon the sensations of the moment, and they may so exalt the emotions as to render the mind wholly superior to physical circumstance:

Thus intellectual pleasures and pains, in many cases, wholly overpower all temporary sensations; whereby some men, of great and superior minds, enjoy a state of permanent and equable felicity, in a great measure independent of the uncertain accidents of life. In such minds the ideas of things, that are seen to be the cause and effect of one another, perfectly coalesce into one, and present but one common image. Thus all the ideas of evil absolutely vanish, in the idea of the greater good with which it is connected or of which it is productive.<sup>42</sup>

Presented so early in the Essay with so bright a prospect, we can be in little doubt that for Priestley the sole end of political activity must be the attainment of the sum of human happiness,

Of course, the arithmetic is still in progress, as we can see when we reflect upon the great improvements which have taken place in the history of the human race. This impressive progress is peculiar to our species ('No horse of this age seems to have any advantage over the individuals of this kind that lived many centuries ago') and it will continue for as long as our energies and interests are not dissipated but employed in concerted effort.<sup>43</sup> Our united strength will bring us more knowledge, and knowledge, according to the Baconian equation which Priestley was fond of quoting, is power:

nature, including both its materials. and its laws, will be more at our command; men will make their situation in this world abundantly more easy and comfortable; they will probably prolong their existence in it, and will grow daily more happy, each in himself, and more able (and, I believe, more disposed) to communicate happiness to others. Thus, whatever was the beginning

of this world, the end will be glorious and paradisaical, beyond what our imaginations can now conceive. Extravagant as some may suppose these views to be, I think I could show them to be fairly suggested by the true theory of human nature, and to arise from the natural course of human affairs. But for the present I waive this subject, the contemplation of which always makes me happy.<sup>44</sup>

Happy as the contemplation of this material prosperity may have made Priestley, it is difficult not to suspect that knowledge alone -, without power, longevity or comfort - would have been enough for him. After all, he believed that the chief blessing of the hereafter (when, presumably, all material needs will be catered for and longevity no longer a problem) would be the infinite opportunities it would afford for scientific and historical research. The growth of knowledge may do much to improve public health and welfare, but Priestley seems interested in such improvements chiefly because they may help to promote the growth of knowledge, for he was in no doubt as to the importance to science of material prosperity. A year or so before writing the Essay, Priestley had composed the sober but visionary preface to his history of electricity. Here too we are told that before us lie new worlds of knowledge, whose conquest will be so glorious as to eclipse even Newton's glory. Princes and merchants do nothing to bring about this intellectual millenium, though 'the patronage of the great' will certainly be necessary. But more important will be the mutual co-operation of the scientists of Europe, who should apportion the task amongst themselves, divide the labour and share the expense. Whether Priestley writes of progress in general terms, as in the Essay, or in more narrowly scientific terms, as here, he always emphasises its dependence on co-operation. And, he explains in the Essay, if there is to be co-operation, there must be social organisation: 'the great

instrument in the hand of divine providence' with which this happy state of affairs will be brought about is 'society, and, consequently, government.'<sup>45</sup>

This vision, which is at the heart of Priestley's politics, owes more to Francis Bacon than to John Locke. Like Bacon, Priestley was one of those millennially-minded radicals who, ignoring the past and overleaping the present, offer a beguiling panorama of the future. It may be an actual future, the inevitable outcome of God's plan of history, or it may be a possible future which will come to pass if human potentialities are realised. It may be a future known by divine inspiration, prophesied in Biblical texts or extrapolated from present trends. Priestley, ever the enemy of claims to inner illumination, relies upon the latter two sources of knowledge. His belief in the potential of science, his associationism and his determinism all help to shape his portrait of the future. His beliefs about the mechanics of associationism, determinism and scientific progress contribute to his ideas of how this vision of the future should regulate political conduct in the present. This is the role that scientific method has in his political thought. The millenium which is so shining a presence in the Essay is not a divine irruption into secular history but the working-out (under God's supervision) of processes already operating in that history.

We are told of this golden future several pages before we are told anything about a state of nature or an original contract. These familiar tools of the political philosopher's trade are commonly employed in a form of radical argument which is historical rather than

millennial and synthetic rather than analytic. Now, whatever Priestley may have thought about the value of analysis to the historian, sheer convenience is likely to incline the associationist, as well as the political philosopher, to synthetic explanation. As Hartley admits, every human passion, every human perception, is so intimately bound up with so many other passions and perceptions that analysis would be an extremely complex business; better to begin with a set of simple perceptions and then add whatever complexities may be necessary to explain the phenomena.<sup>46</sup> If it is extremely difficult to analyse the passions of a single human mind, how much more difficult must it be to analyse the affective structure of human society. And if, despairing of analysis, we set out to study society by the synthetic method, we will soon discover that this is a method with radical implications and that its radicalism is of a distinctly modern, neo-Hobbesian, variety.

Proceeding synthetically, the radical takes men and women in a state of nature, considered apart from any social endowments, as his first principles. He can then deduce what social effects ought to result from these causes, and his deduction is likely to proceed along the following familiar lines. Human beings, having been created free and equal, will surrender some of their freedom, and perhaps some of their equality, only if by so doing they can gain something that is either more valuable to them than unrestricted freedom and equality or a necessary prerequisite for the enjoyment of some measure of freedom and equality. This something is whatever may be gained by mutual co-operation, a pooling of resources and, consequently, a certain restriction of freedom. It may be some material benefit - something

that can be built only by team effort - or it may be, and in most accounts it is, something more fundamental: protection from assault and theft. (All these accounts depend upon an assumption which Hume makes explicit: that the state of nature is also a condition of material scarcity, for if nature supplied all our wants, there would be no need of private property and, hence, there would be neither jealousy nor any use for government, whose function is to remedy the effects of jealousy.<sup>47</sup>) Thus the radical accounts for the existence, not of society - for a mere love of company may be enough to account for that - but of civil society, with its powers of legislation and punishment and its participatory or representative government. Having done this, he can contrast his model with squalid reality, and then he can propose means whereby to close the gap between things as they are and things as they would be if reason (rather than prejudice, greed or whatever) had held the reins of history. This, indeed, is what Rousseau does: he expressly offers a description of the state of nature as philosophical fiction and then he advances a more historical account of the passage from this state to the actual present condition of society.<sup>48</sup>

There are strong traces of this mode of thought in Priestley's religious writings, as we shall see in the next chapter, and it is by no means absent from his political works either. However, when he actually begins constructing his synthesis he does so in rather a casual manner. He does, it is true, try to proceed in a more or less Lockean way: he asks his readers to imagine a group of people living, 'independent and unconnected', in a state of nature, 'exposed, without redress, to insults and wrongs of every kind ... too weak to procure themselves many

of the advantages, which they are sensible might easily be compassed by united strength', and he concludes that such a people might well decide to 'resign some part of their natural liberty, and submit their conduct to the direction of the community' in order to gain the advantages which unity alone can bring. But he does this without any very marked enthusiasm: 'for the sake of gaining clear ideas,' he says, somewhat half-heartedly, we must 'do what almost all political writers have done before.'<sup>49</sup> The business of drawing out the implications of man's actions in a state of nature, to which Locke devotes most of his Second Treatise, is conducted by Priestley in three pages of large type and wide margins.

The fact is that Priestley's enterprise is not quite the same as Locke's. The state-of-nature argument may be used, as Locke uses it, to explain the development of legitimate society; but if it can solve this problem, it can also be used to tackle another and related problem: that of determining the lawful extent of the government's authority. And it is this latter problem that Priestley, his attention focussed on the glorious future and on the roads by which it may be reached, is most interested. It is towards this question that he is anxious to hurry us.

He is not, though, uninterested in the origins of government, and in the Lectures on History (written before the Essay, though published long after it), he essays an explanation in the quasi-sociological style of the Abbe Turgot. It was Turgot's contention that human society had passed through several stages: from the earliest, when men lived as nomadic hunters, through the pastoral stage to the stage at which agricultural cultivation generated so much surplus that towns could

arise, along with 'trade, and all the useful arts and accomplishments' and, with them, the division of labour and social inequality.<sup>50</sup>

Priestley's account, though more informal, follows a similar course. He describes the various forms of government and then remarks that any of them would be preferable to no government at all:

Idleness, treachery, and cruelty, are predominant in all uncivilized countries, notwithstanding the boasts which the poets make of the golden age of mankind, before the erection of empires; and their vices and bad habits lose ground in proportion as mankind arrive at settled and regular forms of government. There is no borrowing in barbaric countries, says Montesquieu, but upon pledges; so little influence have ideas of property and a sense of honour over uncivilized people.

So the struggle out of barbarism is accompanied by, perhaps even propelled by, the growth of property: 'There is ... a natural connexion between government and ideas of property.'<sup>51</sup>

Philosophical analysis and conjectural history thus reach the same conclusion: that labour in conditions of scarcity makes government necessary and that the human faculty for co-operation makes government possible. Both assume a basic selfishness in human kind, but this offends neither Priestley's Pelagian theology nor his Lockean philosophy; it certainly does not conflict with the assumption that human beings come into the world innocent of knowledge and of vice. The twin principles of selfishness and sympathy, both prerequisites of human society, can be deduced from first principles as Hartley explained: 'Let Sensation generate Imagination, then will Sensation and Imagination together generate Ambition; Sensation, Imagination and Ambition, Self-Interest; Sensation, Imagination, Ambition, and Self-Interest, Sympathy. ...'<sup>52</sup> Priestley says nothing of this (perhaps taking it for granted),

but his 'independent and unconnected' people clearly possess not only sensation but also imagination, ambition and self-interest, because they are aware of 'the advantages, which ... might easily be compassed by united strength.' They possess sympathy too; as Priestley remarks in the Lectures on History, 'Man is social beyond any other animal.'<sup>53</sup> But in the Essay, having given to his aboriginal men and women these bare requisites for human society, he turns his attention immediately to the question that really interests him: to what degree will the preservation of these people's liberty be consistent with life in civil society?

If his answer is different from Locke's, it is because his mind moves in directions other than that of synthesis. His thought, more decidedly theological even than Locke's, moves not only backwards to an hypothetical state of nature, but also forwards to a prospective state of paradise. Locke, though he certainly believes that man is social by nature, is reluctant to accord anything more than a merely protective or umpiring function to that joint stock company which he calls political society.<sup>54</sup> Priestley too explains in his Lectures that government will enable a community both to police itself and to repel foreign invaders, and he adds that to seek for government some more positive purpose than this is tempting but dangerous: 'by aiming at too much positive advantage, great numbers may be deprived even of that negative advantage which they first proposed to themselves. ...'<sup>55</sup> However, in the Essay we discover that society, though it may have less than transcendent origins, certainly has transcendent purposes. And, though Priestley is cautious in seeking from government anything more than basic protection,

he is in no doubt that these purposes are to be effected by means of 'society, and, consequently, government.'

This strikingly easy elision from society to government might suggest that Priestley was one of those writers whom Tom Paine was later to castigate for having blurred or removed the important distinction between the two. The distinction, Paine claims, is in fact quite clear: 'Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wretchedness; the former promotes our happiness positively by uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices.'<sup>56</sup> Paine - one of the first of those terrible simplifiers who mistake ignorance for an uncluttered mind - always insisted that he had never read Locke: nonetheless his very negative view of government makes him a more faithful disciple of Locke than ever Priestley was. All three want minimal government, but Priestley is much more respectful than the other two of what government there is. He believes that government must be minimal not because synthetic investigation of the state of nature has brought him to this conclusion but because only a minimal government can properly serve both as man's instrument of self-preservation and as God's instrument of human improvement. As an instrument, it is more like an umbrella than a hammer: beneath its protective canopy, philosophers can explore God's universe and religious societies can offer rival interpretations of God's word; for this in the only way to truth and unanimity.

#### IV.

Two years before the publication of Priestley's Essay, the Reverend Dr. John Brown, whose thoughts on education had provoked it, died by his own hand. Not long before that, however, he had enjoyed great success as the author of the Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times; a very lively polemic in which he had sought the origins of 'our public Miscarriages' not in the actions of the nation's rulers but rather, as Montesquieu - 'the greatest of all political Writers' - advises, in 'the manners and Principles of its People'. These he found to be corrupt. The age, he says, is one not of 'abandoned Wickedness and Profligacy' but of 'vain, luxurious, and selfish EFFEMINACY.'<sup>57</sup>

Many circumstances have contributed to this regrettable state of affairs, from the Grand Tour ('premature and indigested Travel') to frivolous habits of reading, from the false delicacy of life in the capital to the malign effects of modern carpentry, which, by providing town houses with well-jointed windows and doors, has excluded from English life all invigorating drafts of cold northern air.<sup>58</sup> But the chief factor is the 'mistaken Tenderness and Care' with which young children are educated, and it was to this that Brown turned in 1765, when, finding that matters had grown worse, he published his Thoughts on Civil Liberty, on Licentiousness, and Faction. The infant mind, he says in this new work, is 'pregnant with a Variety of Passions'; it is the business of education to ensure that these are fixed on their proper objects and to imbue the child with 'public Spirit, or the Love of our

Country; the highest Passion that can sway the human Heart, considered as a permanent Foundation of true Liberty.'<sup>59</sup>

In speaking thus of patriotism, in urging the need for a rugged spirit of self-defence, in deploying a vocabulary in which 'corruption', 'degeneracy' and 'luxury' are key words, Brown places himself squarely in a very ancient tradition of political thought. It was born in the classical world, in the writings of Aristotle and Polybius, regenerated in the renaissance by certain Florentine authors of whom Machiavelli was the greatest, and transported to England in the seventeenth century. There it came to be associated with those radicals whom modern historians call the Commonwealthmen and who were to be found over the next hundred years among the enemies of the House of Stuart, the opposition to Robert Walpole, the friends of John Wilkes and the members of the Society for the Supporters of the Bill of Rights.<sup>60</sup> According to this tradition, generally known as 'republicanism' or 'civic humanism', man can find fulfilment only in the life of the citizen: the true sphere of human existence is not private but political. And if the end, or telos, of the citizen is the service of the republic, the telos of the republic is nothing but the preservation of itself in a condition of perfect stability; for change is corruption and history an enemy of the state. Any alteration in their mode of life which may disrupt the equality in which the citizens live, or, worse, seduce them from the pursuit of the common welfare to the pursuit of private good, is corruption. And of all things tending to corrupt, luxury is particularly to be feared: it enfeeble the citizenry, it diminishes their spirit of self-defence, inclining them to pay others to

fight rather than to fight for themselves. But luxury is, of course, the child of wealth, which may itself be born of the republican virtues of frugality and industry, so all republics are liable to run what one of Handel's librettists called 'the same shadowy round of fancied greatness': from virtue to wealth, from wealth to luxury, from luxury to corruption and from corruption to decline. However, corruption, once smelt out, may be repelled by a renewal of public spirit, such as that to which Brown called his fellow countrymen: the ways of luxury must be abandoned and public affairs must once again become the supreme concern of all.

By assuming that man is born not a blank slate but a political animal and by making the boundaries of the moral universe coincide with those of the state, classical republicanism provides almost as powerful a system of political legitimation as one could wish for; and by doing so in a way that is markedly secular, it circumvents whatever moral or epistemological problems may have been posed by the tumults of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This, indeed, is why it is worth comparing Brown to Priestley: they stand as representatives of two opposing traditions of English political thought, both of which have their origins in the search for the Godly magistrate.

For the people of the seventeenth century, magistracy had been part of the cosmic order, but in 1649, an anointed king was tried and beheaded, and traditional magistracy collapsed. God seemed to have withheld his word as to where authority lay and, as J.G.A. Pocock tells us, theorists were faced 'with the necessity of re-conceptualising it from its foundations.'<sup>61</sup> One might set about this task, without making

any mention of a state of nature, by assuming that men are essentially political animals, <sup>which</sup> ~~This~~ is what James Harrington did in his Oceana, published in 1656.

On the other hand, one might try to show how possessions and rights could have been acquired by individuals who had been set first in a state of nature. As applied by Thomas Hobbes in his Leviathan (published six years before Harrington's book), this method requires far-reaching, and very grim, assumptions about human nature, and it is more radical than Harrington's method in that it concerns itself with what went on before any polis existed. Its appeal to a lover of objectivity like Priestley is clear: emerging from a tradition that is juristic rather than political, it defines the citizen by whatever rights he may have acquired rather than by the virtues which he may have to exercise in order to fulfil his telos as man; and though the claim to rights may be contested, all argument must be conducted coram populo, leaving discussion of ultimate ends to the private and the inferential.

But within this juristic tradition problems may arise which it seems ill-equipped to tackle. Priestley, for example, naturally unable to embrace Hobbes' authoritarianism, is faced with the difficulty of reconciling freedom of conscience with the need to keep the political show on the road. Knowledge, he believes, is indivisible; to deny liberty of conscience in one area of thought is to prevent that free play of the mind which is necessary if truth is to be sought anywhere else. A religious establishment, even one that tolerates dissent, necessarily shackles the seeker after truth and so frustrates the

ultimate purpose of government, which can be achieved only by experimentation. But how is an untutored mind, one that has as yet received few associations, to assess its experiments? Reason cannot be relied upon here, because reason - as Priestley's philosophy implies, though he fails to acknowledge the fact - is incapable of activity until moved by the affections; and 'the true theory of human affections' teaches that they take their egoistic rise from the pleasurable sensations derived from favours received.<sup>62</sup> There is no question but that a mind so constituted may easily be corrupted in infancy by the gaudy blandishments of vice, nor can it be doubted that minds corrupted in this way make at best for unreliable citizens. But were the state to assert its interest in the case by interfering in the instruction of its potential citizens, it would threaten ruin to itself by restricting freedom of education. This is a vicious circle from which only Divine Providence, working through the laws of necessity, can rescue us; but that promise of rescue lies in a future too indefinitely removed to be consoling to minds less philosophical than Priestley's.

If, however, man's moral destiny lies wholly within the state, then a system of education that inculcates good citizenship is not only allowable but morally imperative. Reason's new and humble status will represent no threat to such a system. Indeed, Brown is able to speak quite openly of it:

they are superficially informed of the Frame and Tenor of the human Mind, who think that mere Reason (as it exists in Man) is more than a Power of discerning and chusing the properist Means for attaining his desired Ends, whether these Ends be Good or Evil. The Passions, pre-established habits, and infused Principles of the Soul are the universal Motions to human Action. Where these point not to an End desired, reason may indolently

exercise its Eyes; but can never find nor create an Object, of Force sufficient to the Powers of the Soul and Body in Motion.<sup>63</sup>

So the educational policies which Brown advocates will not violate the freedom of the infant mind; they will merely divert it to the best ends.

The attraction of classical republicanism lies in its ability to solve - or at least to avoid - problems like these, to provide some measure of moral and political certainty even in a secular world. Priestley responds to the challenge it poses by devoting much of his Essay to a defence of educational freedom (and what he says of state education may be applied, mutatis mutandis, to state religion). However, republican ideas pervaded the thinking of so many educated men - Handel even set some of them to music in his oratorio Belshazzar - that it would be surprising if elements of them were not to be found in Priestley's work. For example, he spoke much of corruption, in a religious and sometimes in a political context; and, as we have seen, he endorsed the programme of political reform associated with the Commonwealthmen - more frequent election, the expulsion of placemen from Parliament, opposition to the influence of the court and the use of military power - and he feared, as they feared, for liberty of the press and for the Bill of Rights. But, equally, there is much in his political thought that seems to distance him from the republican tradition. He was suspicious of Machiavelli, whose 'very name conveys the idea of baseness and villainy as a politician', and he regarded Harrington as a mere utopian, ignorant of human nature and society.<sup>64</sup> Neither, as we saw in an earlier chapter, did he nurse longings for the Anglo-Saxon constitution (an English twist on republican doctrine was to identify the ideal republic not only with a classical but also with a

'Gothic' or Anglo-Saxon past of landowning warriors). Nor did he allow the cycle of corruption more than a very limited role in his thought. More than this, though, the very tenor of that thought - individualistic, optimistic, on the side of history - seems to harmonise ill with civic humanism's sombre themes.

But civic humanism is not a regiment, such that one either is or is not a member of it, and Pocock, its most influential historian, is always careful (the idea is essential to his thought) to speak not of causes to be joined or of dogmas to be defended but of languages and paradigms. Two languages may, of course, be incompatible in as much as a string of words and constructions drawn eclectically from both may not be a well-formed sentence in either, but it is still possible to be bilingual. It is even possible to employ the phrases of one language in the sentences of another.<sup>65</sup> So we need not suppose that Priestley intends either irony or argumentum ad hominem when he asserts that the balance of the constitution will be preserved only if every man educates his children in his own way and that Brown's proposals threaten this balance. The Aristotelian or Polybian ideal of a mixed constitution - balancing elements of monarchy, of aristocracy and of democracy - was one of those aspects of republican thought that had become a commonplace, for it was believed that this ideal was embodied in the British ~~condition's~~ <sup>constitution's</sup> balance of King, Lords and Commons. But which of these three, asks Priestley, could be entrusted with the sort of educational system that Brown advocates? His system would not have the effect intended unless it were 'universal and uniform'; it would not be universal and uniform unless it were 'conducted by one set of men'; but

in a mixed constitution, composed 'of regal, aristocratical, and democratical power', there is no one set of men who so respect every part of the constitution that they could be entrusted with the care of young minds.<sup>66</sup>

In his fears for the balance of the constitution and his belief that great power will always be abused, Priestley is typical of his age, though his admiration for the theory of a mixed government is considerably greater than his enthusiasm for the actual practice of contemporary British politics.<sup>67</sup> This is apparent from the Lectures on History, in which he speaks of Britain's much-lauded balance in terms that are cool and cautious: 'We are not ... to be governed by names, but by things,' and the nature of things is this: Kings and Lords have little direct power - and that would be lost if they tried to use it against the people - but they have much influence, both direct and indirect, upon the Commons.<sup>68</sup> A better form of government would be one in which the three interests - the One, the Few and the Many - truly balanced each other; a mere duality may produce imbalance, for one interest may secure a permanent advantage over the other, but a trinity is likely to preserve its equilibrium, since one of the three may always prefer to remain independent of the others and to shift its weight as advantage dictates. But, republican though all this may appear to be, the corollary that Priestley draws from it seems to reveal a train of thought that is quite unrepublican: 'it may be asserted, that the more distinct interests there are in a state, the easier it will be to preserve the balance of power with it.'<sup>69</sup> The republican advocates a balanced polity because each of the three interests which comprise it

will represent one of the three principles of government. Priestley, on the other hand, is concerned not with the balance of principles but with the multiplication of powers: if three interests are better than two, four would better than three, and so on. This is not republican: it is the pluralism of a minority which would feel safer if everybody were in a minority. It is also the pluralism of the rationalist, who maintains that truth will emerge from the experimental clash of interests.

This pluralism is Priestley's reason for valuing civil liberty so highly and for exalting it above that other form of liberty from which, he explains in the Essay, it must be distinguished: 'Political liberty, I would say, consists in the power, which the members of the state reserve to themselves, of arriving at the public offices, or at least of having votes in the nomination of those who fill them: and I would chuse to call civil liberty that power over their own actions, which the members of the state reserve to themselves, and which their officers must not infringe.'<sup>70</sup> Though Priestley describes this distinction as an innovation, it by no means originated with him: we find it, or something like it, at least as early as the fifteenth century, in the works of the Italian civic humanists. But what for them and for their ideological descendants was true liberty is for Priestley the less important of the two kinds; for him political liberty is valuable chiefly because it is 'the only sure guard of civil liberty', and it is civil liberty which most engrosses his attention.<sup>71</sup>

The two concepts of liberty arise in very different universes of discourse. Political liberty is fitted best to a universe in which the limits of conceivable human action are the frontiers of the state; a

state thought of as an entity out of time, or, at least, as an entity which must strive to be timeless against the corruptions of history. Civil liberty, on the other hand, is a product of historical thought, of thought about a time (real or imaginary) before the state, when all men were completely free and each incursion on their freedom had to justify itself by the canons of moral, rather than political, legitimacy. If, Priestley argues, every government is in its origins 'an equal republic', then no man will delegate his natural rights except 'for the more easy management of public affairs and in order to make the more effectual provision for the happiness of the whole.' In other words, civil right is not something which the state allows the citizen; it is something which the individual, in becoming a citizen, cedes in part to the state so as to achieve some political benefit, and loyalty may quite properly be withdrawn if the state reneges on its debt to its moral creditor, the citizen.<sup>72</sup> There need be little doubt when this has happened, because there is no doubt as to why loyalty was originally given: 'the good and happiness of ... the majority of the members of any state is the great standard by which everything relating to that state must finally be determined.'<sup>73</sup>

How far from republican thought is this assertion of natural right against overweening government will become apparent if we turn to what Brown has to say about civil liberty. He distinguishes it not from political but from natural liberty; and natural liberty, he says, belongs to the state of nature, a savage state in which brutal human appetite encounters no restraint. This is a condition worse than that of animals, because it is contrary to nature: man is a being formed for

society, endowed with potentialities that can be realised only under the restraint which society imposes. True liberty is to be had only in society; it is not a residuum of the liberty exercised in a pre-social condition. There may be such a residuum, but in society it acquires a new name: 'an unlimited Indulgence of Appetite, which in the savage State is called natural Liberty, in the social State is stiled Licentiousness', and licentiousness is one of those great corruptions which tend to the destruction of the state. What then is true liberty? Brown's definition concedes very little to the right of private judgement: it is 'a certain System of Manners and principles, mutually supporting each other, and pervading the whole Community. ...'<sup>74</sup>

Here lies the basic distinction between Brown's world of virtue and Priestley's world of rights. Law, which is universal and not merely civic, is concerned with what may be distributed, and as Pocock remarks, 'you cannot distribute a telos, only the means to it; virtue cannot therefore be reduced to a matter of right.'<sup>75</sup> The means to a telos is, of course, just what Priestley wants to distribute, and this is not merely a matter of apportioning rights to individuals nor of curtailing the pride of governments: if we are to enjoy that paradisaical condition which is our telos in as much as it is what the associative mechanisms of the mind will bring us to, then we must rely both on individual genius and on concerted effort. Priestley is in no doubt as to the importance of individual virtue to the successful operation of government, but, for him, the exercise of civic virtue is not itself the fulfilment of the human telos; it is merely a means to a divine end,

just as government is an means, an instrument in the hands of providence.

Of course, corrupt public morals may stand in the way of this divine end, just as they may stand in the way of the civic ends which Brown describes. Priestley, who has filled his sermons with observations on the ill effects of bad society on the Christian mind, knows this as well as Brown does, and this awareness gives his philosophy of education an initial similarity to Brown's. Human nature, he explains in the Miscellaneous Observations Concerning Education which he published in 1778, is so constituted that it will adapt itself to any circumstances in which it is placed; so nature is the best of all tutors. She, however, gives her lessons at random, and human life is short. Besides, the world, as opposed to nature, man's handiwork as opposed to God's, is not at all a good tutor; it will neither punish irregularity nor encourage virtue. Consequently, great care must be taken by educators to protect their charges from the contagion of vice in this 'foolish and corrupt age'.<sup>76</sup> This is all very like Brown and it soon becomes more so, for Priestley goes on to condemn as mistaken the idea that children should be taught nothing <sup>but</sup> ~~by~~ what they can understand. Divine Providence, he knows, proceeds in a quite different way: it shows us things long before we can appreciate what they are or what they have to teach us, and the labour of discovering their true significance greatly enhances their value to us. So it should be with children: they should be accustomed first 'to the outward forms' of religion, of etiquette and respect, thus acquiring a 'mechanical habit'

which will prepare the way, as nothing else could have done, for 'a rational knowledge and practice.'<sup>77</sup>

Like Brown, Priestley pauses to consider whether this is not inculcating truth 'by such a kind of mechanical prejudice as would enforce the belief of any thing,' and, like Brown, he decides that it is not. The education of children can only take the form of 'prejudicing them in favour of our own opinions and practice' before they are capable of rational conviction. Reward and punishment can be the only educators.<sup>78</sup> But the teacher, though he performs a task which Providence has delegated to him, must not seek to usurp that divine authority. It is not he but Providence who is the chief protagonist of the Essay, where it is explained that Providence must continue to work, as it has always worked, through the mechanism of associations. And if we withhold our Brownian spanner from the works, this mechanism will bring good out of evil just as it brought letters and arts out of the turmoil of Athenian life. Better this turmoil than the stagnation of John Brown's much-admired Sparta. This is a theme strikingly illustrated by British history, which reveals ~~that~~<sup>that</sup> Providence, having great things in store for the British people, has conducted them through successive convulsions and changes out of that condition of pagan ignorance in which they surely would have remained if some Druidical Dr. Brown had had his way. Under the supervision of Providence, societies learn, just as children learn, in the school of experience, self-tuition and hard knocks. Perhaps it may be possible to experiment over-boldly, but acceleration is never as dangerous as too much use of the snaffle and the curb.<sup>79</sup>

It is here, rather than when he talks of the happiness of the greatest number, that Priestley seems to anticipate the Utilitarians, and it is John Stuart Mill whom he most resembles, not Bentham. Like Mill he offers a sober celebration of variety and eccentricity, of individual genius and 'experiments in living.'<sup>80</sup> Only if education is conducted with 'unbounded liberty, and even caprice', can human nature be brought to perfection. A uniform system of education will produce a dull consistency among men and women, but 'new, and seemingly irregular methods' will give us at least a chance of 'something extraordinary and uncommonly great'. Of course, they may also give us something merely odd, but the world is so various a place that there is no lack in it of room for eccentric genius.<sup>81</sup>

V.

It is hardly surprising that Priestley, writing as he does of an educational free market, should regret the parliamentary restraints under which manufacturing has laboured and hope that education will not suffer the same impositions.<sup>82</sup> The point is not that education may be subsumed under an economic model, but that the human activities of learning, of making things and of exchanging them are all to be seen as part of one great plan of history. The plan itself tells us, of course, that all will be well if teachers, manufacturers and merchants are left to their own devices, but within it is a psychological theory which explains how commerce and education may be of mutual benefit to each other.

Brown presents things in a very different light. Commerce, or 'regulated selfishness' - though innocent enough, and even useful, in its early stages - will ultimately have disastrous effects: avarice, luxury, excessive refinement and loss of principle. He has a psychological theory to account for this, and indeed for the whole turn of the cycle from industry to corruption: 'The Passion for Money, being founded, not in Sense, but Imagination, admits of no Satiety, like those which are called the natural Passions.'<sup>83</sup> It is therefore able to crowd out all those other passions, so that trading nations are always ruled by industry and avarice. Exorbitant property, ever unfavourable to civil liberty, always produces licentiousness and faction. So it is in the interests of even the rich, and 'tis certainly the general Interest of a free Community', that there be some legal limit to individual wealth.<sup>84</sup>

Republican thought detected other perils, as well as these, in commercial life. The ancient polis was composed of equal and independent freeholders. Each citizen was at once senator, soldier, father, farmer - and, it was sometimes pointed out, slaveholder - but the citizen of a commercial state was usually one thing only; he paid others to fight for him, thus admitting that instrument of tyranny, a standing army. Worse, his property was in many cases not solid, real property, the real estate of the freeholder, but mere credit; a bundle of promissory notes whose value depended upon the future stability of government and, consequently, upon something which, properly speaking, did not as yet exist. The sovereign advantage enjoyed by the freeholder in land was his independence: the very ground on which he stood gave a

material foundation to that personal autonomy without which he could not be a good citizen. The merchant, on the other hand, depended for his subsistence upon his relations with others, and these relations were not the political relations of citizen with citizen; they were purely instrumental, founded upon fantasy and passion. To this, however, the merchant, or those who spoke for him, could reply with an alternative psychology more suited to a mobile commercial society. It was necessary for them merely to admit what at first they found it difficult to admit: that, as Pocock puts it, 'passion, opinion, and imagination were indeed the motors of human behaviour and the sources of human cognition.'<sup>85</sup>

Of course, Priestley - who in his own work had raised opinio to a status close to that of scientia - had no difficulty in admitting any of this. Indeed, when he turns to the subject in the Lectures on History, he writes as one who has a cause to champion. He acknowledges the widespread belief 'that living in luxury tends to make men effeminate and cowardly', but not before pointing out that the conveniences of life make people happy and that luxury may be favourable to liberty, for when men acquire property they begin to desire equal laws that will help them to preserve it.<sup>86</sup> Instead of regarding luxury, even the luxury of a well-joined window frame, as the misbegotten child of industry, he suggests that a desire for ornament ('that innocent and really useful branch of luxury') actually promotes habits of industry. For this reason the vanity of the Frenchman is preferable to the pride of the Spaniard; the one conduces to industry, the other to idleness.<sup>87</sup>

But it is commerce, and not merely the luxury which it makes possible, that needs to be defended: it needs to be defended against the

republican belief that it is irreconcilable with virtue because it is inimical to moral autonomy. In Brown's work this belief is embodied in a psychological argument purporting to show that commerce not only begins in selfishness but ends there as well. According to Brown, in commercial states avarice represents wealth as the chief good; in mixed states (those founded on agriculture as well as commerce), effeminacy represents pleasure as the chief good. 'These Delusions,' he says, 'create a new Train of Wants, Fears, Hopes, and Wishes: All these terminating in selfish Regard, naturally destroy every Effort of generous and public Principle.'<sup>88</sup> This is bad enough, but there are other reasons for being suspicious of commerce, and Brown draws attention to them when he speaks contemptuously of those who will pay for an army but not fight in one.<sup>89</sup> He was not alone in his fears; as many saw it, commerce was dangerous because it allowed not merely luxury but also choice, and choice made for specialisation, which led to corruption. Priestley knew of this possibility but it did not much trouble him. Having read of the division of labour in the Wealth of Nations, he thought specialisation in industry very conducive to efficiency and, though he sometimes speaks in rather republican terms of the dangers of specialisation, he seems to take it for granted in what he has to say about one of the greatest benefits to be derived <sup>from</sup> ~~from~~ commerce.<sup>90</sup>

That benefit is the growth and diffusion of political knowledge and of the other useful sciences. And, like all the benefits that derive from commerce, this knowledge is particularly prevalent amongst the trading classes. Indeed, Priestley's description of them as 'the

middle classes of life' (a use of the term which considerably antedates the earliest recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary) is itself significant. Being in the middle, these good people are free alike from 'fear of want' and the distracting idleness of wealth; they are not only happier and more virtuous than the upper classes but more polite too, for the more time people spend in the company of their equals, the more they will learn to accommodate themselves to others.<sup>91</sup> The life of the small businessman is, indeed, not without its dangers - 'buying and selling in a small way ... is apt to lead to mean tricks' - but the merchant is a princely figure: 'as by his traffic he connects distant countries, conveying to each the peculiar produce of the rest, he is, in an eminent degree, the benefactor of his species; he has many opportunities of enlarging and improving his mind; and, in fact, many merchants do certainly, together with great opulence, acquire the generosity of princes, and are foremost in all public benevolent undertakings.'<sup>92</sup> So beneficent, in fact, are the effects of commerce, and so complex its operations, that on no account ('as Dr. Smith justly observes') should kings and ministers seek to interfere with what they cannot understand.<sup>93</sup>

There are traces here of the theory, very popular at the time, that commerce arises not when the passions are forceably tamed but when passion is opposed to passion or to interest. The idea was that men engaging in commerce had to restrain their destructive passions (ambition, the lust for power or for sex) in order to pursue the material interests which were born of their acquisitive passions. Thus it was that commerce became, in Montesquieu's influential phrase, 'le

doux commerce', an activity which, by bridling men's passions, softened their conduct. Priestley, who knew his Montesquieu, speaks of commerce in a similar way: it takes its rise from the union of human genius with that 'endless craving, to which the nature of man is subject,' but, by bringing us 'into closer and more extensive connexions with our own species,' it enlarges our minds and cures our prejudice.<sup>94</sup>

Moreover, the causal connection between the growth of commerce and the growth of knowledge does not operate in one direction only. Rather, commerce is joined to knowledge, knowledge to peace, and peace to commerce in a circle of amiable symbioses. Thus we learn from Priestley that knowledge is the product of economic surplus, for as wealth accumulates, the economically-unproductive classes will increase in size, and so, consequently, will the number of those whose 'leisure for speculation' allows them to inquire into the mechanism of the society in which they live. Naturally, they will strive to ensure that their treasure is well spent on government, defence, religion and the care of the sick, and, it may be hoped, they will know that the true interest of a commercial nation lies in peace.<sup>95</sup> And peace, born of mercantile self-interest, makes possible more than one sort of commerce, for 'nothing is so favourable to the rise and progress of learning and the arts as a number of neighbouring independent states, connected by commerce and policy.'<sup>96</sup>

The point is not simply that knowledge reveals to nations that their true self-interest lies in peaceable trade. It is also that the filaments of commerce are so many and so subtle that those engaged in it, whether nations or individuals, find themselves bound to each other

by countless ties of affection and interest. The associationist scheme of things described by Hartley has a place and a name for these ties: they are the sympathetic affections, generated, Hartley explains, out of sensation by way of imagination, ambition and self-interest. They cause both pleasures and pains - for as we may sympathetically rejoice or grieve at the happiness of others, so we may rejoice or grieve at their misery - and among their pleasures 'is Sociality, or the Pleasure which we take in the mere Company and Conversation of Others, particularly of our friends and Acquaintances, and which is attended with mutual Affability, Complaisance and Candour.' We would expect this sociality to engender politeness, and for Hartley it probably does (since in the world of associationism few things are unconnected with each other), but, more strikingly, Hartley also believes that politeness engenders sociality; the rules of good manners demand obedience even when they do not meet with internal assent, but polite behaviour will at last, thanks to the machinery of associations, beget polite feelings.<sup>97</sup> In this way associationism can account for the softening effects of commerce: if business is to be carried on, then men and nations must at least behave politely to each other, and if they behave politely, they will come to feel politely. This being so, it is not surprising that the mercantile classes should be so polite, nor that the ancient republics, which knew little of commerce, should have been so lacking in this quality.

Politeness is important to Priestley, for he believes that no society can be happy without it, and so is the knowledge of politeness, for he believes also that no society can be polite unless it knows what politeness is:

True politeness is the art of seeming to be habitually influenced by those virtues and good dispositions of mind which must contribute to the ease and the pleasure of those we converse with. And wherever nature has given the mind a propensity to any vice, or any quality disagreeable to others, refined good-breeding has taught them to throw the bias on the opposite side, and to preserve the appearance of sentiments quite contrary to those they are naturally inclined to.<sup>98</sup>

The suggestion here is that politeness, consistent with what Hartley says on the subject, is not a matter of moral virtue or sincerity but a skill learned in social intercourse. Republicans, unfortunately, have little opportunity of perfecting their social skills. Priestley knew of the importance of virtue to republics, but when he came to consider politeness, he found it conspicuously absent from the antique world: 'The haughty republican, who is constantly engages in a fierce contention for his own prerogatives, is not likely to acquire a habit of condescension to others. ...'<sup>99</sup> What really matters here is not the political or economic equality of the republics' citizens but the moral autonomy without which they cannot practice the virtue demanded of them by the state. That autonomy is best preserved if the citizen - be he Greek, Roman or Anglo-Saxon - is a freeholder in land, for then his property will be such as to involve him in a minimum number of transactions with others.<sup>100</sup> Obviously, then, his condition has nothing to do with the sociable equality enjoyed by the middling sort in a trading nation. This is why Priestley sees the republican as a haughty, jealous figure, and also why he sees any form of life, whether courtly or commercial, in which the individual is brought into significant contact with others as more conducive to politeness than life in the polis. He seems to have believed (as Daniel Defoe had believed before him) that a society without the specialisation that commerce encouraged.

a society founded on military tenure, was a realm of barbarism and anarchy. He describes the chivalric heroism of the 'Gothic' freeholder as a virtue which would be useless in a well-regulated society, and he depicts the decline of the feudal system as the rise of order out of chaos.<sup>101</sup>

Others took a similarly disenchanted view of the antique world. Hume, Montesquieu and Gibbon, and after them the political economists of Scotland, agreed that the liberty and equality of republican society engendered a certain gracelessness and were unfriendly to the polite arts. It was proper, they declared, that the citizen take advantage of what a market economy with its division of labour had to offer, that he pay specialists to defend and to govern him, so allowing himself leisure for the polite conversation and cultivated pursuits of which antiquity knew nothing. Here, the intellectuals of Edinburgh and Glasgow found a model in the image of polite society, urban and urbane, which Joseph Addison had described in London.<sup>102</sup> During the first two decades of the century, Addison had used the pages of the Spectator to describe the club of which his eponymous narrator was a member. Here the country squire, the rich merchant, the soldier, the lawyer and the clergyman could all meet and talk together freely on terms of equality. It was a microcosm of a world which did not yet exist but which might come to be: an orderly, tolerant society in which man could realise himself as the sociable animal that he truly was.<sup>103</sup> Addison's ideal was middle-class and mercantile, but he rejected Defoe's naked, buccaneering picture of capitalism in favour of something very close to what we later find in Priestley's work. Trade, even trade in what is merely 'convenient and

ornamental', smooths down the rough edges of English provincialism, making Englishmen 'kind, benevolent, and open-hearted to their fellow-creatures.'<sup>104</sup> In short, it makes them candid, in the full eighteenth-century sense of the term.

What Mr. Spectator and his friends achieved in their club, Priestley (who admired Addison's work) sought to achieve by correspondence. In 1769 he founded the Theological Repository, a journal 'Consisting of Original Essays, Hints, Queries, &c. calculated to promote Religious Knowledge.' He explained in his introduction to the first number that the best way of promoting such knowledge was to promote the communication of ideas; and, in order that the range of available ideas be as wide as possible, the pages of the Repository would, he went on, be open 'not only to all denominations of Christians, but to persons who disbelieve Christianity and revelation in general.' Christians were to be encouraged to publish objections to their own faith, for everything was to be open to examination and all arguments were to be treated with 'candour and respect.'<sup>105</sup> It was a bold concept, assuming as it did a national constituency of the like-minded and the candid, and Priestley celebrated it by displaying on the title page of his first number an epigraph from the Epistles of Horace:

... si quid novisti rectius istis  
Candidus imperti ...

These lines - which a contemporary translator rendered as, 'If you know any maxims better than these, impart them with your usual candour ...' - seem to have meant a good deal to educated men in the earlier part of the century: Pope wrote an imitation of the epistle in which they

appear, and he used the lines themselves as epigraph to his Essay on Criticism; Lord Chesterfield quoted them in three of his letters; Fielding quoted them in his journalism; Steele used them as epigraph to an issue of the Tatler and Addison as epigraph to an issue of the Spectator.<sup>106</sup> There is something poignant in this, particularly in Priestley's use of lines which Addison also had employed; for even as he wrote, the candid society which Addison had evoked in the Spectator, and which he had tried to invoke by means of the Repository, was slipping irrevocably from the realm of the possible. The year 1763 may serve symbolically as the turning point, for it was in that year that the Reverend Charles Churchill published his Epistle to William Hogarth.

In Churchill's eyes, Hogarth's crime was to publish a malicious caricature of John Wilkes's eminently-caricaturable features, sketched whilst the Court of Common Pleas was restoring him to liberty. Virtues like Wilkes's, says Churchill, seldom go unpunished; but then, after fifty-two lines, the flow of his indignation is checked:

CANDOUR, who with the charity of Paul,  
Still thinks the best, when'er she thinks at all,  
With the sweet milk of human kindness bless'd  
The furious ardour of my zeal repress'd.<sup>107</sup>

Candour urges the poet to abandon his satire and to follow 'soul-soothing PANEGYRIC's flow'ry way'. But the poet will have none of this:

When Justice bids me on, shall I delay  
Because insipid CANDOUR bars my way?  
When she, of all alike the puling friend,  
Would disappoint my Satire's noblest end,  
When she to villains would a sanction give,  
And shelter those who are not fit to live,  
When she would screen the guilty from a blush  
And bids me spare whom Reason bids me crush,

All leagues with CANDOUR proudly I resign;  
She cannot be for Honour's turn, nor mine.

Candour, 'cold monster', though an 'equal-blooded judge', is not just. She is 'half foe, half friend', not merely to Churchill but to everyone. She gives to all more or less than their due, and so cannot be a true friend because she cannot be a true enemy.<sup>108</sup>

Of course, Churchill cannot have been the first person in eighteenth-century England to be possessed by an honest rage which was not to be checked by the voice of moderation. He is distinctive, however, in finding it necessary to clear candour from his path before giving vent to his rage. The reason for this - the reason, that it, which the poem offers us - is that he had been provoked into speech by the threat of ruin to the nation's liberties and to 'that GREAT CHARTER, which our fathers bought with their best blood. ...' So great is his antipathy to candour that even when he does take notice of his victim's good points, he describes himself as acting not candidly but justly, for it is justice who,

... with equal course bids Satire flow,  
And loves the Virtue of her greatest foe.<sup>109</sup>

Of course, justice implies more than the lazy toleration of conflicting opinions: it also implies judgement between them. And, though the Epistle to William Hogarth was extreme, though candour had never been what Churchill represents it as being, it is worth asking why it was that a virtue which was so eminently the virtue of polite conversation could now be made to seem so insipid.<sup>110</sup>

The function of candour in establishing a bridge between strangers may be expected to recommend it to all but the most isolationist of Dissenters. However, its appeal to those who called themselves Rational Dissenters surely lay also in its impersonality, in the fact that candour and sincerity were not the same thing. The old Puritans put their trust in those who could speak sincerely of the motions of the spirit within their hearts; the new Rational Dissenters, trusting to more objective criteria of religious authenticity, had less need of sincerity and its manifestations than of forms of behaviour that would enable people to deal honestly with each other without any spiritual interrogation. To move to their world of candour from the world of sincerity is to divert one's gaze from what people are and what they feel to what they say and what they do.<sup>111</sup> This being so, any alteration in the rhetorical atmosphere which pushes personality to the fore in public events is likely to have the most damaging effect on candour. Such a change was wrought by Churchill's friend John Wilkes, and Churchill's poem is a symptom of that change. Wilkes may not have been the first figure in English political life to derive his power from the magnetism of his personality (according to Plumb, he was just beaten to the post by the elder Pitt), but there was something strikingly new in the breadth and nature of his appeal.<sup>112</sup> The common people, artisans and labourers, felt that he was their friend and equal. His cause, he told them was their cause and responsibility for its success lay with them, even the humblest of them. Never had an English politician appealed so personally to so many people. As Brewer remarks, Wilkes's aspirations may not have been radical but his methods were.<sup>113</sup>

It was at the height of the Wilkes affair that Edmund Burke condemned as cant the popular motto of 'not men, but measures', and a couple of years later, Junius, pseudonymous writer of letters to the press and scourge of the ministry, spoke of it in very similar terms. He called it 'the common cant of affected moderation', adding that, 'such gentle censure is not fitted to the present, degenerate state of society.'<sup>114</sup> In earlier times character had mattered only in so far as it might lead a man to support particular policies. Now, however, policy was seen to be embodied in character: Wilkes embodied liberty, his enemies embodied tyranny. 'An assassination of their character sufficed to delegitimize the measures with which their names were associated,' writes Richard Sennett. 'The very basis of a public gesture was therefore erased: public speeches of both friends and enemy did not signify of themselves; they were only guides to the character of the speaker.'<sup>115</sup> So Churchill readily joins the mob in coupling the names of Wilkes and liberty, and upon Wilkes's enemy Hogarth, vain lackey of the tyrant, he heaps the most personal abuse.<sup>116</sup>

In such a climate, it was difficult to play the Addisonian censor, sociable though high-minded, just though forbearing, but that is what Priestley wanted his fellows Dissenters to do. He reminded them in a couple of sermons that they must live for others and not for themselves, and in the preface to one of these sermons he invoked, 'Dr. Hartley's Theory of the Human Affections.'<sup>117</sup> Associationism explains to us why it is that the creator has appointed that all our appetites and desires should point to something beyond themselves; for by this means he has insured the 'mutual connexion, dependence and harmony' of his works.

There can be no pleasure in solitude - all our passions, whether gloomy or cheerful, are contagious - and daily, as man advances 'to general happiness', the connections between men grown more numerous.<sup>118</sup> In a later sermon, he explains how such obligations are to be discharged: Christians owe to all their sympathy and charity, but they must also, 'according to their several stations in life', labour to suppress vice and to advance virtue and religion. From this duty to advise and to set a good example, in the hostile world as well as in the meeting house, not even 'the most ignorant, poor and necessitous' are exempt.<sup>119</sup>

It was a a heavy duty to lay upon a set of religious outcasts. Years before, Addison, by placing his own surrogate, Mr. Spectator, at the centre of a group of individuals who, though very disparate, were all members of the same club, had been able to give an earnest both of his forbearance and of theirs. But now it was becoming increasingly difficult to hate the sin while loving the sinner - in politics at least, sin and sinner were close to being one - and amidst such difficulties the spirit of candour began to grow faint.

Nonetheless, it would not be easy for Rational Dissenters to abandon the idea of candour, and they never really did so, though the last three decades of the century saw an alteration of the language in which they sought reform. In the early seventies, many of them, surveying the political scene, found reason for optimism when they saw, or thought they saw, what Andrew Kippis described as, 'a generous prince of the Brunswick line: a seemingly equitable administration: moderate and wise members of both houses: candid bishops: a liberal spirit in all ranks of men and Toleration lifting her voice loudly in Europe.'<sup>120</sup> As

things stood, English toleration was embodied in the Toleration Act of 1689; which, however, exempted from prosecution only those Dissenters who would abjure the doctrine of transubstantiation and subscribe to most of the Articles of the Church of England, including the trinitarian creeds. It thus excluded from its provisions all Roman Catholics, deists, atheists and 'blasphemers of the Trinity'; the Establishment continued to assume authority over matters spiritual, allowing the citizen a certain freedom of worship but not recognising any right to that freedom.<sup>121</sup> But it was the language of candour, rather than the language of rights, that a group of metropolitan Rational Dissenters spoke when, in 1772, they sought repeal of the trinitarian articles of the Act. Their failure - the bill for their relief was passed by the Commons in 1773 but thrown out by the Lords - was doubly disillusioning. In the first place, it appeared to show that candour was not to be looked for in bishops or ministers of state. In the second place, and perhaps more importantly, it showed them that even their fellow Dissenters were not to be trusted; for the one thing that had guaranteed their failure had been a counter-petition from provincial Dissenters - Calvinists and trinitarians - who resented this attempt of urban Socinians to speak as though theirs was the voice of all Dissent.

Clearly, then, the appeal to candour was no longer going to be very useful; it struck no responsive chord in the Establishment's heart and, in any case, there was little use in asking them to listen candidly to the pleas of Dissent when Dissent was conspicuously not united on the matter. So it is easy to suppose that it must have been about this time that the language of the universal rights of man began to seem very

attractive to Rational Dissent. By employing the language of natural rights, they could appeal not to the generosity of those in power but to their moral intelligence and their consciences. They would not be asking for something to be granted them: they would be asking for recognition that they already possessed it. And that recognition need not be swayed by numbers, so any amount of counter-petitions by provincial Dissenters would not (according to the presuppositions of this doctrine) affect the rights of the case.<sup>122</sup>

Even before the failure of 1773, Priestley was telling his fellow Dissenters that, where they had hitherto appealed as Christians, they should 'stand forth now in the character of men'. They should 'ask for the common rights of humanity.'<sup>123</sup> With the rejection of the appeal, he abandoned his willingness to compromise: if nothing could be won by an appeal to candour, then why not go all the way and demand toleration as of right? In 1773 he had been prepared to admit that there was at least no harm in the state's demanding a religious declaration of the citizen; by the following year, however, after the defeat of the appeal, he would no longer countenance such accommodations. They had been made, he said, in the belief (engendered 'by the artifices of courtiers') that they would further the Dissenting cause.<sup>124</sup> Now they should be abandoned, having been shown up as futile. But although it was right and not toleration that were now to be sought (and sought for all, for Catholics and atheists as well as for Protestant Dissenters), Priestley could never abandon the appeal to candour; it was as essential to his thought as the rights of man, if only because he believed that rights were most clearly apparent to a candid gaze. Some such idea as this seems

implicit in the words in which, as late as 1790, his friend Anna Laetitia Barbauld addressed the defenders of the Test and Corporation Acts:

We know you will refuse us while you are narrow minded, but you will not always be narrow minded. You have too much light and candour not to have more. ... We appeal to the certain, sure operation of increasing light and knowledge. ...<sup>125</sup>

Indeed, Priestley was even to go so far as to suggest that candour might be more valuable than the 'right decision in any controversy': a candid controversy was one in which all the evidence was properly exhibited and both sides displayed a 'truly christian temper' and 'the love of truth.'<sup>126</sup>

But in the heightened rhetorical atmosphere of the years that followed the Wilkes affair, many found it difficult to be candid, Priestley not least among them. His own character did little to help matters; though seldom waspish and hardly ever witty, he was an acerbic writer, quick to take offence in controversy and very apt to give it. Thomas Reid, one of the many victims of his zeal, suggested that 'from Dr Hartley his Paragon,' he might 'have taken a Lesson of Meekness, good Manners and Candor.' Samuel Badcock agreed. While conceding that the enemies of materialism had treated Priestley uncandidly, he remarked that Priestley himself had 'sometimes written as if he imagined that occasions would justify the sacrifice of urbanity to zeal.'<sup>127</sup>

The Theological Repository did not succeed; it had to be wound up after three volumes, and a later attempt at a revival failed, as Priestley confessed, for lack of sales.<sup>128</sup> In the eighties, however, he tried to bring its spirit of candid conversation to a wide public by

engaging in debate on several fronts on the issue of whether the primitive church had been unitarian. But neither his character nor the spirit of the age was conducive to candour; the failure of this debate opens the final chapter in Priestley's career as a radical in England.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Priestley to Lord Shelburne, 11 September 1776 (Bowood MSS.), quoted in Holt [1931], p.76.
2. Plumb's influential [1967] is a locus classicus for the modern version of the received account. In this and the following paragraphs, I have also drawn on Plumb[1950] and [1968], Porter [1982], Rude [1962] and Brewer[1976] and [1980].
3. See Brewer [1980], pp.333-339, 348-351.
4. Plumb [1968]. On the press see the fascinating chs. viii and xi of Brewer [1976].
5. Brewer [1976], p.240. See also pp.8-13.
6. 'Generations of British schoolchildren,' writes John Brooke ([1972] p.86), 'were brought up to believe that the King had been told by his mother "to be a king" and that Great Britain lost the American colonies in consequence of his following her advice.' As a member of perhaps the last of these generations, I can personally attest to the long endurance of Whig mythology. More than thirty years after the accession, Priestley was still writing of a new King, 'who knows not Joseph', from whom clergymen have hidden the truth(Priestley [1790a] i, 15), See Christie [1984], ch.ii for an account of the role in contemporary politics of what he calls (p.39) 'this quite baseless political myth'.
7. Clark summarises the revisionist claim in a single stately sentence: 'Instead of a picture of the gradual disintegration of a political order in the years 1754-89 under the impact of growing political articulacy and extra-parliamentary action, in conjunction with a Rockinghamite Whig campaign against renascent ministerial Toryism and a royal bid for absolutism, a "high-political" analysis might still support a different picture: a relatively rapid transition in the pattern of

party-politics in the 1750s, a consequent period of ministerial instability in 1760s, the establishment of a new formula for ministerial cohesion under Lord North, which was to remain effective until 1827, and the survival in its essentials of an aristocratic social and political order despite the evanescent phenomenon of John Wilkes.' (Clark [1985], p.34) To this it must be added that both Clark and his fellow revisionists Eveline Cruikshanks and Linda Colley argue that the Tory Party, contrary to Plumb's account, maintained a vigorous existence from 1714 to 1760. (For a brief discussion of all three and the implications of their work, see Pocock [1985], pp.243-246.) Clark usefully opposes Brewer's account to his own on pp.15-35 of his book

8. Brewer [1976], p.22. More recently, in a review of Linda Colley's book on the Tory Party in the reigns of the first two Georges, Brewer has admitted that, 'many historians, myself included, have exaggerated the novelty of reformist developments in the 1760s. ...' (Brewer [1982])
9. Dickinson [1977], p.214.
10. On the urban nature of Wilkes' support, see Rude [1962]. See also Christie [1984], pp.46-47, and Goodwin [1979], p.45. Clark ([1985], p.311) that the Wilkite movement was evanescent and intellectually shallow, that it sought not democracy but the restoration of traditional rights and that Wilkes founded no tradition of mass political action.
11. On this club - which met from 1754 to 1772 at St. Paul's Coffeehouse and later at the London Coffeehouse - see Goodwin, [1979], p.54, and Thomas [1977], pp.142-143.
12. British Library Add. Mss. 30,877 (John Wilkes, Select Correspondence, Vol.XI, 1754-1797), f.66: Priestley to John Wilkes, undated. (The date 1766, pencilled on the manuscript, cannot be correct. In what appears to be an only slightly later communication, dated 23 June, (ibid., f.77) Priestley sent to Wilkes a copy of his Proposals for Writing the History of Experimental Philosophy together with 'a small piece I have lately published intituled A View of the Principles and Conduct of the Protestant Dissenters. ...' Presumably this letter was written in 1770. The View of the Principles and Conduct was written and published in 1769 and the Proposals were dated 1 June of the following year (see Schofield [1966], p.79). On 2 June 1770, Priestley sent a copy of the Proposals to Benjamin Franklin (Priestley to Franklin, Leeds, 2 June 1770, ibid., p.74). It seems quite likely, then, that the earlier letter, f.66, was sent in the first half of 1770.)
13. See Bradley [1975] for a discussion and rebuttal of these claims. For some particularly vigorous assaults on the equation of political and religious dissent see Davie [1978], pp.130-135, and (1982), pp.24, 94-123. Stephens points

out ([1982], p.71) that a reliance solely on literary evidence has led many writers - he singles out Lincoln [1938] - to overstate the radicalism of eighteenth-century Dissent.

14. In this he praises the Quakers for their 'peculiarly chaste and exemplary' conduct: 'They join as a body to discountenance all undue influence, and admit not the smallest favour, or hardly a civility, for those for whom they have given their vote.' (Priestley [1774a], p.487)
15. Bradley (1975), pp.15-16. Moreover, the penal laws were not enforced with all the rigour possible, and from 1715 to 1790 thirty-five Dissenters became members of Parliament.
16. Priestley [1769b], p.354. In the same piece, he says (p.341) of his co-religionists that 'as Dissenters they agree in nothing but in dissenting from the doctrines and disciplines of the Established Church.' Similarly, he says in his [1769a] that 'Dissenters, as such have nothing in common but a dissent from the established church: and it by no means follows that they, therefore, agree in any thing else.' (p.iv) In his [1774a], he tells his fellow Dissenters that, 'Religious liberty, indeed, is the immediate ground on which you stand, but this cannot be maintained except on the basis of civil liberty. ...'(p.483) See Lincoln [1938], ch.ii.
17. Brewer (1976), pp.56-57. 'Faction is a combination of a few to oppress the liberties of many. ...' said the Reverend Robert Hall at the end of the century. 'Every Tory upholds a faction; every Whig, as far as he is sincere and well informed, is a friend to the equal liberties of mankind.' (Hall [1791], pp.54-55)
18. Priestley, 'The Importance of Self govern<sup>ment</sup>', (MS. sermon, Manchester College, Oxford), p.12.
19. Priestley [1769a], p.24.
20. Ibid., p.37.
21. Priestley [1769e], p.29.
22. Ibid., p.31.
23. Priestley [1769g], p.332 (see also the editor's note to this passage) and [1769e], p.32.
24. Priestley [1769a], p.23.
25. Priestley [1769e], p.32, and [1774a], pp.484-485.
26. Priestley [1769b], p.335 (Priestley adds in a footnote that this passage was written in October 1769). On the noisy

loyalism of the Dissenters under William III and the first two Georges, see Clark (1985), p.216.

27. Priestley [1806], p.94.
28. Rude [1962], p.23.
29. Priestley [1769f], p.389.
30. Ibid., pp.390-391. See Rude [1962], ch.iii.
31. Rude [1962], p.70.
32. Priestley [1769f], p.390.
33. The Public Advertiser, 13 June 1771, quoted in Dickinson [1977], pp.213-214, and Goodwin [1979], pp.48-49.
34. Priestley [1769f], pp.388-389.
35. Priestley [1774a], p.486. 'A Dissenter and a Wilkite were synonymous terms,' said the Anti Jacobin Magazine many years later (I, 629, quoted in Lincoln [1938], p.26).
36. On the negative nature of Rational Dissent, see Richey [1973-74]. On the political implications of these developments, see Clark [1985], pp.315-321. (In 1786, Ralph Harrison declared that Dissenters agreed on nothing but the importance of impartiality and of being persuaded in one's own mind as the truth of religious doctrines to which one adhered. They were, he said, no political tenets peculiar to them. (Harrison [1786], p.27)) On the distinction between orthodox and rational dissent, see Bogue and Bennett [1808-1812], III, 383-386, 395-401, IV, 370-383, and Watts [1978], pp.376-382. Watts explains (p.376) that at the Salters' Hall controversy of 1719, 'the majority of Presbyterian and General Baptist ministers took their stand on the sufficiency of Scripture, the majority of Congregationalists and Particular Baptists insisted on subscription to a Trinitarian Creed. And within a century most Presbyterian meetings and many of the General Baptists churches connected with the General Assembly had become Unitarian, while the Congregational and Particular Baptist churches not only remained Trinitarian but continued to honour the theology of John Calvin.' Compare this orthodoxy with the Rational Dissent of the Reverend David Williams, who, in 1777, urged that 'dissent, which used to be an opinion of superior orthodoxy and superior purity of faith', should abandon this rationale 'for another which is the only rational and justifiable reason of dissent - the inalienable and universal right of private judgment, and the necessity of an unrestrained enquiry and freedom of debate and discussion on all subjects of knowledge, morality, and religion.' (A Letter to the Body of Protestant Dissenters and to Protestant Dissenting Ministers of all Denominations, quoted in Barlow [1962], p.194) It is

because Priestley's belief in what he calls civil liberty and his opposition to church establishment are so intimately connected that I cannot quite agree with Clark's argument ([1985], p.316) that after the seventeen-sixties, Dissenters sought not toleration but the destruction of the alliance between church and state.. Priestley for one would not have distinguished between the two objectives.

37. Priestley [1769b], pp.355-356. It is possible to offer a very different account of the origins of Dissenting radicalism. Clark suggests ([1985], pp.217., 292-293) that the loyalty of Dissenters to the House of Hanover was merely prudential and that it was withdrawn when the Jacobite threat withdrew.
38. Dr. Williams's Library, Mss., 12.45, ff.68-69: Priestley to Thomas Lindsey, 21 February 1770 (rpt., with some alterations, in Rutt (ed.) [1817-1832], i(1), 112). See also Priestley [1769b], p.374.
39. Priestley [1768a], pp.iii-iv.
40. Ibid., p.60.
41. In this Priestley follows his masters: Locke maintains ([1690], ii, sec.26) that 'a true notion of God is one of 'the foundations of virtue', and property is important in his system of government not because it is man's but because it was given to man by God; Philip Doddridge begins that part of his course of lectures which covers civil government with a consideration first of God's goodness and then of his holiness. He could have begun with pneumatology, says Doddridge ([1763], iv, 297), before moving on first to ethics and next to theology, but 'these sciences do insensibly run into each other.'
42. Priestley [1768a], pp.2-3.
43. Ibid., p.5.
44. Ibid., pp.7-8.
45. Ibid., pp.5-6, 17. See also Priestley [1767], i, xvii-xix.
46. Thus Hartley writes of 'the numerous reciprocal Influences' of the passions upon each other, by way of which they 'arrive at that Degree of Complexness, which is observed in Fact, and which makes them so difficult to be analysed.' (Hartley [1749], i, 369)
47. Hume [1739/40], Bk.iii, pt.ii, sec.ii (pp.494-495).
48. Rousseau [1755], pp.161-162, 190-191. See also Meek [1976], pp.76-81.

49. Priestley [1768a], p.9. The function of the state of nature in Locke's argument (where it is no more an historical hypothesis than it is in Priestley's) is explored in Dunn [1969], especially pp.98-116, to which work I am indebted for the light it incidentally throws on Priestley's thought.
50. Meek [1976], pp.19, 73-75. See also Brown [1984], pp.104-110.
51. Priestley [1788a], p.271.
52. Hartley [1749], i, 368-369.
53. Priestley [1788a], p.229.
54. Locke [1690], ii, secs.135, 138, 139.
55. Priestley [1788a], p.229.
56. Paine [1776], p.65.
57. Brown [1758], i, 11-12, 20, 26-29, 51-56, 90-93. The motives for Brown's suicide seem to have been personal (as Leslie Stephen explains in the Dictionary of National Biography). Clark ([1985], p.308] implies otherwise: 'A spectacular series of military victories from the annus mirabilis of 1759 could seem a crushing refutation of any merely moral critique of the social order. The debate took a different course; Brown's life, overshadowed by insanity, ended in suicide.' This is ingenious but it fails to take account of the fact that Brown returned to the attack in 1765 in a work which, though more sombre than the earlier one, does not look like a last stand.
58. Brown [1758], i, 29-43.
59. Brown [1765], pp.28-29.
60. The principal, and indispensable, study of republican thought is Pocock [1975]. Robbins [1959] is a useful account of the personnel of English republicanism. See also Pocock [1985].
61. Pocock [1985], p.106. See also pp.53-56.
62. Priestley [1778], pp.40-41.
63. Brown [1765], pp.39-42, 99.
64. Priestley [1788a], pp.11, 15.
65. Fruchtman's [1983] is a sustained attempt to claim Priestley and Price for the republican tradition. The author is aware that this claim may be contested but not apparently of any need to defend it. His way of proceeding is very simple: having listed what he takes to be the basic components of republicanism (opposition to the inordinate power of king and

court, belief in the supreme authority of the independent property owner), he explains that the adjective 'republican' was 'applied to all of these ideas and the people who wrote approvingly of them', and he goes on to point out that 'Price and Priestley adhered to a number of them,'; especially, he adds, to the idea that government must be of the people and that the balance of the constitution must be preserved (pp.32-33). Elsewhere, he explains that 'Price and Priestley were late eighteenth-century exponents of the Country tradition, its language and its programs' (p.48). The problem is that Fruchtman ignores the possibility that one may endorse a programme of political action without accepting all the philosophical arguments that some of the proponents of that programme use to legitimate it. (Of course, to speak one language only is to limit oneself to the concepts that may be expressed in that language, but if that is what Fruchtman means when he call Priestley an 'exponent' of the Country (or Commonwealth) language, then he is simply wrong: he would do better to talk not of speaking a language but of using a vocabulary.) More serious problems arise when Fruchtman goes on to talk of the ideology of the Court, which, in opposition to that of the Country, accepted the values of a mercantile society and defended them against civic humanism. Price and Priestley, he says, rejected this acceptance (the inelegant formulation is his), and he goes on to describe, in apparent support of this assertion, Priestley's opposition to political corruption (pp.67-68). But the evidence (if that is what it is supposed to be) will not support the assertion, and the assertion does at least need to be defended against Isaac Kramnick's vigorous - and, I think, justified - attempts to claim Priestley for just this mercantilist ideology. (See Kramnick [1977], [1982], both of which Fruchtman lists in his bibliography, [1980] and [1986].) Fruchtman refers to Kramnick in a footnote (p.32, n.8) as the author of 'a lucid and brilliant attack' on what Kramnick calls 'republican revisionism', but he does not explain why he has otherwise ignored all this lucidity and brilliance. Kramnick's work represents a concerted attack on Pocock's interpretation of eighteenth-century radicalism, and Pocock answers some of them in his [1985], pp.242, 259-264. Arguments about Priestley similar to some of Kramnick's (which I believe are justified only in so far as they concern Priestley) but more moderate in tone are offered by Margaret Canavan in her excellent [1978] and [1983].

66. Priestley [1768a], pp.93-97.
67. See Brewer [1976], pp.240-242, and also Pocock [1975], pp.478-481, and [1985], pp.78, 250.
68. Priestley [1788a], p.265. Since executive power is lodged with the King (who ought, however, to be unable to wield it without the people's consent), this subordination of Parliament has upset the balance of power, too. See p.236.

69. Ibid., p.264. Properly speaking, we ought perhaps to distinguish between principles (monarchy, aristocracy, democracy), interests (crown, nobility, people) and powers (legislative, executive, judicial). Montesquieu does something like when he praises the British constitution for its balance of powers (Montesquieu [1748], Bk.XI, sec.6) and in this Priestley follows him, with due acknowledgement ([1788a], pp.240-241). However, the first expression of the view that England enjoyed a mixed constitution - the Answer to the Nineteen Propositions of Both Houses of Parliament written for Charles I in 1642 by Lord Falkland and Sir John Culpepper - seemed to suggest that, just as the balance of principles was instantiated in the balance of interests, so the balance of interests was preserved by the allotment of one power to each interest. 'It was ...', says Pocock ([1975], p.364), 'a recurrent problem in Aristotelian theory to relate specific political functions to elements defined by their virtue; and in the case of English government, the problem was to prove particularly recalcitrant. The legislative power, being lodged in the trinity-in-unity of King-in-Parliament, could not be further employed in distinguishing between the powers supposedly allowed to the three elements; and we notice how, in the [Answer to the Nineteen Propositions] it is easier to state how each may check the excesses of the others than to specify just what powers the lords and commons wield.' But, he adds, the authors of the Answer did speak of the lords as 'entrusted with a judiciary power', which suggestion 'appears in retrospect a step towards the later theory which equated "mixed government" with "separation of powers", assigning to the lords a judicial function while seeking to separate executive, judiciary and legislature in a way which clearly revealed how Aristotelian analysis was bedevilled by English parliamentary monarchy.' This equation survived into the eighteenth century: see Pocock [1985], pp.77-78. Of course, the virtue of a mixed constitution is that it avoids the defects inherent in each of the three forms of government, and these defects all have to do with the abuse of power, which is, of course, exercised by interests. However, it is possible to talk of a mixed constitution as balancing principles rather than interests, and this Priestley notably fails to do.
70. Priestley [1768a], pp.12-13.
71. C.f., Priestley [1788a], p.237. In his Oration at the Funeral of Nanni Strozzi (1488), Leonardo Bruni uses the term 'liberty' to mean both independence and self-government, and he calls 'the true liberty' that liberty which consists of the maintenance of a free constitution in which every citizen has a part to play in government (quoted, Skinner [1978], i, 78). However, it is not clear from Skinner's account whether the humanists, when talking of independence, ever meant not just the independence of the city-state from foreign dominion but the independence of the individual from any external coercion. The distinction is discussed in a review of Pocock [1975] by

Hexter ([1979], ch.vi), who finds it exemplified in a passage of the Acts of the Apostles. Pocock discusses the distinction and responds to Hexter in his [1981], p.53, and [1985], pp.40-44. It is around this distinction that Canovan shapes her [1978]. The classic theoretical discussion is, of course, Berlin [1958].

72. Priestley [1768a], pp.41-42, 45. When Priestley comes to consider the loss of civil liberty, his language is often republican: he speaks of 'tyrannical governors, who have 'no friends but a few sycophants'; he invokes the Commonwealthman's heroes Russell and Sydney; and he speaks of the revolutionary as a 'noble and daring patriot' (ibid., pp.36-37).
73. Ibid., p.17. These are the words at which Jeremy Bentham, if his own account is to be believed, 'cried out, as it were in an inward extasy, Eureka.' He may have done so, but there is nothing utilitarian or proto-utilitarian in Priestley's words. For one thing, he talks, as utilitarians do not, of happiness and good; he does not identify the two, nor does he define 'happiness' in a narrow non-moral and non-theological way. However, it is a happy (and good) fact that we need not labour to prise Priestley from the Benthamite embrace, since Margaret Canovan has already done the job very deftly in her [1984].
74. Brown [1765], pp.12-14, 25.
75. Pocock [1985], p.43.
76. Priestley [1778], p.33.
77. Ibid., pp.43-44. Priestley gives as his example the practice of lighting fires on Guy Fawkes' night, which, he says, early inspires children 'with an abhorrence of arbitrary power.'
78. Ibid., p.46.
79. Priestley [1768a], pp.131-132. Others - Defoe, Montesquieu, Hume, Smith, Gibbon and Priestley's friend Jefferson - feared what Pocock ([1985], p.147) calls 'the nightmare utopias of Lycurgus' law or Plato's republic.'
80. The phrase is Mill's, of course (see Berlin [1958], pp.176-181). Berlin points out (p.188) that Mill's arguments are plausible only on the assumption that human knowledge is in principle fallible and incomplete. Priestley, of course, says explicitly that our knowledge is fallible and, though he does not believe that it must always remain incomplete, he does believe that completion is a very distant (though always glorious) prospect.
81. Priestley [1768a], p.145.
82. Ibid., pp.74-75.

83. Brown [1758], i,22, 152-153, 155. On the theory that the love of money is founded upon nothing but imagination, see Pocock [1981], p.64, [1985], pp.98-101, 112, and especially [1975], ch.xiii, where (p.435) he quotes Locke: 'Gold, Silver, and Diamonds, are things, that Fancy or Agreement hath put the Value on, more than real Use, and the necessary Support of Life.' (Locke [1690], ii, sec.46)
84. Brown [1765], pp.104-105, 149-150.
85. Pocock [1975], pp.458-459. See also Pocock [1985], p.97.
86. Priestley [1788a], pp.321, 354-355.
87. Ibid., pp.354, 356, Priestley believes, of course, that any passion will be dangerous if carried to excess. The love of money is dangerous when it causes money to be treated as an end and not a means. See Priestley [1772-74], i, 104-108, and ii, 39-45.
88. Brown [1758], i, 174.
89. Ibid., i, 197.
90. Priestley [1788a], pp.315-316, and [1778], pp.17, 60-63. On the dangers of specialisation, see Pocock [1975], p.430.
91. Priestley [1806], pp.114-115. (This part of the Memoirs was written in 1787.) For an earlier use of the term 'middle classes' see Priestley [1778], sec.xiv. The earliest use of the term 'the middle class' recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary is from 1812; that of the term 'the middle classes' is from 1831. The 'middling sort' had, however, been spoken of for rather longer: the first recorded use of the term is from 1692, and in 1708 the Freeholder declared that 'The Middling People of England are generally Good-natured and Stout-hearted. ...' In an interesting discussion of the eighteenth-century radicals' concept of the middle class, Kramnick ([1980], p.41) mentions John Aiken's use of the term 'the middle class' in 1790 and Mary Wollstonecraft's in 1792. See also Kramnick [1977], especially pp.517-521. The concept of the middling sort is, however, not unproblematic. For a discussion of the problems of interpretation and for references to Hume and Goldsmith, see Forbes [1975], pp.176-178..
92. Priestley [1778], pp.23-24.
93. Priestley [1788a], pp.315, 332.
94. Ibid., p.315, 332. On 'le doux commerce', see Montesquieu [1748], bk.xx, i, and Hirschman [1977], especially pp.59-62.
95. Priestley [1788a], pp.313-315.

96. Ibid., pp.322-323, 337.
97. Hartley [1749], i, 473.
98. Priestley [1788a], p.361.
99. Ibid., p.362.
100. See Pocock [1985], p.97.
101. Priestley [1788a], pp.283-284. On the idealisation of medieval society as one in which 'the "Gothic" freeholder had been at one and the same time his own warrior, judge, and legislator', see Pocock [1985], p.176. For Defoe, see ibid., p.231.
102. See Pocock [1981], p.67, and [1985], pp.131, 235-238. On this aspect of Addison's work see Bloom and Bloom [1971], chs.i-iii.
103. Joseph Addison, Spectator, no.9, 10 March 1711, quoted in Bloom and Bloom [1971], p.4.
104. Joseph Addison, Spectator, no.464, 22 August 1712, quoted in Bloom and Bloom [1971], p.12; Spectator, no.69, 19 May 1711, and Freeholder, no.34, 10 April 1716, quoted ibid., pp.64-65. On Addison's repudiation of Defoe's ideas see Pocock [1985], pp.49, 236.
105. Priestley [1769d], pp.514, 517, 518.
106. For these references see Goad [1918], pp.157, 336-337, 374, 389, 484, 503, 591, 597, 600. The translation is from Watson [1741], ii, 233.
107. Churchill [1763], 11.55-58.
108. Ibid., 11.100, 101, 163-172.
109. Ibid., 11.401-402, 539-540.
110. Churchill's poem was 'the most bloody performance that has been published in my time', said David Garrick (in R.B. Peake, Memoirs of the Coleman Family, 1841, i, 71, quoted by Douglas Grant in his notes to Churchill [1763], p.519). On candour as a conversational virtue and on the difficulty of maintaining truly candid conversation, see Davie [1964].
111. C.f. Sennett [1977], p.39: 'to the extent a public geography exists, social expression will be conceived of as presentation to other people of feelings which signify in and of themselves, rather than as representation to other people of feelings present and real to each self.'

112. Plumb says ([1950], pp.108-109) of Pitt that 'he could create the sense in all who listened to him that he was their mouthpiece.'
113. Brewer [1976], p.198. See also pp.170-171.
114. Junius, footnote (1772) to a letter of 7 October 1769, in Cannon (ed.) [1978], p.230 (quoted in Sennet [1977], p.104) and Burke [1770], p.41.
115. Sennet [1977], p.104. (This is quite consistent with Clark's claim that after 1760 political commitment became depersonalised. His point is that in a hierarchical society, the state was personified in its ruling family, so that political attitudes were cast in a personal mould, creating the possibility of expressing political choices in terms of dynastic allegiance.' (Clark [1985], p.197) After 1760, he believes, the choice lay between parties and not dynasties. But, of course, dynasties do not embody principle like liberty, nor do they do as Pitt and Wilkes did and pose as the people's mouthpiece. Before 1760, we may say, politics was personalised in that political principle consisted of allegiance to persons; after 1760 politics was more truly personalised in that abstract principle was held to be personified by certain individuals who had no dynastic standing.) On Wilkes as the embodiment of liberty see, for example, Junius' letter of 8 July 1769 (Cannon (ed.) [1978], pp.80-86). Of course, neither Junius nor Churchill was the first satirist to aim his darts at personalities. Boulton reminds us ([1963], p.24) that 'pamphleteers and satirists have traditionally centred their attacks on personalities either real or imaginary'; but he adds that, 'It is, however, significant that the two major Augustan satirists, Pope and Swift, had moved increasingly in the direction of attacking leading individuals by name.' Junius himself invokes Pope in the footnote of 1777 cited in n.126 above.
116. See, for example, Churchill [1763], ll.419-486.
117. Priestley [1787a], p.101. This sermon, 'on the duty of not living to ourselves', was delivered in 1764.
118. Ibid., p.126. Priestley believed that a shared relation 'to some common society' - a nation, a tribe, a family or even a trade - bound individuals to each other. See his [1770a], pp.431-432.
119. Priestley, 'Christians the salt of the earth', p.10, and the second of two untitled sermons on Matthew xxiv, 12, 13, p.17 (MS. sermons, Manchester College, Oxford). See also ppp.6-7 of the latter sermon.
120. Andrew Kippis, Vindication of the Dissenting Ministers, London, 1773, quoted in Lincoln [1938], p.210. See also pp.196-197 and

Barlow [1962], pp.171-172, for descriptions of the situation that gave rise to this optimism.

121. Barlow [1962], p.23. See Stephen [1982] for the fullest account of the appeal against subscription.
122. The account given here differs somewhat from those given in Barlow [1962] ch.v and Lincoln [1938] ch.vi. Both of them argue, with impressive documentation, that the failure of the appeal for reform of the Toleration Act propelled Dissent out of the world of candour and into the world of rights. Thus Lincoln writes (p.211): 'The cry in 1790 was "give us back our rights which your government has usurped", but in 1772-3 it was no more than a plea for co-operation in erecting a common monument to Justice. ...' and he says (p.183) of Dissent in those years that its faith in candour was 'shaken by the failures of those years.' I suspect they underestimate the extent to which it is possible to appeal simultaneously to candour and to rights: as I argue below, after 1773 Dissenters hoped that the dissemination of candour would result in the recognition of their rights. When even that hope had to be abandoned, there was to little to do but emigrate; which, of course, is what Priestley did in 1794. I would suggest also that Barlow and Lincoln do not recognise the extent to which the Dissenters of London could themselves be accused of behaving uncandidly in 1772 by claiming to speak for Dissent when they very obviously did not (this is argued vigorously in Davie [1982], pp.83-93). Consequently, they overlook the possibility that one of the tactical virtues of the appeal to rights was, as I have argued above, that it could be made over the heads of Calvinist Dissent.
123. Priestley [1773], pp.442, 443,450. Both Barlow ([1962], pp.195-198) and Lincoln ([1938], pp.218-235) cite this work in illustration of their argument about the abandonment of candour, though, of course, having been written before the rejection of the appeal, it cannot be taken as one of the effects of that rejection.
124. Priestley [1774a], p.485.
125. Barbauld [1790], p.30
126. Priestley [1781], postscript, p.2, quoted in Fitzpatrick [1982], p.27
127. Thomas Reid to Richard Price, Edinburgh, 10 April 1775, in Peach and Thomas (eds.), p.195; Badcock [1780], pp.2-3. See also Dr. Williams's Library, Mss., 24.157, Samuel Kenrick to James Woodrow, Bewdley, 15 August, 1781: 'our D<sup>r</sup> attacks yours [i.e., Adam Smith] w<sup>th</sup> a good deal more civility, & good manners, than 3 or 4 years ago he brandished his tawmahawk against the celebrated Oswald, Reid & Beattie.' Nine years later, on 28 September 1784, Kenrick was still upset by

Priestley's incivility, writing to Woodrow that '... I confess there was a time that I highly blamed his furious attack on your harmless threefold Doctors. To treat the amiable Beattie w<sup>th</sup> such severity shocked me - & I thought the modest industrious Reid much too roughly handled. I am not sufficiently acquainted w<sup>th</sup> my hero's character to account for it.'

128. Priestley [1806], pp.122-123. There were six volumes in all, published in 1769, 1770, 1771, 1784, 1786 and 1788. Lindsey thought that the journal's discussion of the miraculous conception had done nothing to improve its sales (letter to William Tayleur, 5 April 1785, in McLachlan (ed.) [1920], p.112.

CHAPTER SIX.

EPISODES IN THE LIFE OF JOSEPH PRIESTLEY: FROM 1780 TO 1794.

The puritans were here so unreasonable as to complain of a partial and unfair management of the dispute; as if the search after truth were in any degree the object of such conferences, and a candid indifference, so rare even among private inquirers, in philosophical questions, could ever be expected among princes and prelates, in a theological controversy.

David Hume,  
The History of Great Britain

I.

With hindsight it is as easy to give a shape to Priestley's career as it is to give one to the century in which he flourished. In both cases, the final act seems to open in the late seventeen-eighties: there is a quickening of the pace, every utterance takes on an added weight, all the strands of the plot - and both are stories of self-conscious enlightenment - seem to be converging on a single scene. If, though, we do want to think in these terms, we will have to think of the catastrophes as being exactly two years apart; the two years that separate the fall of the Bastille from the riot that destroyed Priestley's house and laboratory on Bastille Day 1791.

Hindsight aside (if it ever can be put aside), there is a very definite sense of denouement about Priestley's Birmingham years and especially about the controversy that followed the publication of his

History of the Corruptions of Christianity. Most of the threads that we have traced in the preceding chapters can here be drawn together. By 1782, when the Corruptions appeared, he had long since abandoned a number of orthodox Christian doctrines: the Trinity, atonement and original sin, the divinity and pre-existence of Christ, the immateriality of the soul. As we have seen, a painstaking, literal, metaphor-demolishing way of reading scripture, founded in associationist psychology, was what at first led him to reject these doctrines; though he was much encouraged in his pursuit of these questions when his philosophical work took him in the direction of a very general materialism. Now, if, as Priestley believed, history does not proceed by ~~discrete~~<sup>discrete</sup> revolutionary leaps, then it ought to be possible to trace the rise of each of these affronts to scripture and right reasoning. This is what Priestley sought to do in the Corruptions, a thematically-organised history of the various doctrines that offended him, in which Platonist philosophy and the kingdoms of this earth are identified as the principle agencies of corruption.

Though Priestley sometimes spoke as if he thought of the Corruptions as the opening gambit in a conversation with orthodoxy, it is difficult to believe that he cannot have realised how polemical a work it must have seemed; he did, after all, dedicate it to his friend Theophilus Lindsey, who had taken opposition to established religion to the extent of leaving the Church of England to found a church of his own, run upon unitarian lines. In the ensuing controversy, Priestley - faced with perhaps his most formidable antagonist - proceeded upon two assumptions, neither of them fully avowed, which together were to have

disastrous consequences for him. The first arises from that extreme empiricism which had already been tempered in his polemic against the Scottish philosophers: for him all knowledge - or, at least, all the knowledge that counts in public controversy - is objective knowledge and all objective knowledge is of the same kind; there is no special knowledge, whether sacred or political, to which the standards of scientific investigation do not apply. The second assumption is that there can always be candid, open debate and a perfectly free market in opinion unaffected by changing political circumstances. Priestley seems not to have understood that people who could not accept the first assumption would not be able to accept the second. They would at least have an understanding of candour very different from his, and what to him were open and candid avowals of a difference in opinion increasingly looked to them like political agitation, naked and subversive.

## II.

It is curious that a book which sets out to tell of Christianity pure and simple darkened by a love of pagan mysteries should draw its epigraph from a passage of the Gospels in which much is made of the esoteric nature of Christ's teaching:

For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because seeing they see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.<sup>1</sup>

The Son of Man is not an empiricist; a blank slate is passive beneath the engraver's hand, but seed, however good, will not improve the ground on which it is sown unless that ground is already fertile. Even good

seed sown on good ground may not yield the best results: 'Didst thou not sow good seed in they field?' a householder is asked by his servants. 'Whence then hath it tares?'<sup>2</sup> Priestley takes these two questions for his epigraph, but he does not provide the answer to them, which is that an enemy has secretly sown tares among the wheat, nor does he mention what happens next: tares and wheat are allowed to grow together until the harvest, when the tares are gathered in and burned. His contemporary readers would have known all this, of course, and they would have recalled its original meaning: 'He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world, the good see are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.' Though this apocalyptic message resonates behind Priestley's title-page (to burst out in the closing pages of the second volume), it soon becomes clear the Priestley does not intend to write of a world corrupted by the children of the wicked one. It is Christian tradition and practice that have been corrupted, and every corruption is 'a departure from the original scheme, or an innovation.'<sup>3</sup>

To return to the original scheme is to make a radical journey; as Pocock points out, 'the posture appropriate to a rebel in a traditional society ... is that of a reactionary.'<sup>4</sup> This is, of course, the posture of the Protestant, who desires a return to the pure religion of the Bible. It is, for the most part, Priestley's position, but his is not a traditional society; it is a society in transition, and he cannot remain untouched by that rationalistic form of radicalism which is so

distinctively modern. It is to rationality - whether embodied as equity, efficiency, universalism or human rights - that the modern radical most readily appeals, and though the nature of the verdict is often debated, the jurisdiction of the court is seldom challenged. Priestley's leanings towards this sort of radicalism help him towards some answers to the question that must be asked of the more traditional sort of radical: if there is something in the past (a book, an event, a covenant, a charismatic figure) that can confer authority in the present, whence comes this authority if not from the continuity which the radical is challenging with his talk of corruption? And if, as the radical claims, this past something does not authorise present practice, what is its authority and why should we return to it? And why is its authority no longer actualised in present circumstances? The radical must legitimise his depiction of tradition, says Pocock, and in order to do this he must legitimise a picture of its beginnings.<sup>5</sup>

But in the eighteenth century, both the Deists and a certain sort of high Catholic were doing their best to make this impossible. In 1762, the French Jesuit Isaac Berruyer denied that the Church could enjoin acceptance of a doctrine merely because an early council had defined it; for there could only ever be probable evidence of the council's having made that decision or even of its having existed. Only the authority, the present authority, of the Church can command assent. Scripture cannot authorise doctrine; rather, Scripture is to be read in the light of doctrine which has already been accepted because of the Church's authority. The past can, then, be known only through the present. Six years before, Conyers Middleton had - like Berruyer,

though for different reasons - set out to show that none of the early Fathers' claims to miraculous authority could be upheld and that therefore any interpretation of Scripture which depended upon them must fall along with that authority. Both men had employed a sceptical historiography in order to reassert a present authority: in one case that of the Catholic Church, in the other that of Protestant common sense. Both were unorthodox, but, though repudiated by the authorities they thought to serve, they posed a problem: how is the past to be reconstructed in a way that preserves or restores its authority?<sup>6</sup>

Priestley must, then, present and justify a picture of Biblical Christianity. The first Protestant reformers, whose aims were similar, did so by means of a claim to spiritual illumination: that divinity which had conferred authority on the Scriptures conferred it also upon them and so justified their scriptural interpretations. But, of course, this way is not open to Priestley, who maintains in the Corruptions his habitual dislike and distrust of the subjective, of any talk of 'inward consent' or of the 'miraculous work of grace'.<sup>7</sup> And so, denying, as usual, any importance to the private realm, he turns, as ever, to the public; like all rationalist radicals, he appeals to reason rather than to history. Of course, he cannot, like the deist or the political radical, appeal to reason alone and take his readers back to a state of nature, but (remembering, perhaps, that Robinson Crusoe was the only romance he read as a boy) he takes them as far as he can:

Suppose a number of persons, educated in the christian faith, to be cast upon a remote island, without any bible. It is probable they would first of all lose all remembrances of the apostolical epistles, which may show that these are a part of the New Testament the least necessary to be attended to. After this, they would be apt to forget the particular discourses of our Lord; but the last thing they would retain would be the idea of a man, who

had the most extraordinary power, spending his time performing benevolent miracles, voluntarily submitting to many inconveniences, and last of all to a painful death, in a certain expectation of being presently raised to an immortal life, and to great happiness, honour, and power after death; and that these his expectations were actually fulfilled. They would also remember that this person always recommended the practice of virtue, and assured his followers that they would also be raised again to immortal life and happiness, if they persevered in well doing, as he had done.<sup>8</sup>

And who, Priestley asks, would deny these castaways the name of Christian?

The Christian as shipwrecked mariner, monarch of all he surveys, unencumbered by the Schoolmen, the Fathers or even the Apostles, is a figure who haunts the Corruptions. Though he is mentioned only once, we can easily detect his footprint whenever the author turns from history to reason, from exposition to criticism. The desert island serves Priestley as laboratory much as the state of nature has served others: just as rational man in a state of nature seeks whatever staples of survival the world can provide, so rational Christians on a desert island seek whatever staples of religion can be afforded by reason and memory.

The point of the state-of-nature argument is that, cutting away mere desire along with all that is purely accidental or customary, it concentrates our attention on men's needs and therefore on what they cannot be denied. It also (and this is its main purpose) shows how civil society may be legitimated: God has set men in this situation and given them not only their needs but also the capacity for co-operation which is the principal means of attending to these needs; and so civil society, the necessary product of their co-operation, must be lawful.

In Priestley's argument there is a similar connection between human need and human capacity. God desires the salvation of castaways no less than anyone else's, but, since there is one revelation for all, no more of it must be absolutely necessary than such lost people might be expected to remember. God, well knowing our human tendency to speculate and to be guided by general principles, has imparted to us information which, given our circumstances, we could not otherwise have acquired, and thus he prevents our forming 'very absurd notions' or engaging in 'foolish and pernicious practices.'<sup>9</sup> This information is contained in the Scriptures. We may subtract from it (we should not, though as forgetful castaways we may) but we must not add to it. Nor indeed would people left to their own devices have sought to do so.

However, what is most striking about Priestley's example is not the stark condition of his castaways but the poverty of their needs. What they are supposed to have forgotten are discourses and doctrines, and what they are supposed to remember are the deeds and teachings of a great man: religious experience, liturgy and worship, the life of the church are never mentioned - we are not even told that they have been forgotten - and the one, the only, need or appetite which the argument lays bare is for 'immortal life and happiness'. In this, of course, man in the state of nature and the Christian castaway are agreed: both seek to prolong their existence, the one to the farthest possible limit of its earthly span and the other beyond even that point. Moreover, both seek to do so by treating an important form of human activity as purely instrumental. Men in a state of nature learn to behave politically in order to make room in their lives for other, non-political, ends.

Priestley's castaways, seeking immortal life and a happiness whose nature is not explained to us, seem to be doing something similar. Their rather vestigial religious behaviour secures ends which are not defined in religious terms, and they do not regard as an end in itself that which they have treated instrumentally, any more than men newly emerged from a state of nature treat the life of the citizen as an end in itself. This point was made even more explicit by Priestley during the controversy which followed publication of his book: 'What is all religion', he asked, 'but a means to a certain end; and if any man can, in fact, attain to this end, viz. to lead a godly, righteous, and sober life, without christianity ... he is as good a man, and as valuable a character, as any other person who attains the same end by the help of it.'<sup>10</sup>

By ignoring all religious activity that is not directly end-related, Priestley at once makes the life of his castaways explicable in terms of his egoistic ethic and dismisses from the scene those institutions which give form and meaning to this activity. (Such a dismissal is, of course, implicit in the state-of-nature argument, though more brutally apparent in Paine's version of it than in Priestley's.) Whatever Priestley may have said about the value of 'Christian societies', institutions must be banished from the desert island - as they usually are from liberal or radical considerations - because the whole of the Corruptions is devoted to showing that they do little but obstruct the vision. The ocean which has cast these Christians upon their island has also washed the prejudice from them, and Priestley would have his reader bathe in similar waters.

He has spoken directly of this need for mental hygiene in The Scripture Doctrine of Remission, where he tried to show that Christ's purpose on earth was not to be learned of by the application of literal European minds to the gaudy arabesques of Asiatic prose. He returns to this theme now, proposing a way of reading scripture guided by 'general considerations, derived from the whole tenor of scripture, and the dictates of reason.' We must interpret the few obscure texts in the light of the the many clear ones and suspend judgement on whatever seems inconsistent with the plain message of the whole.<sup>11</sup> Thus we narrow our gaze to the essentials and forget the misleading graces of an alien style; doing deliberately, it may be said, what our Christian castaways have done through force of circumstance.

The false doctrines to which errors of interpretation give rise are not merely superfluous to salvation but positively dangerous to Christianity:

For if the general body of Christians retains any doctrine as essential to revealed religion, which true philosophy shall prove to be actually false, the consequence will be, that the whole system will be rejected, by those who consider that tenet as an inseparable part of it. So greatly doth it behove us that christian knowledge should keep pace with philosophical.<sup>12</sup>

True philosophy (that is, Priestley's materialism and Hartley's associationism) coincides with true Christianity, both teaching that man is dust and that his only hope of a future life lies in the promise of bodily resurrection, but true philosophy is quite at odds with received Christian doctrine. So theological research, which consists in the excavation of precious objects inundated beneath the rubbish of centuries, must never lag behind scientific research; for Priestley it

goes without saying that philosophy will not be the handmaiden of theology and that thinking men will reject Christianity if science appears to contradict it. The criteria of theological truth are secular and external: science must determine the nature of man, and the canons of historical interpretation - using tradition, testimony and the works of profane historians - must be employed to assess the authority of Scripture. And this authority, Priestley claims, is not always that of sacred charisma. St. Paul, for example, does not invariably appeal to divine inspiration; sometimes he argues; often he argues inconclusively; and when he does not reason, we must believe him simply as someone who is unlikely to have been deceived or to have had any interest in deceiving, and 'whose authority in general was supported by his power of working miracles.'<sup>13</sup>

Thus Priestley has shown, to his own satisfaction at least, that his picture of the roots of Christian tradition has the authority both of divine charisma and of reason. He has also shown what dangers may attend if this picture is ignored. This seems to answer two of the questions which Pocock asks of the radical in a traditional society: whence comes authority if not from tradition, and why should we return to the origins of our tradition? The third question - why is the authority of the origin no longer actualised in present circumstances? - remains to be answered. Priestley's epigraph, as interpreted by its author, answers very clearly: 'the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil.' But Priestley has allowed the Prince of Darkness to slip, more or less unnoticed, from his cosmology. Indeed, it is difficult to see that he could with

consistency have done otherwise: the devil cannot, of course, usurp the sovereign power which Priestley ascribes to God, that of setting up the providential mechanism of the universe, but neither could he interfere with its exercise unless he were able to do what even God will not do: directly influence the human mind and earthly affairs. The rise of Christianity, as Priestley tells Edward Gibbon in that part of the Corruption which is addressed to him, is a fact of such historic importance and involving so many people that it 'requires to be accounted for from the most obvious principles of human nature, principles common to all men, and all classes of men. ...' And if its rise is to be accounted for by natural means, so is its fall. The circumstance in which Christianity was promulgated caused all its corruptions; different circumstances will bring about its recovery.<sup>14</sup>

### III.

The story is not a fast-moving one. It scarcely could be since, as Priestley has so often explained, God's influence on human affairs is not direct and cataclysmic but instead is mediated through secular circumstance. So in seeking to trace the growth of corruption, we must be sensitive to symptoms of gradual change: 'As the greatest things often take their rise from the smallest beginnings, so the worst things sometimes proceed from good intentions.'<sup>15</sup> Those early heretics who introduced pagan spiritualism into Christianity did so only because they thought thereby to recommend their new faith to the heathen and to their philosophers. Other evils - the worship of dead men, called 'saints', the practice of granting indulgences and of hearing confessions, the

'abuse of pilgrimages' - arose from similarly innocent beginnings, and even that great corruption of church government, the transformation of elected presbyters into appointed bishops, took place in a manner 'gradual and easy.'<sup>16</sup>

What we see here is, of course, providence operating according to that law of unintended consequences which Priestley has already identified in profane history. This law is even more strikingly demonstrated in the Corruptions by the effects that controversy is said to have had throughout the history of Christianity. There are two such effects. First, controversy may cause people to clarify their doctrines: we may, Priestley suggests, reasonably suppose that the primitive church did not believe in atonement because, if it had, controversy would have drawn forth its sentiments on the subject.<sup>17</sup> Second, the effect of controversy is also 'to push men as far as possible from that extreme which they wish to avoid, so as often to drive them into the opposite extreme.'<sup>18</sup> Priestley makes his most explicit statement about this effect while considering the doctrine of predestination, but here his historical methods lead him to what seems a somewhat unfortunate admission. He points out that the medieval church had no consistent doctrine of atonement and that its doctors, though they agreed with St. Augustine about grace, 'were not without expedients to make room for the doctrine of the merit of good works, and even to provide a fund of merit, transferable to those who had it not, of which the court of Rome made a most intemperate use.' Believing thus in merit, they naturally had little reason to perfect the doctrine of atonement, which at its strongest leaves no room at all for merit. Now,

Luther's initial objection to Papal policy centred on the sale of indulgences, a traffic which was justified by the doctrine of the fund of merit. Thus it happened that Luther and other reformers perfected the doctrine of atonement. 'In general ...' says Priestley, 'as the advocates of the church of Rome were inclined to explain away the doctrine of grace, and to introduce that of merit, those who wished for a reformation of the abuses of penance, purgatory, and indulgences, which were founded on the doctrine of merit, would lean to the other extreme, and lay great stress on the satisfaction made for the sin by the death of Christ alone.'<sup>19</sup>

Thus far Priestley's account of the sixteenth-century revolution in the history of the church resembles the account he gives of the scientific revolution of the following century. Like Descartes, Luther and Calvin could reform an erroneous system only on principles equally erroneous. And, we may infer, their system, like his, had the advantage that, though as erroneous as that which it replaced, it was not as inert; once the idea of reform was accepted, further reform was possible.<sup>20</sup> But, enlarging on these matters, Priestley introduces a principle which, though it lies not far beneath the surface of his account of scientific revolution, only here emerges fully:

As good generally comes out of evil, so sometimes, and for a season at least, evil arises out of good. This, however, was remarkably the case with respect to these doctrines in consequence of the reformation by Luther. For the zeal of this great man against the doctrine of indulgences, and that of merit, as the foundation of it, unhappily led him and others so far into the opposite extreme, that from his time the doctrines of grace, original sin, and predestination, have generally been termed the doctrines of the reformation, and every thing that does not agree with them has been termed popish, and branded with other opprobrious epithets.<sup>21</sup>

This admission that evil, even great evil, may come out of good inflicts a severe battering on Priestley's theory of history. Central to that theory is a view of history as God's laboratory: no less than the natural world, the world of human activity is held to display an admirable fittedness of things and events one to another. But a problem arises if we admit, as Priestley now does, that evil sometimes arises out of good or that 'we are not authorized to expect any great good, without a proportionable mixture of evil.'<sup>22</sup> A world in which good always arises out of evil may well be said to bespeak its divine origins, but a world in which evil also arises out of good looks no different from a world in which things just happen. Of course, it may still be a divinely-ordered world, and God will no doubt see to it that good arises out of that evil which has arisen out of good, but it will not be a world in which divine order is manifest. Not only will it have nothing to teach us, but it may even be said to resemble the distinctly secular world of the civic humanists, in which empires rise and fall obedient to blind fortune alone.

The problem, arising in the context of Priestley's discussion of Luther, is, of course, one that hovers over the whole of the Corruptions. We have seen that the third question which Pocock asks of the radical - why is the authority which we are asked to restore no longer actualised? - is implicitly answered by Priestley with an appeal to secular circumstances. God allows it and circumstances secure it: 'This corrupt state of christianity has, no doubt, been permitted by the supreme governor of the world for the best of purposes ...'<sup>23</sup> The problem arises, of course, precisely because the evil, though 'in a

proportionable mixture' with the good, does not equal it. If the balance of good and evil were always one of exact equivalence, there would be no progress. But Priestley's problem is that he believes in progress and, consequently, that the good normally preponderates over the evil. For him the Reformation is not an event to be viewed dispassionately and appraised for its good and evil quantities; it is, beyond doubt, a great and good, not an indifferent, thing. Of course, if he could bring himself to see it as an evil thing, as the triumph of the doctrines of atonement and of sovereign grace, he could then present the weakening of Papal power and the discrediting of Popish superstition as good things arising out of this evil. But this he cannot do. The picture grows smoky and only with the eye of faith can we see the hand of God.

If, as all this seems to imply, history is ironic in the full Mandevillian sense, betraying the virtuous as well as the malicious, might it not be that normal historical processes will be insufficient to ensure the triumph of good? We need not, of course, expect any divine irruption except the last, apocalyptic, one; but we are told that the evil which Luther introduced was so great that we cannot reasonably hope for its removal 'till it shall please divine providence to overturn all these corrupt establishments of what is called christianity, but, which have long been the secure retreat of doctrines disgraceful to christianity.'<sup>24</sup> Some abuses, like this one, may be so deeply embedded that their removal will require something more radical than the gentle succession of revolutions which has so far characterised ecclesiastical history.

This embedding can in considerable measure be attributed to the power of associations, which, though Priestley never mentions it specifically, can easily be seen to underlie his thought in this book as in so many others. Christianity's single greatest corruption is, of course, the transformation of a man into a god, and this was the work of people well disposed to the Gospel who knew what hideous associations clustered around the idea of crucifixion.<sup>25</sup> And, though these victims of irony many have acted deliberately, others were the unwitting dupes of paganism, a system so extensive as to exert a powerful hold on men's minds even after they had been converted formally, and in their own eyes effectively, to another.

Habit, the effect of often-repeated associations, is the cause of other abuses too. Christians who had been converted from paganism 'could not all at once divest themselves of their fondness for pomp and mystery.' The Lord's Supper, instituted as a sharing of bread and wine in memory of Christ, became in their hands a mystery to which only initiates were admitted, like those rites which were 'so striking and captivating' an aspect of heathen worship.<sup>26</sup> Baptism and the recital of the apostles' creed were similarly perverted, and from all this it was a short step to the pagan belief that it is not good thoughts and deeds but the punctilious performance of certain rites that will commend us to God. And in time the moral virtues ascribed to these divinely-ordained actions came to be ascribed also to other actions which, though related to matters religious, had not been commanded by God.<sup>27</sup> Thus the sign of the cross, originally a means by which Christians could recognise each other, acquired a talismanic significance. So also did the sacraments

and the use of holy waters. It is easy, of course, to provide an associationist explanation for this: Priestley himself had pointed out that ideas arising from the objects of passion are often transferred by association to 'indifferent objects' related to them either properly or accidentally.

In due course, the same processes of association which had given pagan ideas such a grip on the early Christian mind gave Popish ideas an equally strong grip on the minds of the first Protestants. Luther and Calvin could deny the spiritual power of the Papacy but not the infallibility of the universal church; they could repudiate the doctrine of transubstantiation but not their belief in some sort of real divine presence in the bread and wine. And the fact that not even they - nor even, as Priestley elsewhere makes clear, the Apostles themselves - were immune to the effects of association should impress upon us the importance of cleansing the mind. It should also leave us in no doubt as to the enormous difficulty of the the task.<sup>28</sup> We now see that the reason why Priestley's Christian castaways were assumed to remember nothing of Christian practice was that all practice is the the practice of churches and therefore corrupt. Degraded institutions exert such a hold on those trapped within them that even good and reforming intentions are perverted. For this reason it is simply not true that the early reformers of the English Church were as well placed as ourselves to judge of Christianity and that we may therefore rest satisfied with their reforms. It will not do to say that they had only to read the Scriptures, 'as if it required nothing more than eyes, capable of distinguishing the words of scripture, to enter into their

real meaning.' On the contrary, the reformers, though they might pretend to be guided by Scripture alone, were prejudiced by their adherence to the doctrines of the second, third and later centuries: 'Or should the English reformers have seriously proposed to themselves to make the scriptures their only rule, how was it possible for them, educated as they were, in the complicated system of popery, to read them with unprejudiced eyes?'<sup>29</sup>

Prejudice is the product of situation; or so Priestley, as a good associationist, believes, candidly admitting that if he were a bishop he would probably not be a reformer but would see things as bishops see them. As long ago as 1769 he had suggested that the understandings of men were all so similar ('~~as~~<sup>at</sup> least so much, as that no persons can seriously maintain that two and two make five') that if all could read the same books uninfluenced by previous knowledge, they could not help but draw the same conclusions from them. In this, of course, he reflected the deep yearning of his epoch for some proof that the truth must be manifest to an unprejudiced eye or that free discussion, candid and unbiassed, must end in rational unanimity: earlier in the century, Swift had said that 'all rational and disinterested People in the World' would come to be of one religion if they did but talk together every day, and French writers had maintained that two painters of exactly equal talent, presented with the same vista, would produce exactly identical pictures.<sup>30</sup> But this, Priestley lamented, is never the situation in which we find ourselves. Inheritors of other men's hypotheses, we read the Scriptures with minds 'prepossessed'. Only one course is open to us: 'To remedy this inconvenience, we must go back to

first principles' (as some go back to a state of nature and others to a desert island). Reading only the Scriptures, disclaiming commentators, we shall all be exposed to the same influences and so must in time 'come to think in the same manner.' This was strong medicine, Priestley thought, and not to be prescribed for those of advanced years: a regimen of unprejudiced reading could do nothing for them, expect, perhaps, unbalance their minds.<sup>31</sup> The same message is implicit throughout the Corruptions, but here the focus of attention has shifted and it is not the mind of an old man that risks derangement but the political and ecclesiastical establishment of a society old in corruption.

Of the two kinds of corruption, those of doctrine and those of church government and practice, the former generally result from the influence of pagan philosophy and the latter from the influence of the civil power. However the two support each other and, though the very powers that were once the chief supporters of the harlot 'now begin to hate her, and are ready to make her desolate and naked', the continued alliance 'of the kingdom of Christ with the kingdoms of this world' is still all that sustains the corruptions of Christianity.<sup>32</sup> Until this alliance has been severed, true reform will be impossible, and so severed it must be, at whatever cost. If we are to break the spell of pernicious associations, if we are to escape those traps in which ironic history ensnared earlier reformers, the cost will be high. So Priestley's epigraph has been well chosen and he, satisfied that he has explained why the tares have sprung up amongst the wheat, and remembering no doubt that 'the harvest is the end of the world', ends his book on a thoroughly apocalyptic note:

It is nothing but the alliance of the kingdom of this world (an alliance which our Lord himself expressly disclaimed) that supports the gravest corruptions of christianity; and perhaps we must wait for the fall of the civil powers before this most unnatural alliance be broken. ... May the kingdom of God, and of Christ (that which I conceive to be intended in the Lord's prayer) truly and fully come, though all the kingdoms of the world be removed, in order to make way for it!'<sup>33</sup>

#### IV.

The History of the Corruptions of Christianity brought its author what he always professed to desire: protracted, involved and erudite controversy. By 1785, one observer, James Woodrow, was writing of 'a powerful Corps in the field' against Priestley, though he was confident of the result: 'he is a bold and able knight and will doubtless think it but a small thing to overthrow these united Chieftains, by the prowess of his single arm.'<sup>34</sup> Woodrow was not alone in having recourse to military metaphor; such language recurs on all sides throughout the controversy, sad evidence that candour had been the first casualty.

Hostilities commenced with the defection of a former ally. Samuel Badcock, once an extravagant admirer of Priestley's, reviewing the new book anonymously over two issues of the Monthly Review, found it too rash a work, too full of 'perversion and misrepresentation.'<sup>35</sup> Priestley sprang to reply even before the second part of the review had been published, but by then a more powerful adversary had taken the field. On 22 May 1783, the Reverend Dr. Samuel Horsley, F.R.S., publicly warned the clergy of his archdeaconry about an attempt 'to unsettle the faith, and to break up the constitution of every ecclesiastical establishment in Christendom.'<sup>36</sup> In autumn of the same

same year, Priestley published some Letters to Dr. Horsley, which were answered the following summer by Letters from the Archdeacon of St. Alban's, in reply to Dr. Priestley. A few months after that, Priestley responded with a second set of Letters, 'in which,' said Horsley, 'all professions, of personal regard and civility were laid aside.'<sup>37</sup> By now Priestley had other enemies to contend with, but in November 1785 he drew Horsley's fire with a sermon on free enquiry; and Horsley himself delivered a controversial homily that Christmas before returning to the attack in the new year with Remarks on Dr. Priestley's Second Letters to the Archdeacon of St. Alban's. This was almost his last word on the subject (though he wrote a bitter preface to the collected edition of his tracts against Priestley), but Priestley kept up his side of the war, firing off two more volleys of correspondence before other and more violent matters interrupted the debate.

The two men had met before in public controversy, when, a few years earlier, Horsley had attacked the doctrines of materialism and determinism; but the politeness which had characterised that exchange was not to survive a longer encounter.<sup>38</sup> This was, perhaps, not to be wondered at, for their minds could scarcely have been more dissimilar. Priestley, contemplating God's power, found it most strikingly manifested in human history, but Horsley worked on an altogether more grandiose scale and in an altogether more abstruse manner. Having offered a new computation of the distance of the earth from the sun, he concluded, after a series of calculations based on the densities and mutual gravitation of the sun and planets, that 'a force of motion is every instant produced a-fresh in the solar system, exceeding



which Priestley had made some of his 'lucky discoveries in the prosecution of physical experiments.'<sup>43</sup>

But it was Horsley's ecclesiastical character that most separated him from his adversary. As an archdeacon he held (and was evidently proud to hold) one of those hierarchical titles which were unknown to the New Testament and therefore offensive to Priestley. Nor was he without that personal ambition which Priestley had long thought 'utterly unworthy of the character of Christian ministers': on his way to the top he had collected several livings without always troubling to make his home in them, and was thus guilty of pluralism and non-residence, two practices which scandalised Priestley, who had written in 1769 that, because of them, a great deal of clerical work was left in the hands of under-paid and ill-qualified curates, 'while the higher ranks of the clergy roll in wealth ...'<sup>44</sup> In fact, Horsley spent his wealth too quickly ever to have time to roll in it: he lived in great style, kept a carriage and four, and disbursed large amounts of charity. But even in his compassion for the poor he contrasts significantly with Priestley; Dissenting politicians were little troubled by the poverty around them. Priestley opposed state welfare on the grounds that it discouraged both private charity and self-improvement, whereas Horsley, distrustful of social mobility and convinced that inequality was divinely-ordained, believed in the duty of the rich to relieve the poor (and secure the balance of society) both by public charity and by private.<sup>45</sup>

Horsley's social views are, then, much like his scientific and theological convictions, static and hierarchical. His God makes himself known not in the turbulence of human history but in the impersonal

demonstration of of his sovereign power, exercised in eternal repetition. And for Horsley scientific truth is to be sought less on the laboratory bench than in the immutable certainties of the equation and the syllogism. In short, he believes in established truth and the order of things. In a passage reminiscent of Bossuet, he maintains that from ecclesiastical history 'the student learns what the faith of he church hath at all times been; and he is enabled to separate the pure doctrine of the first age from all later innovations. ...' The divine revelation, mysterious though it may be, contradictory though it may seem, is 'an imperfect discovery, not a contradiction.' It is, of course, an infallible discovery, conferring infallibility upon the first preachers to whom it was made and upon the traditions of the church which they founded.<sup>46</sup>

Priestley and the Archdeacon were thus bound to be at cross purposes, for whereas Horsley saw himself as defending orthodox doctrine against insolent heresy, Priestley seems to have thought at first that he had embarked with a fellow voyager in search of truth. Characteristically, he claimed to welcome Horsley's attentions and to hope that the controversy would continue. It was no 'mere trial of skill,' he said, but an affair of the greatest moment, and, though they were both probably too old to convert each other, he and Horsley would perhaps throw 'new light' on important questions.<sup>47</sup>

But Horsley's attentions were directed elsewhere. Reviewing the controversy some years after its close, he took pride in the fact that he had not allowed himself to be drawn on the main question, that of Christ's divinity (a contention 'long since exhausted'), but had instead

diverted the discussion towards numerous points of ecclesiastical history related to it; and by then he had already explained that his attack was aimed less at Priestley's opinions than at his credibility as a writer.<sup>48</sup> Horsley never speaks as Bossuet does of the presumption of those individuals who challenge the traditions of the Church, but an attitude similar to Bossuet's seems implicit in what he does say. It ought to be enough to teach the truth, but it is not: truth must be defended as well, against the 'stubborn infidel', the 'restless spirit of scepticism' and 'the refinements of a false philosophy.'<sup>49</sup> The picture of truth as a monolith, a citadel to be defended, is never far from his thoughts; he is a member of the garrison, but Priestley must make his assault alone and unsupported. This is why he wishes to attack not Priestley's opinions but his learning. The opinions have long since been rejected, but the learning, false though it is, may mislead 'the weaker Brethren'.

In fact, though Priestley may at first have misunderstood Horsley's intentions, each man has a clear idea of his own role in the controversy. Priestley is aware that for him the question is one of personal judgement and integrity (as it most emphatically is not for Horsley). So he is anxious to protest his candour, to emphasise that he is not moved by zeal for reputation and is no more prejudiced than other men. He knows that he stands alone - though he believes that history is on his side - and that it is his task to defend both a method of interpreting scripture and a particular interpretation. He speaks of the difficulty of combatting ingrained prejudice and, to demonstrate it, furnishes a short history ('not a little humbling') of his own progress

from 'the strictest principles of Calvinism', to Arianism and thence to Socinianism. Convinced as he now is that unitarianism was the faith of the early church, he does not expect to change, but the young and indifferent, 'whose minds have not acquired the stiffness of ours who are turned fifty', may certainly learn from the controversy, if it is conducted in the right spirit:

It becomes us, however, to consider, that they only will be entitled to praise, who join in carrying on the designs of providence with right views of their own; who are activated by a real love of truth, and also by that candour and benevolence, which a sense of our common difficulties in the investigation of truth most effectually inspires. A man who has never changed an opinion cannot have much feeling of this difficulty, and therefore cannot be expected to have much candour, unless his disposition is uncommonly excellent. I ought to have more candour than others, because I have felt more than many can pretend to have done, the force of those obstacles which retard our progress in the search of truth.<sup>50</sup>

Horsley is not impressed. Nor should he be given his assumptions: if a man attacks established truth, it matters not at all that <sup>he</sup> does so from the best of motives. This ought to have been apparent to Priestley, for the first blow of Horsley's attack had aimed at exposing the contradictions of his adversary's position as one man against the world.

Horsley points out that, instead of inferring the doctrine of the early church from the plain sense of scripture, Priestley moves in the opposite direction: he wants to trace changes in doctrine so as to arrive at the uncorrupt original, 'the faith of the first ages', and he wants to use that original in order to settle disputed points of scriptural interpretation. Therefore, he cannot in logic employ a particular interpretation of scripture as proof that the faith of the first ages was such as would support that interpretation. This, however, is just what Priestley tries to do: he asserts that the faith

of the ancient Jewish church may be known from scripture and from ecclesiastical history, but his evidence from ecclesiastical history will hold water only if his interpretation of scripture will, and the validity of his interpretation of scripture is, of course, just the question which is to be decided. Things would be different, Horsley implies, if Priestley's interpretations were acknowledged by the 'majority of the Christian Church', but they are not; however obvious Priestley may believe them to be, they are particular interpretations only, and very strange ones at that. Indeed, when St. John writes of the logos and St. Paul describes Christ as the 'image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature, by whom all things were created', Priestley has to assume that these inspired authors were really saying the very opposite of what they seem to be saying; and he can foist such interpretations on the early church only by means of a 'circulating syllogism'.<sup>51</sup>

Priestley's answer to this can only be that he is not as singular as he looks, and this indeed is more or less the answer that he does give. He has, he claims, independent evidence of the gospels' unitarianism and the principle upon which he proceeds is this: if we wish to prove two assertions and we know that if one is true then the other must also be true, then it is usual for us to begin by observing that they prove each other and that therefore any proof of one is a proof of the other. Earlier commentators, says Priestley, have shown the doctrine of the scriptures to be unitarian; his task in the Corruptions was to prove from independent evidence the unitarianism of the primitive church.<sup>52</sup> But for as long as the interpretations of these

commentators are, as Horsley puts it, 'disallowed by the majority of Christians', they cannot be submitted as the clear sense of scripture. So Horsley confronts Priestley with a dilemma: if he still argues that the primitive faith must have been unitarian because unitarianism is the clear sense of the scriptures (clear in that it is 'clearly conveyed in the words'), then he is still arguing in a circle, because the sole purpose of inquiries into the primitive faith is to settle disputed points of scripture; if, however, unitarianism were shown to be the clear sense of the scriptures (clear in that it could be clearly proved to be the sense intended by the authors), then the only conclusion must be that its authors were of all writers 'the most unnecessarily and most wilfully obscure.' In fact, Horsley continues, this obscurity is acknowledged by Unitarians themselves, who cannot pretend that their doctrine is plainly conveyed by scripture and who are forced to assume that the sacred authors delighted in metaphors and imagery strange to European eyes but supposedly familiar to Asiatic readers.<sup>53</sup> Even if the argument were not circular, it would be brought down by this assumption, which, as Horsley realises, undermines the very foundation of Priestley's egalitarian theology:

The gospel is a general revelation. If it is delivered in a style, which is not perspicuous to the illiterate of any nation except the Jewish; it is as much locked up from general apprehension, as if the sacred books had been written in the vernacular gibberish of that age.<sup>54</sup>

Priestley's situation is like that of those radicals whose historical researches into past glories has been so thorough as to reveal an antiquity quite unlike the present; an antiquity that is therefore

totally irrelevant and useless for radical purposes. Priestley has turned a universal gospel into an historical curio.<sup>55</sup>

This is a situation in which the conservative is never very likely to find himself, for he seeks authority in perduring institutions rather than in recently-excavated monuments. The commonsense interpretation of scripture ('that which will be the first to occur to common people of every country, and in every age') is almost enough for Horsley, but it is supplemented by the traditions and teaching authority of the Church. Of course, as an Anglican he cannot issue commands from out the mists of authority; he cannot, like Berruyer, employ an extreme historical scepticism. He wants to show both that his Church has an apostolic constitution and that its doctrines are agreeable to scripture and to reason. For this he needs to be able to point to a continuous history; not necessarily to an entirely unspotted history, but certainly to one free from the disfiguring corruptions of which Priestley writes. He concedes his adversary's point that 'there is nothing that can be called an account of the divine nature of Christ in the gospels', but remarks that the gospels were not intended to be a system of general principles. Our method must be to look not at any single gospel or at all four gospels or at the gospels, the Acts and the epistles together, but at the 'whole code of revelation', at both the Old Testament and the New. This of course, is just the method that Priestley recommends when he argues the importance of adhering to 'the general tenor' of scripture. Horsley flings the phrase back in his face: 'I contend, that your doctrine is what stands upon particular texts; while the catholic faith is supported by the general tenor of the sacred writings, and by the

consent of those writings, in many parts, with an universal tradition of unexplored antiquity.'<sup>56</sup>

But even Priestley's explorations of antiquity are of dubious value, Horsley contends. Every corruption has a history, so we are entitled to ask whether Priestley can prove that the first Christians did not worship Christ as a God. That is to say, can he prove it by means of the sort of evidential proof which alone is acceptable in historical research?

For as for that kind of proof, in which you so much delight, which is drawn by abstract reasoning from general and precarious maxims; it is of no more significance in history, than testimony would be in mathematics. ... Scientific truth can only be established by abstract reasoning. Testimony can in science produce nothing more than probability. In history it is quite the reverse: abstract reasoning can never go beyond a probability: proof must arise from evidence. And the reason of this is plain. The principles of scientific truth are all within the mind itself: the truths of history are the occurrences of the external world. Neglecting this necessary distinction, the great Berkeley questioned the existence of the material world, because he found it incapable of demonstration; and I have known many seek a confirmation of geometrical theorems from experiment.<sup>57</sup>

In other words, Priestley is here accused of just that error which he believed underlay the false philosophy of the Scots: that of seeking more proof, and proof of a different kind, than the nature of the subject will admit. Clearly the problem arises because he so frequently invokes general maxims of historical method - based, often enough, on associationist principles - and then draws particular conclusions from them. For Horsley, logic and mathematics are the master sciences and theirs is the realm of demonstrable truth. However, the tenets of the Catholic faith have no need of demonstration: they derive from an infallible source and have been communicated by the inheritors of that

infallibility. Horsley is therefore free of that concern with legitimation which troubles Priestley and from which derive those methodological habits which he criticises. Having, because of this concern, espoused associationism, Priestley was never much inclined to resist two temptations to which associationism gave rise: the temptation to conflate the logical and the empirical, and the temptation to establish a priori general principles of human psychology with which historical fact is expected to conform.

The habits to which Horsley objects are perhaps at their most egregious in the postscript to Priestley's first set of letters, in which fourteen 'maxims of historical criticism' are, in his slippery phrase, 'adapted to' a set of sixteen propositions which summarise the evidence for the unitarianism of the early church. These maxims are generally of two kinds: those which seem to have associationism behind them and those which derive from that argument from silence which Priestley had been using for the last twenty years. The two approaches converge at last in a single argument: the theory of the human mind bequeathed to us by Locke and Hartley teaches us that early impressions are long retained and that the mechanism of the mind has not altered over the centuries; from these considerations taken together we may deduce that great doctrinal innovations will occasion great shock and that if an innovation which would today occasion shock did not do so centuries ago, then it is probable that no long-established prejudice was offended. The Apostles' Creed condemns only Gnosticism, not Unitarianism; Tertullian did not consider Unitarians outcasts from the Church; no member of the primitive Church was executed for Unitarianism:

'Now, since the minds of men are in all ages similarly affected in similar circumstances, we may conclude, that the unitarian doctrine, which was treated with so much respect when it was first mentioned, was in a very different predicament then, from what it was at the time of the Reformation.'<sup>58</sup>

In a related line of attack, Priestley suggests that the difficulty of tracing the doctrine of Christ's divinity to its origin is a reason for believing that origin to be comparatively recent, and he twice tries and fails to get Horsley to assign a date to the announcement of Christ's divinity.<sup>59</sup> Horsley's refusal is founded on the correct observation that an inability to do so would embarrass his case only if he were to concede that the early church was unitarian. As long as he refuses to make this concession, he can, believing as he does in the infallibility of tradition, direct his attention towards the charismatic origin of his faith and not to the secular question of its transmission:

It concerns not me; because, with my notions of inspiration, I am obliged to believe what the inspired Apostles taught, however late the time might be when they themselves received their information. It concerns not you; because with your notions of inspiration, you are at liberty to dispute what the inspired Apostles taught, whatever pretensions they may have to the earliest information. If the knowledge was infallible which they received from inspiration, it matters not how late; if not infallible, it matters not how early they received it.<sup>60</sup>

The question might, of course, be more compelling to Horsley if he were to admit (as he does not) that the Jews had expected a mortal messiah, but even this admission would lead merely to a problem of secular history - why did nobody express surprise at the announcement of the Messiah's divinity? - and Horsley is not a secular historian. The

scriptures are not for him, as they are for Priestley, documents to be interrogated, like Caesar's Commentaries or Plutarch's Lives, for he maintains a distinction between the sacred and the profane which is quite unknown to his adversary.

It is this distinction that gives him so grave a sense of his own sacerdotal importance and leads him to adopt a tone which Priestley believes injurious to the investigation of truth. But requests that he drop 'that sarcastic manner of writing' are, of course, unavailing, for the truth is that Priestley and the Archdeacon are never so far apart as when each protests his own candour whilst regretting his adversary's ill-bred manner. For Horsley, to be candid is to be tolerant; a beneficed servant of the Church by law established, engaged not in the pursuit of truth but in the refutation of heresy, he is indulging Priestley merely by talking to him. It is part of his duty to rebuke, to speak de haut en bas, to emphasise that he is the professional and Priestley the amateur, skilled enough in 'philosophical subjects' but at a loss when it comes to theology.<sup>61</sup>

Priestley, to whom a belief in the unity of knowledge is central, can neither accept this nor, it seems, properly understand it, for he admonishes Horsley as though expecting to convince him: 'if I have been so cautious and so successful in the investigation of truth in one province, I may, having the same talents, make the same successful application of them in other provinces. For the same mental habits generally accompany the same men in every scene of life, and in every mode of exercise.'<sup>62</sup> But if Horsley were to concede that the mental habits formed in the laboratory might be useful in the interpretation of

ecclesiastical history, then he would be violating not only the distinction between sacred and profane knowledge but also the theory of divine providence that underlies it. For he is committed to the belief that the Catholic Church is the favourite child of providence, displaying this status in history by its maintenance of a pure faith and an infallible tradition. Priestley, on the other hand, has expressly stated that divine providence has no local operation and God no direct influence on either the individual mind or the collective mind of the Church.<sup>63</sup> He can therefore allow himself an egalitarian and optimistic view of knowledge: any research, whether scientific or theological, may contribute to our understanding of God, and any researcher, whether professional or amateur, may be fortunate enough to add to what we know. Horsley, though, little impressed by Priestley's own 'lucky discoveries', has no reason to believe that an amateur may stumble on the truth:

A writer, of whom it is once proved that he is ill-informed upon his subject, hath no right to demand a further hearing. It is a fair presumption against the truth of his conclusion, be it what it may, that it cannot be right but by meer accident. To be right by accident will rarely happen to any man in any subject; because in all subjects truth is single, and error infinite.<sup>64</sup>

It is clear from Priestley's reply to this that he is now without any illusions that this will be the 'perfectly amicable' discussion for which he hoped. In the attempt to discredit him, Horsley has attacked not only his learning and ambition but his honesty as well. He begins his reply with a long complaint against the Archdeacon's insolence, his misrepresentations of the living and his defamations of the dead. But, most of all, it is Horsley's 'want of common candour' that upsets him. In exchange for candour he has been offered 'gross insults' and the

language of the battlefield, for Horsley frequently boasts of his 'victory' and exults over his 'prostrate enemy'. It would be absurd for the victim of such abuse to return to the respectful style with which he began the discussion. He will now write with greater freedom, and the 'candid reader' will make allowances for his prejudices. Indeed, Priestley is no longer above a little military metaphor himself as he advances (so he believes) through the ranks of his critics: 'If I had left all their darts sticking in my buckler they would not have retarded my progress.'<sup>65</sup>

Such rough usage perhaps indicates a greater willingness on Priestley's part to enter into the spirit of things - and he was certainly enjoying himself in what he called 'the easiest and the pleasantest piece of controversy I was ever engaged in' - but, though he seems now to have recognised that Horsley was a foe and not a colleague, he was still unable to take the measure of the enemy.<sup>66</sup> The very idea, so precious to Horsley, of a sacerdotal succession descending from the Apostles through the Popes to the Archdeacon and his brethren, is so outlandish to Priestley that he can scarcely credit that he is living at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>67</sup> But in his exasperation, he betrays a fatal inability to understand the passions that sway his High-Church opponents. Horsley fears for his country; for the broken unity of her Church, for the unsettled faith of her people, beset by philosophical scruples, and for the Protestant religion, disgraced of late by the fanaticism of the Gordon rioters. All these scandals serve to discredit true religion: on the one hand, devotion to it is inflamed by enthusiasm; on the other, its doctrines are stripped of their

mystery. And at the root of these evils he detects a principle which Priestley seems disposed to advocate: 'that every man who hath credit enough to collect a congregation, hath a right, over which the magistrate cannot without tyranny exercise controul, to celebrate the divine worship according to his own form, and to propagate his own opinions. ...'<sup>68</sup> This was indeed what Priestley believed, and in proclaiming his belief he struck his most undiplomatic blow so far.

November 5 was a date twice-glorious in Dissenting eyes: anniversary of the frustration of Popish conspiracy in 1605 and of Popish tyranny in 1688. To Priestley it must have seemed an appropriate day on which to celebrate the banishment of darkness, and he chose to do so in a sermon which he later published as The Importance and Extent of Free Inquiry in Matters of Religion. In it he proclaimed the boundaries of religious knowledge to be as thrillingly and as challengingly distant as those of scientific knowledge, and he made it clear that he differed from his opponents not only not only in his open-ended view of religion but also in his individualistic rationalism.<sup>69</sup> This is apparent from one rather extraordinary sentence: 'No person whose opinions are not the result of his own serious inquiry can have a right to say he is a dissenter, or any thing else, on principle; and no man can be absolutely sure of this whose present opinions are the same with those that he was taught, though he may think, and be right in thinking, that he sees sufficient reason for them, and retains them on conviction.'<sup>70</sup> Such an appeal for independence of mind would, of course, have been familiar to any Dissenter of Priestley's day, and indeed to any of the old Puritans, but the idea that the only sure proof of independence is rebellion is

unusual. It recalls Priestley's insistence that it is in our behaviour and not in the affections of our souls that we must seek for assurance of our faith, and, of course, it has a similar origin. In both cases we are to look for the decisive act of will as the only objective proof of a proper condition of mind. The system of ideas that association builds up in our minds is so complex and tenacious that only by exchanging them for others can we truly know that our ideas are our own; though we can do without this knowledge, and many of us will have to (as Priestley has to admit if his sermon is not to appear too blatant a piece of special pleading for his own religious history). If our religious convictions are to be put to this sort of test, there must, of course, be alternatives. There can be no one church, but all must be 'equally parties' in a religious free market with no earthly power to judge them.<sup>71</sup>

He enlarges on this theme in the 'Reflections on the present state of Free Inquiry in this country' which he appends to the published version of his sermons. Only after all our doctrines have been tried in the fire of controversy can we hope, he says, to arrive at that happy state of affairs in which all will unwaveringly acquiesce in 'a permanent and useful uniformity. ...'<sup>72</sup> It is unfortunate, then, that the times are not favourable to free inquiry. There is, Priestley admits, no actual persecution, but such is 'the influence of habit, of fashion, and of connections, in these peaceable times' that few have the courage to act on their convictions and most pay lip-service to the orthodoxies of the age. Priestley's line of insinuation here is one with which two centuries of radical thought have made us very familiar:

in the regrettable absence of any one identifiable oppressor, public opinion itself is made out to be the persecutor; we are subtly invited to assume that the public - or at least the less enlightened part of it - simply does not know its own mind. (Of course, any theory of progress will serve to justify a theory of false consciousness; Priestley's determinism, though Christian, will do the job as well as Marx's.) But there will always be some whose consciousness is not false, who are on the side of history, and once their spectral presence makes itself known, then the slightest political tremor may, as Priestley hopes, cause the establishment suddenly to vanish 'like an enchanted castle in romance.' This idea of subterranean progress, slow in its course but sure in its effects, so beguiled him that he was inspired to illustrate it with a disastrous metaphor: 'We are, as it were, laying gunpowder, grain by grain, under the old building of error and superstition, which a single spark may hereafter inflame, so as to produce an instantaneous explosion::; in consequence of which that edifice, the erection of which has been the work of ages, may be overturned in a moment, and so effectually as that the same foundation can never be built upon again.'<sup>73</sup>

In vain did he later protest, to the citizens of Birmingham and even to the Prime Minister, that his gunpowder was 'nothing but arguments'. The damage had been done - not only to him but to his fellow Dissenters - and from now on he was 'Gunpowder Priestley' to the mob.<sup>74</sup> Of course, his intentions were not sanguinary, but his disavowals of violent designs on the establishment are at least very naive. His language, metaphysical or not, was, as Horsley pointed out,

'audacious', and he can hardly have complained if his critics inferred that such audacity was intended to have its effect. The battle lines are now very clearly drawn up and martial language is freely used on both sides. Priestley describes the controversy in terms of strongholds, outworks and sallies; he speaks of strengthening his fortifications and of his hopes to withstand 'a close and regular siege', or at least to surrender 'with all the honours of war.' For his part, Horsley frankly announces that the controversy between Priestly 'and the advocates of the catholic faith' now amounts, by Priestley's own declaration, 'to a state resembling that of a war, in which no quarter is to be given or accepted. ...'<sup>75</sup>

On Christmas Day 1785, the Archdeacon delivered a 'Sermon on the Incarnation', in which, having scored some palpable hits at the very idea of a Christian materialism, he sets about constructing a philosophical defence of the Catholic faith. But before he has gone very far, he breaks off:

Would to God the necessity never had arisen of stating the discoveries of Revelation in metaphysical propositions. The inspired writers delivered their sublimest doctrines in popular language, and abstained, as much as it was possible to abstain, from a philosophical phraseology. By the perpetual cavils of gainsayers, and the difficulties which they have raised, later teachers, in the assertion of the same doctrines, have been reduced to the unpleasing necessity of availing themselves of the greater precision of a less familiar language.<sup>76</sup>

This is a version of an argument which had earlier been perspicuously put by Bossuet. That which is orthodox now, he had said, always was orthodox. Nor can the Church be said to have deepened her understanding of it; for she has always known her mind. Sometimes, however, moved by the need to answer the heretic, she has had to clarify and explain her

meaning, to refine her language and to explicate what before was merely implicit.<sup>77</sup> It is some such thought as this that moves Horsley when he condemns 'the folly and crime of setting up private judgement for the role of public opinion, in opposition to a tradition traced to the first ages, and by consequence of the same authority with that on which the rest of the Canon rests. ...' This is the language of the Catholic faith, and Horsley - who remarks that mere distance from Rome is not in itself 'the true standard of purity' - seems happy to share it with Popes and Cardinals.<sup>78</sup>

In the face of this sort of thing, Priestley tried to depict the Archdeacon as a curiosity - tilting at windmills and affording with his arrogance more entertainment than any public figure since the great Tory hero Dr. Sacheverel - but Horsley had a final trick to play.<sup>79</sup> 'The best policy, in the enemies of truth,' Priestley had said, 'is no doubt, that of those who endeavour to stifle all inquiry, who read nothing, and who reply to nothing.' This was now the Archdeacon's policy. He spared himself 'the insipid task' of reading Priestley's History of Early Opinions Concerning Jesus Christ, explaining that his experience of the author's work hitherto had left him with no hope of learning anything from 'that large work in four volumes, the result of a whole two-years study of the writers of antiquity. ...'<sup>80</sup> It is not hard now to envy him his foresight; in part these four volumes recapitulate the argument of the Corruptions (though that book, says Priestley, is addressed to the unlearned and this to the learned) and in part they rehearse again Priestley's side of the debate with Horsley. There is little that is new in this account of the advance of Platonism in the early Church and

the retreat before it of unitarian orthodoxy, but Priestley's method of research does possess a certain naive originality. He has, he says, attempted to write his book without preconceptions, not looking into any commentators before reading all the early authors. Once more, then, he seeks to regard sacred history with a secular and scientific gaze, claiming that his object is not to persuade his readers but to enable them to do the same, to form their own judgement from the facts that he has laid before them. More than once, the reader is urged to forswear preconception and 'take up the matter ab initio', which often means, of course, trying to understand the scriptures not as tradition understands them but as their contemporary readers would have understood them.<sup>81</sup>

According to Priestley, these, the methods of profane scholarship, are the methods by which we determine that Homer, for example, was a polytheist; and what is good enough for Homer is good enough for Moses and the gospel writers. Priestley's tendency, already pronounced, to treat sacred works as though they were secular is here made quite explicit: 'all those to whom it can be worth my while to make an apology, think as I do with respect to the scriptures, viz. that they were written without any particular inspiration, by men who wrote according to the best of their knowledge, and who from their circumstances could not be mistaken with respect to the greater facts, of which they were proper witnesses, but (like other men, subject to prejudices) might be liable to adopt a hasty and ill-grounded opinion concerning things which did not fall within the compass of their own knowledge. ...' Unbelievers will scarcely be impressed by talk of inspiration. If they are to be persuaded, it must be by 'a just and

rational defence of this most important history', mounted on the principle that the gospel writers are 'simply historians, whose credit must be determined by the circumstance in which they wrote, and the nature of the facts which they relate.'<sup>82</sup>

But though Horsley had withdrawn, convinced of his victory (these martial metaphors are irresistible), Priestley was by no means left to undisputed dominion of the field. There were many other blows to be parried, more than could be met individually, and so, over the next few years, he published three volumes of Defences of Unitarianism, for 1786, for 1787 and for 1788 and 1789. Relieved, he said, to be speaking to persons better tempered and more knowledgeable than the Archdeacon, he addressed himself now to his friend Richard Price, to Dr. Horne, Dean of Canterbury, to several other reverend gentlemen, to the students of divinity at Oxford and Cambridge, and at last even to the silent Horsley (by now raised to the See of St. David's, or 'pretty well comforted for his defeat,' as Priestley put it). He was pleased to have so many opponents; not only would this excite public interest but it seemed to show that each would combat for a while and then, despairing of victory (he uses military metaphors constantly now), step aside to allow another champion to step into the breach. But he was not happy with the tone of the correspondence. Drs. Price and Geddes, the one a Dissenter and the other a Roman Catholic, were candid men, but such candour was not everywhere to be looked for: 'Why is it that, excepting only the dean of Canterbury, the members of the church of England cannot write with the same liberality, such as becomes gentlemen, scholars, and christians?'<sup>83</sup>

The Dean of Canterbury, though a member of the established church, was a valuable opponent and a candid man; but still he was a member of the established church and, as such, a prisoner:

Your system is so complex, and involves such an unnatural connexion of things ecclesiastical with things civil, that though you might know where to begin a reformation, you will never be able to agree among yourselves where to stop. It must, therefore, be done in a manner in which the leading persons in the church and state will not be the primary agents.<sup>84</sup>

We are perhaps not intended to read this as a threat of revolution from without, a hint that the citadel, since it will not be surrendered, must be taken by storm. It is, however, of a piece with Priestley's advice to the undergraduates of Oxford and Cambridge that they should act for themselves and not wait for the lead of 'some great man' in church and state. It was not by great men that Christianity was propagated or the Reformation begun, but rather by individuals of all ranks thinking for themselves, till at last those in power saw that it was in their interest to favour them. Now, as then, ministers of state 'ought to follow the lead of the people.'<sup>85</sup> Such arguments as these struck so near to the heart of the English polity that only a short step was enough to take them from theology to the world of affairs.

V.

The times seemed propitious for reformers. Great things were expected of the young Prime Minister. He was believed, on good grounds, to be a friend of reform: Dissenters had, as Price said, 'contributed much towards giving the last general election a turn in Mr. Pitt's favour,' and they believed that he had incurred an obligation which he

was bound to repay.<sup>86</sup> Reform could, it seemed, be urged, and with some confidence, in a language of judicious moderation. And so, on 28 March 1787, Henry Beufooy, arguing that every man had a right to the privileges of the society in which he lived, moved a bill in the Commons for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. But the Dissenters' confidence was misplaced: not only did the Prime Minister oppose reform, but he did so with arguments very similar to some of Priestley's. He distinguished between civil and religious liberty, arguing that the latter was not a natural right but a trust which the state had a discretionary power to grant to those of sound principles, religious and political. Dissenters, he said, already possessed civil liberty; if the state - united as it was with the church on principles of expediency - chose, for reasons of expediency, to deny them political liberty, they were not thereby being treated as second-class citizens.<sup>87</sup> In the debate that followed, Priestley's gunpowder metaphor was quoted with consequences disastrous to the Dissenting cause: the appeal was rejected by 176 votes to 98.

But Priestley denied being a spokesman for Dissent, and, indeed, it is true that the moderate reformers who initiated the appeal had been careful to repudiate his extremism. Knowing, he says, his own unpopularity ('even among the Dissenters'), he had taken no part in the campaign. However, he did hear Pitt's speech, and he felt bound to reply.<sup>88</sup> This he did in an open letter heavy with condescension. The Prime Minister, he said, had been misled by his education and connections and by a desire for popularity. But he should take it from

an old man that honesty was the best policy and that there was nothing disgraceful about a change of mind in one so young.

The Letter was not a success - some of its readers seem to have considered the author too violent to do any good, others thought him mad - and, though Priestley later complained that the he had been misrepresented as insolent and menacing, the plain word of his text is quite menacing enough:

It has been said that, if Dissenters gain this point, they will aim at something more. This I acknowledge: we should ask many things more, because there are many things that we conceive ourselves to be entitled to, and which it will be no injury, but an advantage, to our country to grant us.<sup>89</sup>

But he still believed that these many things would be the fruits of open discussion, and he was not alone in his optimism; it was typical of the mood of Dissent in the seventeen-eighties. The note of expectation is sounded very clearly in the discourse which Richard Price delivered in 1787 to the supporters of the proposed academy at Hackney. Like Priestley, he calls for a cleansing of the mind - claiming that only those who have examined everything impartially can be properly attached to true principles - and, like Priestley, he is clear as to the political implications of what he has to say: it is 'our national code of faith and worship' that is to be tried at the bar of impartial reason.<sup>90</sup>

These blithe expectations found focus the next year in the centenary celebrations of the Glorious Revolution, and these in turn gave impetus to a second attempt at repeal. Again the Commons threw out the motion, but by a margin so narrow (only 122 votes to 102) that Dissenters, scenting victory, were led into what one of their number

called 'gross and fatal indiscretions.'<sup>91</sup> Provincial Dissenters, now at the helm, abandoned the cautious tactics with which their metropolitan brethren had hitherto conducted the movement. They agitated in the press, formed associations and demanded the abolition of all ecclesiastical tithes and the repeal of all penal statutes affecting religion. However, even at this stage of events - as the atmosphere warmed and the language of the rights of man came increasingly to be used - Priestley could still assert that if the facts of the case were candidly represented 'to the nation at large, and especially to those who have power to give us relief', then reason, truth and right would prevail.<sup>92</sup> (Of course, this sort of thing may be a display less of optimism maintained than of wells poisoned: we are perhaps meant to infer that if the Dissenters' case is as obvious as all that, then those who oppose it must be uncandid obscurantists.)

However, this belief, proclaimed in Priestley's 5 November sermon in 1789, is accompanied by a new and darker picture of the Dissenters' present situation. In a passage which reads like a direct reply to Pitt, Priestley tells the congregation of the Old and New Meetings at Birmingham that they are 'in a state of comparative servitude, not enjoying the privileges of other citizens': their situation differs from severe persecution in degree but not in principle.<sup>93</sup> This, of course, is to answer Pitt's argument only by begging the question. Priestley assumes, without arguing for the assumption, that the political disabilities under which Dissenters labour are civil punishments. If this is so, then obviously, since there has been no offence, those punished may indeed be said to be in a state of servitude. In this sort

of argument the language of the rights of man more than justifies its growing popularity: when Dissenters appealed merely to the candour of those in office, their first task was to draw attention to the particular details of their case; now, by appealing to a universal concept rather than to local sympathies, they are able to blur the distinctions between particular cases. There is a singularly virtuosic example of this in the peroration to Priestley's sermon. Here, with one sweeping movement of rhetoric, he gathers together the prosperous Dissenters of Birmingham with all the wretched, huddled masses of the earth: 'Lastly, while we join in asserting our own rights, let us not be unmindful of the rights of others, especially the common rights of humanity, of which the poor negroes have long been deprived, being treated as brutes, and not as men, and also of the just claims of all men to the rights of a free and equal government.'<sup>94</sup> But Pitt's argument was that the Dissenters possessed civil liberty - their lives and property were their own - and were denied only certain political privileges to which they were not entitled as of right. So they were not being punished, nor were they in anything like a state of servitude, and the poor negroes had nothing to do with the case.

Priestley's sermon went down well with its audience - as its title-page proudly proclaims, it was printed by request of the seven congregations of the three Dissenting denominations in Birmingham - and Lindsey said that 'friend and foe' spoke favourably of it.<sup>95</sup> But its optimism, and that of its friends, was ill-founded. The politicking of radical Dissenters had produced an loyalist counter-movement; there could no longer be any question of a growing consensus in their

favour.<sup>96</sup> And though this opposition was distinct from anything done in reaction to events across the Channel, these events began to cast a shadow over the world in which the Dissenters had, so recently, found such cause for hope.

On the day of Priestley's sermon in Birmingham, Price preached one of his own in London, his audience the members of the London Revolution Society, who met every year on this day to commemorate the birth of William III. He began soberly enough, but, warming to his theme, was led into more controversial fields: he condemned church establishment as destructive of true devotion; though not a member of the church, he saw fit to demand reform of its liturgy and articles of religion; and he went so far as to congratulate his sovereign for being 'almost the only lawful king in the world, because the only one who owes his Crown to the choice of his people.'<sup>97</sup> At last, as he approached the end, he addressed the great event of the year, He congratulated himself on surviving to see superstition and error undermined, liberty exalted, slavery spurned. 'Tremble all ye oppressors of the world!' he cried, in language that recalls the apocalyptic final paragraph of Priestley's Corruptions. 'Restore to mankind their rights; and consent to the correction of abuses, before they and you are destroyed together.'<sup>98</sup>

These were the sentiments, both subversive and metaphysical, that drew upon their author's head the fury of Edmund Burke; formerly the friend of Dissenters, now their implacable enemy. Burke had not spoken in either of the first two debates on the Test and Corporation Acts, but on 2 March 1790 the chance came again - Charles James Fox proposed repeal in the name of 'the Universal Rights of Human Nature' - and this

time he took it. Opposing the motion, he paraded for the House's inspection several examples of Dissenting excess, including extracts from Price's sermon and from an open letter in which Priestley had predicted that the zeal of the orthodox would at length ignite 'those grains of gunpowder' whose explosion would bring down the Church 'as suddenly, and completely as the overthrow of the late arbitrary government in France.' After this, the bill was doomed: it was defeated by 294 votes to 105 and there was national rejoicing.<sup>99</sup>

Priestley seems by now to have been running out of friends. His 'bold and decisive spirit,' said Kenrick, had 'raised him many enemies among the moderate & discrete of all parties - particularly the dissenters - whose minds ... are not yet sufficiently enlightened to keep pace with his.'<sup>100</sup> Priestley no doubt thought himself more popular in Birmingham - nowhere, he said, were there more Dissenters who were not Calvinists - but here, where the Dissenting population had been very active in the campaign against the Test and Corporation Acts, these national differences mingled with more local resentments. So the battle lines were already drawn up by the time Priestley delivered his sermon of 5 November 1789.<sup>101</sup> Nor did he still the controversy with his Familiar Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham. Intended as a reply to his many and bitter critics among the local clergy, these letters, says John Money, 'called forth a mass of vernacular replies, most of them bogus ... some of them possibly genuine. Priestley himself later admitted that his letters had only exacerbated matters. He was, he said, followed and taunted by boys in the street.'<sup>102</sup>

The Letters go over ground already covered, in less popular form, in Priestley's other publications.<sup>103</sup> His particular target, though, are the clergy, who have denounced him from their pulpits and slandered him in their pamphlets. In order to undermine their position, he tries to show that they are not, as they claim to be, the possessors of special knowledge. Far from being knowledge of any sort, the principles which their church takes for granted have no foundation, he claims, either in scripture or in common sense. And scripture itself is a matter of common sense: there are no deep mysteries in the Christian religion; the Apostles were plain men.<sup>104</sup> Their testimony regarding the person of Christ is, indeed, not inspired, but - despite what the High Churchmen of Birmingham allege - Priestley does not for that reason reject it. On the contrary, since they were 'naturally competent to judge in the case', their testimony is decisive, and divine inspiration could have added nothing to its validity. Moreover, even if they were inspired, succeeding generations have not been; so neither their inspired testimony nor even the knowledge that it was inspired could have been transmitted to us by anything other than the entirely fallible conduit of historical evidence.<sup>105</sup>

A few years later, Priestley - by now Citizen Priestley and an honorary Frenchman - pursued the same line of argument in his Letters to the Philosophers and Politicians of France. He urged his new compatriots to subject the scriptures to close historical scrutiny. They would find, he said, a narrative, at once truly plain and plainly true, that had no need of divine inspiration nor claimed it; a narrative 'as circumstantial, and as open to inquiry, as that of Caesar and

Pompey'.<sup>106</sup> It is typical of Priestley - never one to employ diplomacy when a frontal assault across open ground against an impregnable position was possible - that he should have thought it proper to address the same argument both to the Christian inhabitants of Birmingham and to the philosophers and politicians of France, who, one assumes, were deists or atheists. An argument that compares the gospel narratives to those of Caesar and Pompey is, perhaps, the only sort that will prevail with an audience who recognise no authority but that of human reason. In Birmingham, however, Priestley is addressing Anglicans, as he himself recognises, and Anglicans are committed to belief in an authority other than those of reason and historical scholarship. They believe that the church is, as its articles proclaim it to be, 'a witness and a keeper of holy Writ', that the divine inspiration granted the Apostles has been transmitted through the generations to the visible church of the present day. So Priestley, in insisting that we never could have more than historical and fallible evidence for our faith in the inspiration of others, is dismissing out of hand the teaching authority of the church.

The line of argument is entirely secular and what makes it so is its egalitarian epistemology. For Priestley, knowledge is a single, unbounded republic; it harbours no autonomous kingdoms, secure in their privilege and safe from investigation. He has already spelt this out in his controversy with Horsley and in his History of Early Opinions Concerning Jesus Christ; here it is joined to the pluralism expounded in his political works. As usual, he wants to argue for a multiplicity of competing sects and the argument is illustrated with an analogy of which he grew so fond that it appears twice in the Letters to the Inhabitants

of Birmingham: suppose that there were state physicians as well-established as the state clergy: would not any suggestion of reform - even of so slight a reform as the introduction of a new medicine - alarm them just as much as innovation now alarms the clergy? Would not they too say that the constitution was in danger?<sup>107</sup>

The most striking thing about this analogy is the fact that it is neither developed nor explained. Priestley assumes that he has only to lay it before his readers, leaving them to infer that it is as absurd to conduct ecclesiastical affairs in this way as it would be to practice medicine. The hidden assumption in all this is, of course, that the world of medicine is indeed comparable to that of religion. Once more Priestley has smuggled secular ingredients into his dish, expecting his readers to swallow it without a qualm. Clearly, if clergymen are no different to physicians or (to use a couple of other analogies that Priestley employs) apothecaries or builders, then the public should be allowed to decide which it wants; market forces should prevail in religion as in other things. This, of course, is already the regular practice among Dissenters: 'We are used to free inquiry, and love to encourage it,' says Priestley, though he does not explain who 'we' are.<sup>108</sup> (He uses the pronoun as though it referred to all Dissenters, but 'we' cannot be Particular Baptists, Independents, or any of those Dissenters who remained loyal to their Calvinist roots.)

It is curious that Priestley should still have believed, so late in the day, that the candid spirit of the Theological Repository and of his published exchange with Price could be revived in public debate:

Let all points of difference be freely discussed. Truth will be a gainer by it. But let us respect one another, as we respect truth

itself; love all, and with the good of all, without distinction. This is true candour, and consistent with the greatest zeal for our particular opinions.<sup>109</sup>

The hope was, of course, quite unrealistic: in these Letters, wrote a sympathetic observer in the following year, 'the seeds of that implacable dislike were scattered which produced the late riots. ...' Some of Priestley's associates foresaw violence, but not he.<sup>110</sup>

## VI.

For most of Priestley's career, spectacle and sudden change were not important features in his philosophy of history. But in writing the Corruptions, he had found himself depicting a society so confirmed in its corruption that nothing short of a great cataclysm could make it clean again. The controversy with Horsley and other members of the establishment can only have confirmed this impression. It must be for this reason that in 1789 the moral drama of revolution proved impossible to resist. He much approved of the language, so similar to that of the Corruptions, with which Price had greeted the fall of the Bastille and, when the moment came, he sprang to the defence of his friend's sermon.

Priestley's Letters to the Right Hon. Edmund Burke was hardly the most considered of the many replies to Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France - it appeared on the first day of 1791, only two months after the publication of Burke's essay - but he had good reason for wanting his voice to be heard. Much of Burke's general argument was, of course, obnoxious to him, depending as it did upon a defence of ecclesiastical establishment and an appeal from disorderly 1789 to constitutional 1688; but, this apart, his friend Price was held up by

Burke as a bloody and prophetic sermoniser on seventeenth-century lines, 'a man much connected with literary caballers, and intriguing philosophers; with political theologians and theological politicians both at home and abroad.'<sup>111</sup> (Indeed, Price and Priestley were together doing so much to associate Dissent with dissidence - 'Dissenters,' said the Gentleman's Magazine in 1793, 'are levellers by principal and education' - that to this day the misconception persists that every Dissenters was as a matter of course disaffected with the government and laws of his country.<sup>112</sup>)

A good deal of Priestley's Letters to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke appears to have been written more in sorrow than in anger. Though he shows little sign of hoping to convert Burke back to the cause of liberty, he tries throughout the book to be conciliatory in tone. Burke's imagination, he suggests, is heated, its ideas confused; objects appear distorted to him and, without denying their existence, he nonetheless fails to see the great principles which underlie them. These principles - those of England in 1688 and America in 1776 - are, or were, Burke's principles, and traces of them may still be perceived in the Reflections, Priestley believes. But, of course, there are passages in the Reflections in which even so conciliatory an antagonist as Priestley can find no trace of a principle to which he can own. Indeed, faced with Burke's dithyrambs on the Queen of France - 'glittering like the morning-star, full of life, and splendor, and joy' - he is able to do little more than try to explain their author's extraordinary behaviour psychologically, ascribing it on associationist principles to his early education.<sup>113</sup>

Of course, he has missed the point of this passage by failing to take it in context. By this stage of the argument, Burke has contrasted the 'juvenile warmth' of Price's sermon with the horrible reality of what happened in October 1789: the royal family dragged from a palace strewn with mutilated corpses; their bodyguard, unresisting, slain; heads stuck on spears, 'shrieking screams and frantic dances. ...' The scene is painted for us as a sacrificial orgy, so that we are left with an idea of Price as a starched, academic orgiast, untouched by the blood and the shrilly-screaming women but letting his hair down a bit and applauding from a safe distance. Coming after all this, Burke's apostrophe on the Queen of France is a gauntlet flung at Price's feet; and, like a gauntlet, it is both challenging and medieval. The language - celebrating 'the age of chivalry', 'the decent drapery of life', 'the pleasing illusions, which made power gentle and obedience liberal' - is deliberately provocative, suggesting as it does a gothic monument overrun by uncomprehending hooligans. But Burke's devotion to the monument (which is quite comprehensible, despite Priestley's difficulties) is genuine and is founded on the strong belief that the alternative edifice now under construction is much less humane. Strip away these pleasing illusions, demolish this system of ancient loyalties, and you are left with a coldly exploitative, unlovely and barbarous polity: 'laws are to be supported only by their own terrors, and by the concern, which each individual may find in them, from his own private speculations, or can spare to them from his own private interests. In the groves of their academy, at the end of every vисто, you see nothing but the gallows.'<sup>114</sup>

This is why Burke mourns the age of chivalry; he is not merely nostalgic, though he makes his lament in nostalgic and romantic language designed to puzzle and annoy the men of the new age, the 'sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators'.<sup>115</sup> When he writes of politics as an experimental science, not to be taught a priori nor learnt by short experience, he sounds a little like Priestley writing about religion and scientific method.<sup>116</sup> But by now, by 1791, Priestley, battle-hardened after his struggles with Horsley, was more inclined to emphasise the virtues of simplicity: a lean church and a trim state, each unencumbered by ties with the other, both founded upon principles openly proclaimed and easily grasped. Consequently, he cannot advance much beyond Mary Wollstonecraft in understanding Burke's political thought. In the first published response to the Reflections (rushed out only four weeks after the appearance of Burke's essay), she had declared that they had made her 'glow with indignation', so antipathetic were they to reason and so lacking in avowed first principles, and Priestley too was irritated to find that his adversary did not 'deal much in definitions, or axioms. ...'<sup>117</sup>

Burke's refusal to deal in first principles, definitions and axioms is an aspect both of his art - he wants to provoke those who believe that government is geometry - and of his matter; he wants to emphasise that government is a practical business which demands skilled workers who will not be so 'grossly ignorant of their trade, or totally negligent of their duty' as to look for geometrical simplicity in political constitutions. At bottom the trade is a matter of

sensibility: the true lawgiver is one who can 'catch his ultimate object with an intuitive glance'.<sup>118</sup>

So political knowledge cannot be available to all. For Burke it is a special form of knowledge, just as religious knowledge is for his friend Samuel Horsley. Both men oppose the doctrine, so close to Priestley's heart, of the unity of knowledge, and they do so for the same reason: they want to preserve a traditional understanding of church and state.<sup>119</sup> Indeed, Burke's ideas of political knowledge, though expressed in startling and provocative language, have very traditional origins. J.G.A. Pocock has explored the similarity between these ideas and those habits of mind associated with the Common Law, and he has emphasised the importance that Burke attached to these habits. The Common Law, it was generally believed, was the Englishman's unique inheritance; it was the unwritten custom of the realm, embodying the wisdom of many generations, its roots lying not in abstract reason but in the immemorial past. The language of this law is an argot into which Burke readily slips: in the early pages of the Reflections, he maintains that, 'it has been the uniform policy of our constitution to claim and assert our liberties as an entailed inheritance derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity; as an estate specially belonging to the people of this kingdom without any reference whatever to any other more general or prior right.'<sup>120</sup> This scheme of government resembles the Common Law in that its origins are unknown and its development consists of the response of each generation to the emergencies and problems of its time. Developing in this manner, both constitution and Common Law are, though immemorially ancient, always up

to date and always liable to change. The constitution is therefore peculiarly suited to the genius of the nation because it has matured along with the nation; the spirit of the law and the spirit of the people are born of the same circumstances.<sup>121</sup>

Given this account of the constitution, it is easy to see why Burke was so well disposed to prejudice. A prejudice is a prior judgement in favour of what is known, and in a country with a prescriptive constitution - where the prejudices grow out of the same soil as the laws and are warmed by the same sun - a prejudice is likely to be a judgement in favour of what is legal, true and tried. In this desire not to unmask popular prejudice but to elicit its latent wisdom, Burke may seem to have some intellectual affinity with his friends the Scottish philosophers of common sense. He appears to have been the author of a very favourable review of Beattie's Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth: an anonymous notice - published in 1771 in the Annual Register, of which Burke was editor - praises Beattie for vindicating 'the rights of the human understanding' and for opposing common sense, 'this primitive and fundamental standard of all Truth', to the 'cheap and lazy scepticism' of the age.<sup>122</sup>

Even if Burke did write this review it would, of course, be rash to suggest on the strength of these few pages, published anonymously twenty years before the Reflections, that Beattie or any other of the commonsense metaphysicians had a direct influence on the philosophy with which he opposed the French Revolution. But it is certainly significant that Priestley reacted to the Reflections very much as he had reacted sixteen years before to the principles of common sense:

If the principles that Mr. Burke now advances ... be admitted, mankind are always to be governed as they have been governed, without any enquiry into the nature, or origin, of their governments. ... On these principles, the church, or the state, once established, must for ever remain the same. This is evidently the real scope of Mr. Burke's pamphlet, the principles of it being, in fact, no other than those of passive obedience and non-resistance, peculiar to the Tories and the friends of arbitrary power, such as were echoed from the pulpits of all the high church party, in the reigns of the Stuarts, and of Queen Anne.<sup>123</sup>

Passive obedience and non-resistance - Jacobite doctrines unrestrained by reason - were exactly what Priestley had claimed to fear when he contemplated the commonsense philosophy; and Burke's assertion that we regard kings with awe, parliaments with affection, priests with duty, nobility with respect, because 'when such ideas are brought before our minds, it is natural to be affected' reads like a realisation of Priestley's worst forebodings as to where the commonsense philosophy might lead.<sup>124</sup> Burke's talk of the wisdom latent in prejudice disturbs Priestley as much and for the same reason as the Scottish philosophers' talk of the truth latent in common sense. In both cases he points to the relativism to which such talk must, he believes, inevitably lead. Burke's principles, which make him a staunch churchman in England, would have made him a Moslem in Turkey or a devout worshipper of the Grand Lama in Tibet. Worse, had he been a pagan in ancient Rome he would surely have remained one; for Christianity was there a mere sect, neither authorised by law, nor dignified by prescription, and certainly not cherished by immemorial prejudices. The principle of prescription, like that of common sense, may be used to legitimate any system of power which happens to be old.<sup>125</sup>

There is nothing eccentric in Priestley's fear, at so late a date, of the old Stuart principles of passive obedience and non-resistance; Horsley was shortly to arouse similar fears in Richard Brinsley Sheridan and they were to persist in Whig circles till well into the next century.<sup>126</sup> Nor was Priestley alone in suspecting that to reject empiricism or deny the unity of knowledge was to open the way to elitism. John Horne Tooke the radical pamphleteer and writer on language was arguing at this time, as Priestley had years before, against the philosophy of mind set out by James Harris in his book Hermes, and there is no doubt that, like Priestley, he saw political as well as linguistic implications in what he opposed.<sup>127</sup> Both Tooke (whose work was widely read by radicals) and Priestley suspected empiricism's enemies of trying to keep important truths - of language, of philosophy and of politics - safe from profane eyes. Both saw it as their task to open the eyes of the oppressed, to banish obscurantism with plain fact: 'Either what God has ordained, or what antiquity authorises may be difficult to ascertain,' writes Priestley, 'but what regulation is most conducive to the public good, though not always without its difficulties, yet in general it is much more easy to determine.'<sup>128</sup>

Mildly put though this is, it seems to presuppose complete freedom of action, unaffected by any considerations of tradition or religious custom, and Priestley was soon to make it clear that such freedom of action was seldom available in monarchical governments. He seems to have begun to regard kings and their ministers in much the same way that he already regarded bishops, as prisoners in a web of corrupting

associations, and he looked to the spirit of the French Revolution to free the world of such trammels. This is clear from the address, more apocalyptic in tone than the letters to Burke, that he delivered in April 1791 to the supporters of the Dissenting Academy in Hackney.<sup>129</sup> Here - though the old heroes, John Hampden and Algernon Sydney, Newton, Locke, and of course Hartley, are still invoked - it is 'the glorious revolution in France' which is seen as reshaping the hopes of humanity. Ahead, thinks Priestley (disclaiming prophesy himself, but looking to the prophetic passages of scripture), lie 'great revolutions' both political and religious. The evidence for this is plainly to be seen in the reaction of the friends of establishment to recent events and to the literature of liberty. Members of the Church of England openly lament the fall of the Popish church in France, as though correctly perceiving that the two are built upon the same foundations and that the 'light and good sense' which have overthrown one must in due course overthrow the other.<sup>130</sup>

A couple of months later, Priestley returned to this dangerous idea of enlightenment as the prelude to revolution. In his Political Dialogue on the General Principles of Government, he explains that, important though the financial difficulties of the French government may have been, they would not in themselves have engendered revolution 'if the minds of the people had not been previously enlightened on the subject of government, so that they could go at once to the proper source of their abuses.' In Britain desperate remedies of the French kind will not be necessary (as Priestley makes clear, though perhaps not quite so clear as discretion warrants); however, desirable reforms short

of revolution could be obtained if public opinion were sufficiently united 'to overawe the governing powers.'<sup>131</sup> Again Priestley has expressed with astonishing mildness sentiments whose implications are radical indeed. He suggests that public opinion might be unified 'by committees of correspondence, and other means', but he surely cannot have been unaware how dangerous such societies looked after the publication of the Reflections. Moreover, the London Revolution Society and the Society for Constitutional Information - to whose activities Burke had alerted the public - were no longer alone: their desire for provincial offspring had already been gratified in Manchester and in Norwich, and Priestley himself was even now assisting at the birth of the Warwickshire Constitutional Society.<sup>132</sup> It looks, then, as though the Dialogue endorses a national network for the diffusion of subversive opinions.

The idea is made to look especially dangerous by the pages that come before it. Here enlightenment is displayed as a very subversive force indeed. The diffusion of knowledge, we learn, together with the spirit of industry and commerce, must inevitably put an end to those last remnants of feudalism, hereditary nobility and hereditary monarchy: 'Every thing in society will now be brought to the plain test of use and expedience. ...'<sup>133</sup> This makes odd reading for anyone familiar with the rest of Priestley's political writing. Not once in the whole work is there any mention of God or of that glorious future which he has in store for his creation. The future, indeed, is scarcely mentioned at all and the past is seen as a time of corruption and Gothic tyranny. Instead we are offered a timeless and austere classical view of a

state in which the citizenry are sovereign, rotating public office amongst themselves and overseeing an equitable distribution of labour and the fruits of labour. Such a state could be efficiently governed by an elective assembly consisting 'of the most respectable members of the society', whose function it would be to balance the various interests in the nation. Further checks and balances - a second chamber which could veto legislation or a monarch who could withhold from it his assent - would be neither necessary nor desirable: 'In every state, as in every single person, there ought to be but one will, and no important business should be prevented from proceeding, by any opposite will.'<sup>134</sup>

Published anonymously in July 1791, these sentiments did not, presumably, help to provoke the catastrophe, which occurred on the fourteenth of that month. Nor was Priestley, one of the ninety or so reformers who that afternoon attended a dinner at the Birmingham Hotel to celebrate the fall of the Bastille (he had meant to go but wisely changed his mind at the last moment). But his public reputation - emphasised by the Familiar Letters and his attempts to recruit for a Warwickshire Constitutional Society - made him a principal target of the rioters who claimed the dinner as their provocation. He was not their only victim: three Unitarian meeting houses and one Baptist meeting house were destroyed or damaged, so were the dwellings of twenty-seven people who had attended the dinner or were Dissenters or were members of the Lunar Society.<sup>135</sup>

Priestley had lost everything but his principles; to these he was firm, never forgetting, he said, that his sufferings were 'part of the plan of a wise and just providence ...' His Appeal to the Public on the

Subject of the Riots in Birmingham, dedicated to 'the People of England', is an elaborately candid work, in which, however, he at last recognises how things stand between him and his enemies. Once more, military metaphor recurs; but this time it appears to have been chosen with greater deliberation and with some awareness that an exchange that can be described in these terms cannot be a candid conversation amongst explorers in the search after truth:

With respect to the high church party in this country, I may be considered as in a state of open war. I utterly dislike their principles and maxims, as they do mine; and I scruple not to take any fair opportunity of expressing this dislike in the most unequivocal language. Let them do the same with respect to my principles; but let us observe the rules of honourable war. ... To conciliate these persons I consider as a thing absolutely impossible, and therefore not worth attempting.

The moment of understanding is, though, a brief one. Why, Priestley demands, should he be singled out for such treatment by a suborned mob (which was careful to spare the homes and meeting houses of Calvinist Dissenters) when he has never, in any of the controversies in which he has engaged in Birmingham, been the aggressor? He did not, he continues, initiate the controversy with Horsley, and all the Defences of Unitarianism were calm replies to virulent abuse.<sup>136</sup> But he seems not to appreciate how disturbing his opinions were to Churchmen, and he goes on not appreciating it when he protests that Unitarianism bears no relation to any particular form of government and that the clergy have misled the people by representing all Socinians as republicans. On the contrary, he continues, he for one has again and again praised the tripartite constitution of his country: 'And though I might now recommend a very different form of government to a people who had not previous prejudices or habits, the case is very different with respect

to one that has; and it is the duty of every good citizen to maintain that government of any country which the majority of its inhabitants approves, whether he himself should otherwise prefer it, or not.'<sup>137</sup>

Coming as it does from someone who had written so much of the importance of overcoming prejudice, and of the cataclysmic efforts which might be necessary in order that it be overcome by a whole nation, this can only have looked disingenuous to Priestley's Anglican readers. Nor can the suggestion that he is writing only theoretically have done much to assuage loyalist doubts: if his readers were also readers of Burke - as they were very likely to have been - they could well have seen the whole French Revolution as an attempt to impose upon an existing society a theoretical model much like the one which Priestley favoured, an attempt to treat a country which had a government as though it had none and was ripe for remodelling.

Priestley, though, no longer cared to win people. He would not emigrate, he said in 1792, but he was now attached to his fellow countrymen only as men, and he knew that many of them would favour arbitrary government.<sup>138</sup> Circumstances had made him more radical. An exile from Birmingham, he had attended the London Revolution Society's annual dinner in November 1791, where the loyal toast was drunk 'in gloomy silence' and the Ca ira, most murderous of revolutionary songs, was sung. Here too a toast to 'The Revolution of the World' had been proposed by Tom Paine, the second and more radical part of whose Rights of Man Priestley was shortly to find 'striking and excellent much beyond the first part.' Priestley was also greatly struck by Joel Barlow's Advice to the Privileged Orders and thought that in these two

publications political discussion had been brought to a new and admirable pitch: 'Such boldness ... was never seen before in this or any other country.'<sup>139</sup>

But the sermon, on The Uses of Christianity, Especially in Difficult Times, in which he bade farewell to his country breathes a more tranquil spirit:

Our habitations here are perishable, liable to be destroyed by lawless violence; but there are 'houses not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.' Here we have no continuing city, no place of absolute security, where we can depend upon not being disturbed. But in heaven is 'a rest for the people of God,' a place where 'the wicked cease from troubling,' and where those who are weary with their unceasing persecutions may depend upon being unmolested. Let us, then, when we are harassed and disturbed here, and especially when we are exposed to disturbance because we ourselves are disposed to be quiet, willing to live at peace ourselves, and desirous of promoting a disposition to peace in others, look forward to that peaceful and happy state, and cultivate a temper of mind most suited to it.<sup>140</sup>

He had changed his mind about leaving the country, and now not only was he an emigrant to America; he was also an emigrant of the spirit. In turning his attention from his earthly to his eternal home he was doing, of course, what he believed there was ample objective reason for doing; nonetheless the tone of defeat in these words, of withdrawal from the public stage to a cell of private hope, is impossible to ignore.

Throughout his career he had sought to persuade. He had always had two objects in mind and ultimately he failed of them both: he had hoped through candour to persuade others to his way of thinking and he had hoped also to persuade them to join him in a candid conversation, which would have been both a project for the discovery of truth and a desirable end in itself. His failure was intellectual - he had not properly judged the temper of his society - but it was also personal: he

was too vain, too touchy, too tone-deaf to moderate the sound of his own voice. In the end, and whatever his own intentions, the constantly-reiterated protestations of candour just ceased to be convincing.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES.

1. Matt., xiii, 12-13. In 1779, Priestley delivered a sermon on this text; a footnote to the published version mentions that work on the Corruptions is well under way. See Priestley [1787a], p.87.
2. Ibid., 27. I quote the words as Priestley gives them; the Authorised Version has: 'So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, sir, didst not thou sow good seed in the field? from whence then hath it tares?'
3. Priestley [1782a], i, xiv (emphasis in original).
4. Pocock [1972], p.247. Much of what follows here is greatly indebted to the essay in which these words appear: 'Time, Institutions and Action: an Essay on Traditions and their Understanding' (rpt. in Pocock [1972], pp.233-272).
5. Pocock [1972], p.258.
6. For the comparison between Middleton and Berruyer, I am indebted to Chadwick [1957], pp.71-76 (in this context, however, Chadwick speaks not of Berruyer but of his teacher Hardouin). For Middleton see also Stromberg [1954], pp.75-78, and Sykes [1959], p.168. In his [1934], p.420, Sykes includes Middleton with Butler, Warburton and Paley in a list of those 'divines of the eighteenth century' who 'have received due recognition and praise for their several parts in the battle against deists and freethinkers.' This seems extremely generous, especially in view of the effect that a reading of Middleton's book had on the young Edward Gibbon. Stephen [1876] gives (i, 264-272) a very full discussion of this aspect of Middleton's work. For Gibbon see Porter [1938], pp.45, 113-114.
7. Priestley [1782a], ii, 64, 101. On the appeal to spiritual illumination, see Pocock [1972], p.258.

8. Priestley [1782a], i, 174 (this passage is taken almost verbatim from Priestley [1769/73], p.208. For the young Priestley's somewhat restricted literary tastes, see Priestley [1806], p.74
9. Priestley [1777b], pp.243-244. I have taken Priestley at his word ([1782a], i, xix-xx) in regarding the 'History of the Philosophical Doctrine Concerning the Origin of the Soul, and the Nature of Matter', which occupies the last hundred or so pages of this work, as part of his [1782a].
10. Priestley [1785], pp.72-73.
11. Priestley [1782a], i, 278. See also i, 171. The doctrine of atonement, Priestley decides (ibid., i, 158, 238, 277), cannot withstand this test; founded upon a 'few obscure expressions and passages' which were probably intended to be figurative or allusive, it is completely discredited by those 'numerous, plain and striking texts' which tell of God's pardon freely given to the repenting sinner. Similarly, he suggests (ii, 7-8) that the figurative language of the early Fathers contributed to the growth of the doctrine of the real presence.
12. Priestley [1777b], p.249.
13. Priestley [1782a], ii, 366. On the historical methods employed in the Corruptions see also ii, 362-370.
14. Ibid., ii, 440-441, 443, 458. See also i, 4, and p.62 of 'The Proper Constitution of a Christian Church, Considered in a Sermon, Preached at the New Meeting in Birmingham, November 3, 1782' (rpt. in Priestley [1787a], pp.45-69).
15. Priestley [1782a], i, 20. See also pp.110-118.
16. Ibid., ii, 143, 156, 230, 331.
17. Ibid., i, 226-227.
18. Ibid., i, 85, 285. For another example of the effects of controversy see ii, 161.
19. Ibid., i, 257-260.
20. Ibid., i, 271-272.
21. Ibid., i, 316. Having thus established that evil may arise out of good, Priestley hammers the principle home later in his book by remarking (ii, 191, 345-357) that, absurd though it was that Popes should have laid claim to temporal authority, the Reformation gave birth to an even greater absurdity: the usurpation of ecclesiastical authority by temporal powers.

22. Ibid., i, 271. For examples of good brought out of evil, see i, 119 and ii, 216, 379-380, 407-413, 441, 464.
23. Ibid., i, vi.
24. Ibid., i, 326-327.
25. Ibid., i, 21.
26. Ibid., ii, 4, 87.
27. Ibid., ii, 203.
28. Ibid., ii, 59-64, 318, 343, 376-377. The Apostles' practice of calling Christ, 'who died to promote the reformation of the world', a sacrifice - a practice which has misled all subsequent generations, at least until that of Socinus - is attributable, Priestley maintains, to their thorough familiarity with Jewish rites: 'whatever they were writing about, if it bore any resemblance to that ritual, it was sure to obtrude itself.' (ibid., i, 187).
29. Ibid., ii, 471-473. Priestley is here replying to Bishop Hurd, to whom, and to all other 'Advocates for the Present Civil Establishments of Christianity', part ii of his 'General Conclusion' is addressed.
30. For Swift's views on candid conversation, see Davis [1951], especially p.186.
31. Priestley [1769c], pp.25-27.
32. Priestley [1782a], ii, 140, 446.
33. Ibid., ii, 484 (see also i, 326-327). Edward Gibbon, to whom the first half of Priestley's conclusion was in part addressed, took exception to these words: see Pocock [1985], p.155.
34. Dr. William's Library, Mss., 24.157, No.88: James Woodrow to Samuel Kenrick, Steventon, 7 January, 1785.
35. Badcock [1788], p.519. For Priestley's reply see his [1783a].
36. Horsley [1783], p.5.
37. Horsley [1789], p.ix.
38. Horsley's sermon 'On Providence and Free Agency' (1778) is reprinted as sermon xix in his [1810-22], ii, 108-139. Priestley published a letter of reply ('Calne, June 1778') in Price and Priestley [1778], pp.213-228. For a discussion of Horsley's views on materialism, see Stephens [1984], in which much use is made of the hitherto-unpublished marginalia in Horsley's copies of works by Priestley. Horsley corresponded

on these matters with the Scottish philosopher Lord Monboddo: see his letter of 5 February 1787 and comments on Monboddo's Ancient Metaphysics, reprinted in Knight [1900], pp.155-175, 281-305. He returned to the subject of Priestley's materialism in 1785 in his Sermon on the Incarnation (reprinted in Horsley [1789], pp.308-329). It still troubled him in his later years and in 1800 he wrote John Robison a long letter on the subject of 'M<sup>r</sup> De La Place and his Atheistical Physics' (Royal Society MSS., MM.1.13, Bishop Horsley to John Robison, Bromley House, Kent, 16 November 1800). He was an admirer of Robison's Proofs of a Conspiracy, in which, as we have seen, a link is alleged between materialism and revolutionary conspiracy in Europe: see 'The Charge of Samuel, Lord Bishop of Rochester, to the Clergy of his Diocese; Delivered at his Second Visitation, in the Year 1800' (in Horsley [1813], pp.116-177), especially pp.134-136. On this aspect of his thought see Soloway [1969], pp.39-46, in which it is placed in its political context, and Oliver [1978], pp.51-62, in which it is placed in the context of the history of millennialism. Horsley's millennial concerns are similar to Priestley's, differing principally in that what Horsley feared Priestley welcomed. On Priestley's millennial thought, see Garrett [1973], Oliver [1978], especially pp.43-46, and Fruchtman [1983], especially chs.i and iv.

39. Horsley [1767], pp. 11-12, 19.
40. Horsley was particularly old-fashioned in depicting a God who intervened directly in the operations of nature. This voluntarist concept of divine action, which is certainly present in Newton's work, had by Horsley's time been largely overshadowed by the idea of a creator who operated through the laws of nature. See Gascoigne [1988], pp.222-227.
41. See Jebb [1909], pp.54-57, and the Dictionary of National Biography's entries on Banks and Horsley. Jebb's book - so far the only available life of Horsley - is quite inadequate to its magnificent subject and in many respects scarcely an improvement on Alexander Gordon's excellent sketch in the D.N.B.
42. See Manuel [1963], pp.4-5, 188. The edition, begun in 1779, was completed in 1785.
43. Horsley [1789], p.iv, and Lambeth Palace Mss., 1767 (Horsley Papers), ff.120-127v: Samuel Horsley to Henneage Horsley, Brighthelmstone, 3-9 November, 1797.
44. Priestley [1769b], pp.341-342. Soloway [1969] describes Horsley (p.32, n.2) as an 'extravagant, pluralistic High Churchman.' A year after graduating LL.B. from Cambridge in 1758, Horsley succeeded to his father's living at Newington. In 1768, he began to combine his parochial duties with those of tutor to Lord Guernsey at Oxford. This moonlighting was rewarded in January 1774, when, having become first Bachelor

and then (four days later) Doctor of Civil Laws at Oxford, he was presented by his pupil's father to the rectory of Albury, Surrey. His parishioners at Newington now saw even less of him than they had over the last six years, for though he continued to hold his living there, he now moved to his new rectory. Nor did he resign Albury when in 1777 the Bishop of London made him his domestic chaplain and a prebend of St. Paul's. At the end of that year, he succeeded his father as Lecturer at St. Martin's-in-the-Fields. In 1779 he resigned Albury and the following year the Bishop of London gave him the living of Thorley. The year after that, the Bishop made him Archdeacon of St. Alban's, and in 1782 he resigned Thorley when the Bishop presented him to the vicarage of South Weald. 'The record of Horsley's earlier clerical life', writes Jebb ([1909], p.53), 'becomes an almost wearisome record of Church preferments held and resigned by him.' Years later, after Horsley, safe upon the bench of bishops, had abandoned his pluralistic practices, and at a time when he believed that the Church needed to summon up all its spiritual resources against the evils of the age, he was eloquent in his condemnation of non-residence: 'Nothing', he said, 'has so much lessened the general influence of the clergy; nothing so much threatens the stability of the national Church.' ('The Charge of of Samuel, Lord Bishop of Rochester, to the Clergy of his Diocese; Delivered at his Primary Visitation, in the Year 1796', in Horsley [1813], p.82) On this aspect of Horsley's career, see Soloway [1969], pp.53-54.

45. For Horsley's views on poor relief, see Soloway [1969], pp.75-77; for Priestley's see Canavan [1983]. On the indifference to poverty of Dissenting activists, see Cookson [1982], p.26.
46. Horsley [1783], pp.67-68, 70. Compare Bossuet: 'The Church's doctrine is always the same. ... The Gospel is never different from what it was before. ... There is no difficulty about recognizing false doctrine: there is no argument about it: it is recognized at once, wherever it appears, merely because it is new ...' (Premiere Instruction Pastorale sur les Promesses de l'Eglise, xxviii (Works, xxii, 418-419), quoted in Chadwick [1957], p.17).
47. Priestley [1783b], pp.iv, xiii.
48. Horsley [1789], pp.vi-vii, and [1784], p.85 (see also p.276).
49. Horsley [1783], p.4
50. Priestley [1783b], pp.v, xii.
51. Horsley [1783], pp.11-14.
52. Priestley [1783b], p.18.
53. Horsley [1784], pp.103-105.

54. Ibid., p.111.
55. See Pocock [1972], p.261.
56. Horsley [1784], pp..253-254.
57. Ibid., pp.242-243. Horsley's opinion is (it comes as no surprise) completely contrary to Lindsey's: 'It has indeed sometimes happened, that profound mathematicians and philosophers, through a confirmed attention to that kind of evidence, which is strictly demonstrative, have become incompetent judges of those probable arguments, affording no less certainty, by which a divine revelation is proved and its doctrines ascertained; and have either intirely rejected, or reasoned very imperfectly concerning it. But Dr. Priestley's genius is equal to all subjects. ...' (Lindsey [1784], p.69)
58. Priestley [1783b], p.43.
59. Ibid., pp.60-68, 92-93. For the second attempt, see Priestley [1784], p.262.
60. Horsley [1784], pp.212-213.
61. See ibid., pp.286-295 and Priestley [1783b] pp.105-107.
62. Ibid., p.106.
63. See 'The Doctrine of the Divine Influence on the Human Mind, Considered in a Sermon, Preached ... in 1779', rpt. in Priestley [1787a]. pp.82-100.
64. Horsley [1784], p.90.
65. Priestley [1784], pp.143, 145, 153, 155-156, 168-169.
66. Priestley to the Rev. Peter Emans, 25 August 1784; copy by the Rev. Franklin Baker in Royal Society Mss., Priestley Memorial Volume, p.19.
67. Priestley [1784], pp.333-334.
68. Horsley [1784], pp.292-293.
69. Priestley [1785], pp.7-9 (rpt. in Priestley [1787a], p.72).
70. Ibid., p.14 (rpt. in Priestley [1787a], pp.74-75).
71. Ibid., p.18 (rpt. in Priestley [1787a], p.76). Priestley greets the proposal in a phrase clearly intended to echo Milton: 'Truth will always have an infinite advantage over error, if free scope be given to enquiry.'
72. Ibid., p.55.

73. Ibid., pp.37-41.
74. See, for example, 'Old Mother Church', a song quoted in Lincoln [1938], p.6n. He does not give his source but perhaps takes the song from Priestley [1791e], p.xxx. A pamphlet published after the Birmingham riots and reproduced by Priestley in his [1792], p.173, calls him 'Gunpowder Joe'. A cartoon (dated 1791) of Priestley in his incendiary role is reproduced in Kramnick (1982), p.652. For Priestley's disavowal, see his [1790a], i, 7-8 (also iv, 13) and [1787c], pp.17-18.
75. Priestley [1785], p.98, and Horsley [1786], p.402. C.f. Priestley [1788b], p.30: 'As for myself, like an honest general, successful or unsuccessful, I will give as fair an account of my killed and wounded, as of the trophies I may gain, or the prisoners I may take.'
76. Horsley [1785], pp.318-319.
77. See Chadwick [1957], pp.17-23.
78. Horsley [1784], pp.279, 284.
79. Priestley [1790b], pp.5-6. See also p.64n.
80. Priestley [1785], p.53, and Horsley [1789], p.xii.
81. Priestley [1786], i, v, xviii, 17, 38, 89-90.
82. Ibid., iv, 4-5, 15, 57-58.
83. Priestley [1788c], pp.v, vii.
84. Priestley [1788b], pp.17-22.
85. Ibid., pp.60-61.
86. Dr. Williams's Library Mss., 12.68, (i): Richard Price to J. Parker, Hackney, 13 March 1790. See also Barlow [1962], pp.222-223.
87. For Pitt's argument, see Barlow [1962], pp. 235-236, Clark [1985], p.341, and Goodwin [1979], pp.79, 84. Pitt's argument seems to have become popular: see Barlow [1962], p.259. See Cookson [1982], p.16, for Belsham's opinion of Pitt's 'apostasy'.
88. Priestley [1791e], p.16. On the repudiation of Priestley by the moderates, see Goodwin [1979], p.82.
89. Priestley [1787c], pp.16, 25-28. For Dissenting opinions of the letter, see Dr. Williams's Library Mss., Kenrick-Woodrow Correspondence: No.129, Kenrick to Woodrow, Bewdley, 1787;

No.134, Woodrow to Kenrick, Steventon, 13 December, 1787; No. 135, Kenrick to Woodrow, Bewdley, 13 February, 1788.

90. Price [1787], p.46. Price, more cautious than his friend, urges that zeal be accompanied by peaceableness and charity; and he is careful to disavow republicanism (ibid., pp.30-31), ambiguously praising the British constitution 'as better adapted than any other to this country, and in THEORY, excellent. (If the constitution is excellent in theory only, this is because 'of the increase of corruption and the miserable inadequateness of our representation. ...') The year before, at the opening of the new academy in Manchester, Thomas Barnes had given voice to similar enthusiasm in a run of breathless short sentences: 'Divine truth seeks no concealment. It fears no detection. Sound knowledge, of every kind, must ultimately befriend it. And it shall prevail. It is even now rapidly prevailing. The day has already dawned. The light of heaven is advancing.' (Barnes [1786], p.27) For more on this mood of optimism, see Barlow, pp,228-230, 241-242. Clark detects these millenarian tones at an even earlier date, at the time of the Feathers Tavern petition and the Dissenters' application to Parliament, and he notes ([1985], p.335) that, 'The radical chiliasm normally associated only with the French Revolution and its impact in England had a quite different chronological origin; it can be traced to certain developments in English radical theology in the mid and late 1760s.'
91. William Belsham, quoted in Goodwin [1979], p.90.
92. Priestley [1789], p.10.
93. Ibid., pp.4, 11.
94. Ibid., p.15.
95. Theophilus Lindsey to William Turner, jun., 10 February, 1790, in McLachlan (ed.) [1920], p.38.
96. On this reaction, see Cookson [1982], p.12. For one example of it - the prosecution of the Mayor of Nottingham for not taking the sacrament - see Lincoln [1938], p.282. For examples of the many resolutions passed by clergy and gentry against political Dissent, see Barlow [1962], pp.257-260.
97. Price [1789], p.25.
98. Ibid., pp.50-51.
99. Burke, quoted in Goodwin [1979], p.96. Priestley insisted ([1790a], ii, 16-17) that he had been misquoted. On Burke's change of heart, see especially Clark [1985], pp.249-253, Thomas [1977], ch.xv, and also Goodwin [1979], pp.92-93, 102-103. On the national rejoicing, see Barlow [1962], pp.270-271.

100. Dr. Williams's Library Mss., 24.157, Kenrick-Woodrow Correspondence: No.152, Kenrick to Woodrow, 18 May 1791; Priestley [1790a], iv, 20.
101. Though the leaders of all denominations in Birmingham had been brought together by their support for the campaign against slavery, Dissenters and Churchmen were soon at odds again over the issue of the local police. In the face of a growing rate of crime, the necessity for the establishment of such a force, to be maintained on the parish rates, seemed clear; yet it was opposed by a small number of ratepayers led by a Dissenter, Priestley's friend William Hutton. His arguments, based on principles of pure laissez-faire, sharply pointed up the difference between bourgeois Dissent and paternalistic establishment. The controversy did much to sour religious politics in Birmingham, and matters were not improved by two further disputes, concerning the Sunday school and the subscription library. In both cases, an institution administered at first by Churchmen and Dissenters together became the casus belli in a pamphlet war between the denominations. (See Money [1977], pp.8-18, 126-128) Priestley was also becoming alienated from the Royal Society. Annoyed that his radical friend Thomas Cooper should have been denied membership on grounds, he said, 'of party spirit, political or religious', he sent Sir Joseph Banks two angry letters on the matter before withdrawing from the Society's activities. (For these letters - dated 25 and 27 April, 1790 - see Bolton [1892], pp.100-102.)
102. Money [1977], p.222; Priestley [1791e], pp.xx, 21.
103. For some of these old favourites, see Priestley [1790a], ii, 7, 20; iii, 13-14; v, 23-27.
104. Ibid., iii, 12, 22-23.
105. Ibid., v, 18.
106. Priestley [1793], pp.28, 38.
107. Ibid., ii, 18-20; v, 45-46.
108. Ibid., iv, 37.
109. Ibid., v, 63.
110. Hall [1791], p.36; Priestley [1791e], p.22
111. Burke [1790], p.93. See also pp.156-159.
112. Gentleman's Magazine, 1791, i, 556, quoted in Lincoln [1938], p.66. This misconception is a recurrent feature of Kramnick's recent work. 'Priestley was lyrical in his praise of the French Revolution, as were virtually all the dissenters', he

writes ([1986], pp.4-5), and the choice of words is significant: most Dissenters were not, of course, publicly lyrical about the French Revolution nor about anything else, because most Dissenters (like most of the rest of the population) did not set down their enthusiasms for posterity to read about. However, the Rational Dissenters - that small and self-consciously elitist elite upon which Krammick's attention is exclusively fixed - were much more likely than others to be lyrical in print about foreign politics. It may be, suggests Donald Davie ([1984], p.324), that 'on the broad issue of loyalty to the Crown, there was at any time a substantial minority of English Dissenters, if not indeed a majority at times, who go unremarked because they were relatively inarticulate. They did indeed find articulate spokesmen. But these are hard to discern, perhaps because there were disproportionately few of them, more certainly because it has been in nobody's partisan interest, from their day to ours, to have them remembered.' He goes on to mention John Merivale of Exeter; John Clayton, an Independent minister; Thomas Sheraton, the great cabinet maker, who was also a Dissenting minister; and the Rev. David Rivers: all of whom combined Dissent with loyalty to their country and its government. To this list we can add (from Lincoln ([1938], pp.21-22) the Rev. Edward Pickard and the Rev. John Martin. John Seed admits ([1985], pp.323-324) that Rational Dissent was unrepresentative of Dissent as a whole in the 1770's and 1780's but suggests that it did give voice to the aspirations of a significant number of the bourgeoisie.

113. Burke [1790], p.169, and Priestley [1791a], pp.17-20, 29-31.
114. Burke [1790], pp.171-172. Burke's understanding of the old society is strikingly similar to that of Marx and Engels. In a famous passage of the Communist Manifesto (quoted in Laslett [1983], p.17), they describe the process by which the bourgeoisie - stripping away 'all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations' - has substituted naked exploitation for 'exploitation veiled by religious and political illusions' and left between man and man no connections but self-interest and 'callous "cash-payment"'. Of course, Burke would not have agreed that the 'pleasing illusions' which were so happy a feature of the old society concealed a system of exploitations. His point is that the 'mechanic philosophy' severs head from heart, equates reason with calculations; so it is only when the illusions are stripped away and government reduced to a matter of sticks and carrots that exploitation becomes inevitable. In the light of all this, Paine's famous comment on this part of Burke's essay - 'He pities the plumage and forgets the dying bird' - seems more than usually blockheaded (Paine [1791], p.73). Marx, it may be noted, thought Burke a sycophant, a 'romantic laudator temporis acti' and 'an out-and-out vulgar bourgeois'. See Conor Cruise O'Brien's introduction to Burke [1790], p.9.

115. Burke [1790], p.170.
116. Ibid., p.152.
117. Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Man (1791), in Butler (ed.) [1984], pp.72-73; Priestley [1791a], p.56.
118. Burke [1790], pp.152-153, 266-267, 281.
119. Clark provides ([1985], pp.247-285) a useful corrective to the view - once common among political writers - of the Reflections as an unprecedented and very personal reaction to Lockean orthodoxy. However, in telling us (p.249) that 'Burke's achievement in his later works was to give eloquent but unoriginal expression to a theoretical position largely devised by Anglican churchmen', he underestimates, I think, the importance of these epistemological considerations.
120. Burke [1790], p.119 (emphasis in original).
121. See Pocock [1972], p.228.
122. Burke (?) [1771], pp.252-255. See also Wilkins [1967], to which I am indebted for this reference.
123. Priestley [1791a], p.viii. Queen Anne, of course, was a Stuart.
124. Burke [1790], p.182. For Priestley's very similar views of the commonsense philosophy, see his [1774b], pp.200-201, and pp.211-212 above.
125. Priestley [1791a], pp.60-64, 110-114.
126. See Clark [1985], pp.210, 233. John Wesley had been proud to own these principles, and so was Hannah More, distinguished educationalist and evangelical Christian, who named her two cats 'Passive Obedience' and 'Non Resistance' (ibid., pp.210, 246.).
127. See Smith [1984], chs.i and iv. The first volume of Tooke's Diversions of Purley appeared in 1786. A revised edition followed in 1798 and a second volume in 1805. Priestley would not have followed Tooke in his belief that Locke's analysis of ideas should more properly be applied to words and that complex terms arise in the evolution of language and not from the existence of corresponding acts of mind. On this aspect of Tooke's work, see Smith [1984], p.133.
128. Priestley [1791a], pp.23-24.
129. On this institution, founded in 1786, see McLachlan [1931], pp.246-255. 'A costly and finished education was there intended to form preachers of socinianism to the rich. ...' say

Bogue and Bennett ([1808-12], iv, 267), contrasting it with a more recent foundation in the same locality, 'designed to prepare itinerants to publish the unsearchable riches of the gospel to the poor. ...'

130. Priestley [1791b], pp.5, 14, 36, 41. A few days later, Priestley, delivering the sermon at Price's funeral, remarked ([1791c], p.8) that the deceased had been described as 'the apostle of liberty' by 'the most august assembly in the world', the National Assembly of France.
131. Priestley [1791d], pp.85, 103.
132. For the Warwickshire society, see Royle and Walvin [1982], pp.48-49; for the others, see Goodwin [1979], ch.v.
133. Priestley [1791d], p.92. Fourteen years before, Priestley had said something similar in the dedication to his [1777a]. The age, he says here, is one 'in which every thing begins to be estimated by its real use and value.' It is difficult to decide whether these sentiments are here softened or given an ironic edge by being addressed to Shelburne's son Lord Fitzmaurice. Certainly, Priestley seems at this time to have hoped for useful peers rather than for no peers at all.
134. Priestley [1791d], pp.88, 96.
135. For an account of the riot, see Rose [1960], and, for the local background, Money [1977], ch.ix.
136. Priestley [1791e], pp.xx-xxi, 50-51, 60.
137. Priestley [1792], ix, 15-16, 37, 41, 112.
138. Ibid., pp.110, 113-114.
139. British Library, Add. Mss. 44,992, ff.48-49v: Priestley to William Russell, Clapton, 15 February, 1792. For an account of the dinner, see Goodwin [1979], pp.186-188.
140. Priestley [1792], p.5.

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