

This dissertation has been 64-10,505
microfilmed exactly as received

SULLIVAN, Gerald Joseph, 1932-
POLITICS AND LITERATURE OF SAMUEL
JOHNSON.

The University of Oklahoma, Ph.D., 1964
Language and Literature, general

University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

POLITICS AND LITERATURE OF SAMUEL JOHNSON

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

GERALD JOSEPH SULLIVAN

Norman, Oklahoma

1964

POLITICS AND LITERATURE OF SAMUEL JOHNSON

APPROVED BY

David P. Swene
A. J. Felt
Paul G. Ruggers
J. P. Ferginall
Robert Williams

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank Dr. David French for his assistance and patience in directing this dissertation. I also want to thank Drs. Paul Ruggiers, Alfonse Fritz, Jack Kendall, and Lloyd Williams for their pleasant cooperation as members of the examining committee.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
 Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE POLITICS OF SAMUEL JOHNSON: THE STATE OF MAN, UNGOVERNED AND GOVERNED	11
III. IRENE	48
IV. THE POLITICS OF SAMUEL JOHNSON: GOVERNMENT, ITS METHODS AND PROBLEMS	104
V. THE ALLEGORIES	128
VI. THE POLITICS OF SAMUEL JOHNSON: SOCIETY, ITS BENEFITS, DISADVANTAGES, AND WEAKNESSES	169
VII. RASSELAS	188
VIII. CONCLUSION	245
BIBLIOGRAPHY	280

THE POLITICS AND LITERATURE OF SAMUEL JOHNSON

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The interplay of Samuel Johnson's politics and literature forms the subject of this dissertation. I will examine this alliance by constructing as coherently as possible Johnson's political theory out of the many pamphlets, essays, sermons, prefaces, reviews, and the like that he produced during his life, as well as from important contemporary sources, particularly Boswell's Life of Johnson. The results of this synthesis will occupy three chapters, each chapter containing a division of the political theory. After each division, I will devote a chapter to an analysis of a major imaginative work which closely embodies this division's principles, calling upon The Vanity of Human Wishes and the other poetry whenever they are relevant. This analysis will show, I believe, that Johnson embodies in fictional form--in concrete situations, specific actions, and particular speeches rising out of actions--corollaries, analogues, or similitudes of his

political beliefs.

The reason for this special kind of identity arises from Johnson's empirical and skeptical temper, his inveterate habit of testing all ideas, theories, or speculations--excepting always his religion--in the practical, experiential world of reality. Thus, Johnson's fear of anarchy and civil war, his insistence upon subordination, his demand for forbearance on the part of subjects of a government--to mention only three of his leading political ideas--sometimes seem arbitrary or willful when stated abstractly. But when these same ideas are clothed in the human action of the imaginative works, we see their basis in his painful apprehension of the destructive force of a mob or an army; his sensitive awareness of the happiness that mere peace and concord afforded, in and by themselves, when achieved through obedience to lawful authority; and his clear perception of the abuses of power and authority that will inevitably occur but which must be endured for the greater blessings governing achieves. Further, Johnson's political views, if not validated, are at least made more accessible to the understanding than before. The abstract outline of the political theory possesses the advantage of all outlines: clarity, obviousness of relationships, and completeness of design. The imaginative work possesses equally its own peculiar advantages: depth, "solidity of specification," experiential dimension. When they are placed side by side, the abstract

outline of the politics takes on the color and form of life and reveals thereby its value, its possible validity, and most certainly its foundation in life.

It is only in the last decade that much scholarly work has been done on Johnson's politics. The "Namier Revolution" in eighteenth-century history studies has been slow in seeping into literary studies of various figures of the age. The first book length study of Johnson's politics was published in 1960--Donald J. Greene, The Politics of Samuel Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960). This work is, as Greene calls it in his "Preface," an "introductory sketch--for it can claim to be little more--of the political activities, ideas, attitudes, and milieu of Samuel Johnson,"¹ and is very valuable for sweeping away "the continued currency of the simple old legend of Johnson the 'blind reactionary' . . . that is an unnecessary handicap to serious students."² It supplies important and suggestive directions for creating a coherent political theory, but its historical purpose leads Greene away from a thorough elaboration of his general discussion of this issue.

Two other books published in the last decade supply much material for the elucidation of Johnson's political theory. E. L. McAdam, Jr.'s Dr. Johnson and the English Law.

¹Donald J. Greene, The Politics of Samuel Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. vii.

²Ibid., p. viii.

(Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1951) provides the Johnson excerpts, and very valuable they are,¹ from the series of lectures Sir Robert Chambers delivered as successor to Blackstone as Vinerian Professor on the English Law at Oxford. Many of Johnson's basic ideas about society, government, and law are contained in this material. Benjamin Hoover's Samuel Johnson's Parliamentary Reporting (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1953) is the other important work, and while it does not contain so much important material for the student of Johnson's politics as the two previously mentioned books, it does call needed attention to the worth and value of the Debates Johnson wrote for the Gentleman's Magazine as a great seminal source for many of the political beliefs Johnson held throughout his life. As Johnson's latest biographer puts it, "What had started merely as another journalistic assignment for the magazine turned out to be an important milestone in the maturing of Johnson's ideas."²

There are several unpublished dissertations that should be mentioned in a study of Johnson's politics. The first and what is perhaps the most important is Joseph Sidney's The Political Thought of Samuel Johnson (unpublished dissertation, University of Chicago, 1957). Sidney

¹See Greene, pp. 192-93 for a discussion of their importance.

²James Clifford, Young Sam Johnson (New York: McGraw Hill, 1955), p. 260

attempts to arrive at Johnson's political thought through an analysis of the political utterances against the background of the moral and ethical statements about man that Johnson made most often in his periodical essays. This approach differs from mine both in scope and method. Sidney is not interested in finding any concrete embodiments of the political ideas in the fictional works, or in relating his findings to any particular movements of Johnson's age, as I will attempt to do in the last chapter of this dissertation.

Robert Orlovich's unpublished dissertation from the University of Illinois (1941), Samuel Johnson's Political Ideas and Their Influence on His Works, is an earlier attempt like Greene's to place Johnson politically in the context of his time. Orlovich's conclusions are often opposed to Greene's--on the whole, it appears to me, mistakenly so. Orlovich's work suffers from his inability to consult any of the many historical works published after his dissertation,¹ and the reconstruction of Johnson's early life by James Clifford in his excellent Young Sam Johnson.

Even with the new additions to Johnson scholarship, much work still needs to be done on Johnson's political position. As the authors of A Bibliography of Johnsonian

¹See Greene, pp. 1-21, 288 for a discussion of the value of this new material and a list of the more important titles for a student of eighteenth-century history.

Studies: 1950-1960; A Supplement to Johnsonian Studies: 1887-1950 point out, Greene's "forceful claims [a]bout the enduring value of Johnson's political beliefs] should arouse active opposition in those who cling to traditional interpretations . . . and there will no doubt be many replies. For which let us rejoice. Honest controversy is the life-blood of serious scholarship."¹ The present study is not in the nature of a reply, since I agree substantially with Greene, but is an attempt at clarification, as Greene's work was, of Johnson's politics, utilizing materials and interpretations that have only just become available. Although its approach is from within, it employs the light cast from without by recent scholarship.

That such illumination is necessary can be illustrated by certain facts presented by Bertrand Bronson in an article entitled "The Double Tradition of Dr. Johnson."² As Bronson has shown, there are two traditions which find their source in Johnson: the learned and the popular. The popular tradition received its archetypal Johnson, its "imago" as Bronson calls it, in the famous descriptive passage in Macaulay's review of Croker's Boswell.

¹James Clifford and Donald J. Greene, in Johnsonian Studies, ed. Magdi Wahba (Cairo, 1961), p. 278.

²In Eighteenth Century English Literature, Modern Essays In Criticism, ed. James Clifford (New York: Oxford University Press, A Galaxy Book, 1959).

Everything about him, his coat, his wig, his figure, his face, his scrofula, his St. Vitus's dance, his rolling walk, his blinking eye, the outward signs which too clearly marked his approbation of his dinner, his insatiable appetite for fish-sauce and veal-pie with plums, his inextinguishable thirst for tea, his trick of touching the posts as he walked, his mysterious practice of treasuring up scraps of orange-peel, his morning slumbers, his midnight disputations, his puffings, his vigorous, acute, and ready eloquence, his sarcastic wit, his vehemence, his insolence, his fits of tempestuous rage, his queer inmates, old Mr. Levett and blind Mrs. Williams, the cat Hodge and the negro Frank, all are as familiar to us as the objects by which we have been surrounded from childhood.¹

One of the traits of the popular tradition emphasized strongly by Macaulay in his essay is a blind Toryism, a quality arising, so Macaulay thought, from the "characteristic peculiarity of his intellect which was the union of great powers with low prejudices."² Johnson in the popular tradition is thus anti-democratic, anti-equalitarian, almost sentimentally monarchial, either an early Jacobite or a late and humble Hanoverian, pugnaciously reactionary and fiercely proud.

In the learned tradition, Bronson points out, the same view, more cautiously and pedantically stated, was held until roughly the turn of the century. A reaction set in, exemplified by Henry Craik's attack on the popular image in his historic anthology of English Prose, in which he praises Johnson highly.

¹Quoted by Bronson, p. 287.

²Quoted by Bronson, p. 289.

It is not too much to say, that all that is best in English prose since his day is his debtor in respect of not a few of its highest qualities.¹

In the years since Craik's work, scholars have expended much time and work on Johnson, the result of which has been the solidification of Johnson's high position as a major figure in English literature. Unfortunately, the commerce between the two traditions, the learned and the popular, is slight: the popular tradition remains little modified. Even within the learned tradition, the effect of scholarly studies on Johnson has not modified the Macaulayan figure completely. This is as true in politics as in any other area of Johnsonian study.

In speaking of the work done in the past half-century and its impact upon both traditions, Bronson states,

So far as concerns the "learned tradition," the eidolon has been quite re-formed. But it remains to inquire whether there has been a comparable alteration of the popular image, and whether in fact the work of devoted specialists has made any impact on general opinion. It might be presumed that the literate public at least would be affected; but it appears likely that the folk-image still persists on a far higher level of culture than the specialist would ever dream possible. Even among the teaching profession, almost certainly on the lower levels, and perhaps also at the upper one where specialization in other areas of literary study has prevented reconsideration, the Macaulayan simulacrum probably yet prevails.²

The continuing need for the reformation of that eidolon, plus the inherent value of defining accurately the political

¹Quoted by Bronson, p. 290.

²Bronson, p. 297.

views of a major figure of the eighteenth century, accounts for this paper.

I hope, then, to describe accurately the nature of Johnson's political doctrines and to reveal some of his fundamental beliefs about the nature of man. For Johnson did not disassociate the political man from general mankind and then derive his political theory from that abstraction. As he says in his review of Jenyns's Free Enquiry, the account of political evil is not difficult if we have discovered the "origin of moral Evil, . . . polity being only the conduct of immoral men in publick affairs."¹ The motivations of the political man merely take on a specific political coloration, but in outline they remain the same motives that move all men. Hence, the relation of the imaginative literature to the politics is the relation of a general motive in man to its specific form in the political world.

Johnson's beliefs about the general nature of mankind can then be contrasted with those out of which several intellectual and literary movements of his own day grew--sentimentalism and primitivism, for example. The final result of this method will be a more precise definition of Johnson's "rationalism," his "classicism." For some of the ideas that he opposed were part of what Arthur Lovejoy calls

¹Works (London: Oxford University Press, 1825), VI, 74. Unless otherwise noted, all further references to Johnson's works will be to this edition. For convenience, the title of the piece, the volume, and the page number only will be given.

the "characteristic idea-complex which constitutes what is commonly called the 'rationalism of the Enlightenment.'"¹ Hence, the discrimination of Johnson's rationalism from the general features of eighteenth-century rationalism will, in effect, define with some precision Johnson's unique position in the general currents of his time.

¹"The Parallel of Deism and Classicism," Essays in the History of Ideas (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1948), p. 78.

CHAPTER II

THE POLITICS OF SAMUEL JOHNSON: THE STATE OF MAN, UNGOVERNED AND GOVERNED

i

In the course of a debate in the House of Commons in 1741, the following principle is announced as self-evident to all parties and remains uncontroverted through the rest of the debate:

In all political questions, Questions too extensive to be fully comprehended by generative Reason, Experience is the Guide which a wise Man will follow with least Distrust. . . .¹

This statement embodies one of the most fundamental and enduring of Johnson's beliefs, not only in politics but in the whole large and confused arena of human affairs. Life as it presents itself to the eye of man is a complex, complicated interweaving of circumstances and movements, of ill-defined motives and half understood actions, of far reaching consequences and slight motions, of good and evil entangled so completely within each situation and context that no possible way exists of untangling them.

¹"Debates in the Senate of Lilliput," The Gentleman's Magazine, XII (March, 1742), 123. Cited hereafter as "Debates."

Man's abilities to comprehend this overwhelming puzzle are severely limited, yet he must make decisions, act, and become deeply involved within it. His whole life is bound to it, and if he is to achieve any happiness, if, what is probably more important, he is to avoid a great deal of pain, he must act wisely and discreetly. But it is "beyond the power of mortal intelligence," Johnson states in Rambler, No. 63, to "take a view at once distinct and comprehensive of human life, with all of its intricacies of combination, and varieties of connexion."¹ If it follows then that there is no completely safe or trustworthy guide --experience being what the wise man will "least Distrust" not completely trust--the advantage must lie with what has been submitted to and tested in life, not with a speculative scheme that is based on untested hypothesis.

An excellent example of this kind of reasoning occurs in Johnson's "Considerations on the Corn Laws." Here Johnson is investigating a new scheme for lowering the bounty on the export of corn. He admits that

It is possible, that if it [the bounty] were reduced lower, it would still be the motive of agriculture, and the cause of plenty; but why we should desert experience for conjecture, and exchange a known for a possible good, will not easily be discovered. If, by a balance of probabilities, in which a grain of dust may turn the scale--or, by a curious scheme of calculation, in which, if one postulate in a thousand be erroneous, the deduction which promises plenty may end in famine;--if, by a specious mode of uncertain ratiocination, the critical

¹II, 301.

point at which the bounty should stop, might seem to be discovered, I shall still continue to believe that it is more safe to trust what we have already tried; and cannot but think bread a product of too much importance to be made the sport of subtilty, and the topic of hypothetical disputation.¹

The value of the bounty as an agricultural incentive has been proven, whereas the new theory, created by the limited judgment of one man, quite possibly has dangerous potentialities, particularly when something so important as bread is involved. This danger stems directly from the "inadequacy of man's mind to experience," of man's inability to "foresee all the Consequences of new Measures, or . . . to know what Evils they may create, or what subsequent changes they may introduce. . . ."2

1Considerations on the Corn Laws, V, 327.

2"Debates," XII, 522. There is no positive way of identifying what Johnson's own sentiments were in the Debates and those that were merely the respective speaker's. There are, however, two methods of testing that indicate, it seems to me, which principles enunciated in the Debates were probably approved by Johnson. The first involves a careful reading to find those principles which are contradicted by other speakers during the debate in question and those which are not. The quotation above states a belief about government which both sides in this debate accept, but from which each draws a different conclusion. I have attempted to use only quotations from the Debates which are in this category.

The second method for deciding whether Johnson's own ideas are being presented involves a study of a large part of the Johnson canon to determine whether the idea involved reappears in some later work in the same form or whether it is contradicted. I have again attempted to use only those ideas in the Debates which are reaffirmed in later works.

Finally, the quotations from the Debates are chosen most often not for any originality but for the succinctness and clarity with which they state dominant ideas in Johnson's political theory, ideas, however, which can also be found in various other works of Johnson. The Debates forced Johnson

There is a necessary distinction to be made here, however, between the speculation that is utilized in industrious pursuit of new knowledge and the speculation that is not solidly grounded in acute observation, study, and experience, but which, like Procrustes, cuts off that part which does not fit its already formulated belief about reality. The kind of speculation that Johnson criticizes and which he always contrasts with experience is the superficial, unsophisticated kind which does not stay close to the level of hard fact but takes "distant views," which reduces the inevitable difficulties and complexities of life by ignoring or blurring them. This kind of speculation is severely limited in its value to man, and it is these limitations that Johnson always attacks in his criticism.

As Joseph Sidney points out in his unpublished dissertation¹, Johnson's distrust of speculation stems primarily from three defects he finds in general speculative theory. It ignores: 1) human limitations; 2) the complexity of the

to formulate clearly and state precisely what were some of the most common political attitudes of the day. This exercise undoubtedly helped him solidify his own political beliefs and accounts partially for his searching skepticism in all political matters. From the time of the Debates on, there would be no more "patriotic" effusions such as Marmor Norfolciense, Johnson's early attack on Walpole. The Debates forced Johnson to face political reality and in so doing resulted in the expression of certain political ideas with a vigor and force that he never surpassed.

¹The Political Thought of Samuel Johnson (University of Chicago, 1957), pp. 43-51. The following discussion is heavily indebted to Sidney.

world; 3) the effects of chance.

The first of these limitations has already been touched upon in the quotation above from Rambler, No. 63, in which Johnson says that a view "distinct and comprehensive of human life" is "beyond the power of mortal intelligence." In Idler, No. 91, Johnson presents this idea more fully.

The difficulty of obtaining knowledge is universally confessed. To fix deeply in the mind the principles of science, to settle their limitations, and deduce the long succession of their consequences; to comprehend the whole compass of complicated systems, with all the arguments, objections and solutions, and to reposit in the intellectual treasury the numberless facts, experiments, apophthegms and positions, which must stand single in the memory, and of which none has any perceptible connexion with the rest, is a task which, though undertaken with ardour and pursued with diligence, must at last be left unfinished by the frailty of our nature.¹

Man is radically limited in his ability to understand the world in which he lives, but much theoretical speculation ignores this limitation and attempts to encompass an unmanageable complexity in one grand scheme. The devastation wrought by Johnson on Soame Jenyns's Free Enquiry Into the Nature and Origin of Evil is perhaps the best available example of what happens to one of these schemes when it is tested against the experientially grounded knowledge of a mind like Johnson's. Evil in the world has always been one of the most difficult facts of existence to explain rationally; Johnson usually falls back on faith in Christianity and the inscrutable Will of God to account for it. Jenyns's

¹IV, 417.

unhappy attempt to explain it in rationally comprehensible terms is actually a result of his failure to take into account the limitation of the human intellect in dealing with this problem.

Johnson constantly points out this weakness in Jennings's theory.

This is given as a satisfactory account of the Original of moral Evil, which amounts only to this, that God created beings, whose guilt he foreknew, in order that he might have proper objects of pain, because the pain of the part is, no man knows how or why, necessary to to the felicity of the whole.¹ (*Italics mine.*)

The theory breaks down because man must finally admit that he simply cannot comprehend, his mind is not able to understand, the total organization of experience. Johnson makes the point again near the end of his review.

Our author, if I understand him right, pursues the argument thus: the religion of man produces evils, because the morality of man is imperfect; his morality is imperfect, that he may be justly a subject of punishment; his is made subject to punishment, because the pain of the part is necessary to the happiness of the whole; pain is necessary to happiness; no mortal can tell why, or how.² (*Italics mine.*)

The same language is used here to point up the same fatal flaw in the argument: man is not able to understand something so anomalous as the presence of evil in a God-directed, that is, rational, universe.

Johnson makes clear that he is not criticizing

¹Review of A Free Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil, VI, 73.

²Ibid., p. 75.

Jenyn's ability or learning per se, but only his refusal to take into account the limitation of the mind. "I do not," he says, "mean to reproach this author for not knowing what is equally hidden from learning and from ignorance." Since all men are limited, there is no disgrace in admitting this limitation. "The shame," however, "is to impose words, for ideas, upon ourselves or others."¹ Words hide from man his inherent inadequacy, and in so doing mislead him onto dangerous ground where only experience should be trusted: "Words are," as Johnson pointed out in another place, "the daughters of earth," but "things are the sons of heaven."² (Johnson's italics.)

The second fault Johnson finds in speculation, that it too often ignores the complexity of the world, receives explicit comment in Rambler, No. 125.

The works and operations of nature are too great in their extent, or too much diffused in their relations, and the performances of art too inconstant and uncertain, to be reduced to any determinate idea. It is impossible to impress upon our minds an adequate and just representation of an object so great that we can never take it into our view, or so mutable that it is always changing under our eye, and has already lost its form while we are labouring to conceive it.³

Thus the involved and complicated actions that make up the life of men are causally related to man's ability to understand

¹Ibid., p. 64.

²Preface to the English Dictionary, V, 27.

³III, 93.

fully this world. Our faculties are limited; our problems are almost infinite. These two facts must be recognized and taken into account in any speculative scheme that attempts to elucidate a dark or perplexed area of life, for example, Jenyns's attempt to solve rationally the problem of evil. Johnson thought that all too many attempts such as Jenyns's ignored these facts and in so doing vitiated much of their effect.

The third defect which led Johnson to suspect facile speculation was his awareness of the effects of chance in men's lives. Man's comprehension is limited, his world is intricate and involved, but even that part which he can understand and hope to control is open to forces which he cannot regulate or predict.

It is not commonly observed, how much, even of actions, considered as particularly subject to choice, is to be attributed to accident, or some cause out of our own power, by whatever name it be distinguished.¹

Johnson often noted the effects of such chance in political history.

Forms of government are seldom the result of much deliberation; they are framed by chance in popular assemblies, or in conquered countries, by despotick authority. Laws are often occasional, often capricious, made always by a few, and sometimes by a single voice.²

The law lectures which Johnson helped Robert Chambers compose for delivery at Oxford as the "Vinerian Lectures on

¹Rambler, No. 184, III, 359.

²Idler, No. 11, IV, 182.

English Law" were the occasion for the most forthright of Johnson's many pronouncements upon the necessity for recognizing the part chance plays in the lives of men.

It may not be improper in this place to caution young inquirers into the origin of our government against too great confidence in systematical writers or modern historians, of whom it may justly be suspected that they often deceive themselves and their readers when they attempt to explain by reason that which happened by chance, when they search for profound policy and subtle refinement in temporary expedients, capricious propositions, and stipulations offered with violence and admitted by compulsion and therefore broken and disregarded when that violence ceased by which they were enforced.¹

The role of chance in the drama of history is a large one and as unpredictable as it is large. Many great events can often "be traced back to slender causes," such as "petty competition or casual friendship, the prudence of a slave, or the garrulity of a woman." These slender causes have often "hindered or promoted the most important schemes, and hastened or retarded the revolution of empires."² No speculative theory can hope to account for or to avoid the vicissitudes that inhere in life. They cannot be subsumed under any provision, and they undermine the effectiveness of any abstract formulation. Hence, for Johnson, the large generalities and abstract schemes of speculation all suffer grave

¹Quoted by E. L. McAdam, Dr. Johnson and the English Law (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1961), p. 92. All citations from this work, unless otherwise noted, will come from the Johnsonian part of the Vinerian Law Lectures quoted by McAdam and will be cited hereafter as "Vinerian Lectures."

²Rambler, No. 141, III, 168.

disadvantages through the limitations of the intellect that devised them, through the intricate and complex world of human affairs that defied their simplicity and clarity, and through the often disastrous, always uncontrollable disruptions of chance.

The beneficial kind of speculation, on the other hand, possesses a solidity and reliability lacking in its cousin. Its worth shines forth especially in its service to the advancement of learning.

Knowledge is always promoted by inquisitive industry, and almost always retarded by systematic dogmatism.¹

"Inquisitive industry" must be based on some sort of speculation, some sort of formulation, untested as yet, about the experience which "systematic dogmatism" refused to reflect upon.

One of the political benefits of this fruitful kind of speculation will be that

Causeless discontent, and seditious violence, will grow less frequent and less formidable, as the science of government is better ascertained, by a diligent study of the theory of man.²

Johnson touches on this point in his "Introduction" to the Harleian Miscellany when he discusses the value of a free press. It should not be inferred that "Political or Religious Controversies are the only Products of the Liberty

¹"Vinerian Lectures," p. 99.

²The False Alarm, VI, 155.

of the British Press," he writes, even though the innumerable pamphlets of these controversies would make it appear so; for

the Mind once let loose to Enquiry, and so suffered to operate without Restraint, necessarily deviates into peculiar Opinions, and wanders in new Tracks, where she is indeed sometimes lost in a Labyrinth, from which, tho' she cannot return, and scarce knows how to proceed; yet, sometimes, makes useful Discoveries, or finds out nearer Paths to Knowledge.¹

The pursuit of knowledge involves by necessity some sort of speculation, but it is still experience that is used to sift and test all this speculation, to find the valid and true, to reject the shallow and false. In this context, then, speculation possesses more of a residual than deliberate value.

This residual value lies in the use of the speculative faculty to create new and various solutions to man's difficulties. These problems, almost always ethical or moral as far as Johnson was concerned, have existed since man's beginning, and therefore no new discoveries can be expected to replace the time-tested solutions already preserved in the recorded wisdom of the ages, such as the Bible, the classics, or the church fathers. But if no panacea is to be expected, some improvement can be, for, as George Sherburn noted, the eighteenth-century man generally had faith in the advancement of mankind and Dr. Johnson was no exception.

¹The "Introduction" to the Harleian Miscellany (1744) in Samuel Johnson's Prefaces and Dedications, ed. Allen T. Hazen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), pp. 54-55.

"Even Dr. Johnson believed in progress, and his contemporaries in general glorified the idea."¹ The progress which Johnson allowed, however, was radically different from that, say, of Rousseau² or William Godwin. Johnson's kind of progress was attained by accretion, by slight additions to the accumulated fund of tested knowledge possessed by mankind, and these slight additions gave to speculation its value. Rousseau and Godwin, on the other hand, wanted to move forward not by inches but by giant strides, made possible by a complete revaluation, and demolition often enough, of the institutions, establishments, and commonly held beliefs of mankind. They wanted to make new, whereas Johnson wanted to refurbish.

ii

Johnson's refusal to write a formal treatise presenting his political theory originates, therefore, in his skepticism about the value of such speculation. There are, of course, other possible reasons. Johnson was after all a professional writer, a man who lived by his pen. He would not value his writing cheaply since it was his livelihood.

¹George Sherburn, The Restoration and Eighteenth Century, in A Literary History of England, ed. Albert C. Baugh (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1948), p. 968.

²For an excellent and concise discussion of Johnson and Rousseau's contrasting approach to progress through reform see Richard B. Sewall, "Dr. Johnson, Rousseau, and Reform," The Age of Johnson, ed. W. S. Lewis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), pp. 307-317.

(No man "but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money."¹) Hence, he was not likely to expend his energies composing formal treatises that would not bring immediate cash. Even though Johnson managed to live by his pen, he actually did not know a comfortable life until he received his pension in 1762 from George III. He seldom had time for the necessary study involved in a thorough, philosophical treatment of any subject (it took Locke sixteen years to complete his Essay on Human Understanding); consequently he was directed neither by inclination nor by occupation to formal or extended speculation about complex matters.

But even though Johnson wrote no formal treatise, there is no reason to assume that he acted merely from irrational bias (Macaulay's "union of great powers with low prejudices"²) or that he simply consulted his particular feelings at the moment, on the assumption that all political speculation was ineffectual or worthless. Johnson too much appreciated and sought the "grandeur of generality" to act in such an important area as politics without arriving at some fundamental political principles first. He had thought hard about political matters most of his life, mainly because, as Donald J. Greene has shown in his recent

¹Quoted by Boswell in The Life of Johnson, ed. G. B. Hill; rev. L. F. Powell (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1936-1950), III, 19. All further references will be to this edition.

²Thomas Macaulay, Works, ed. Lady Trevelyan (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1897), V, 526.

book on Johnson's politics¹, he was deeply involved in almost every period of his life in political activity. From his earliest publications--a translation of Father Jerome Lobo's A Voyage to Abyssinia (1739), A Complete Vindication of the Licensers of the Stage (1739), and Marmor Norfolciense (1739)--to the end of his life when he wrote for Boswell a short dissertation entitled "of Tory and Whig" (1781) and the many miscellaneous political comments in the Lives of Poets (1781), Johnson was writing and thinking about political matters. These facts concerning Johnson's political involvement plus his belief in the meliorative potentiality of human reason, that is, speculation, add up to a positive belief, heavily salted with skepticism it is true, in the necessary and beneficial work of political activity.

In this connection a popular argument has been that Johnson never considered politics a very important matter and that this supposed unimportance implies a lack of any consistent thought about fundamental principles on his part. Such statements as this one in the Life of Lyttleton are often used to support this belief.

Politicks did not, however, so much engage him [Lyttleton], as to withhold his thoughts from things of more importance.²

Johnson's addition to Goldsmith's poem "The Traveller,"

¹The Politics of Samuel Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 21.

How small of all that human hearts endure
 The part which laws or kings can cause or cure!¹
 (11. 429-30)

several comments in his letters, like this one to Robert Chambers,

The State of the Publick, and the operations of governments have little influence upon the private happiness of private men nor can I pretend that much of the national calamities is felt by me,²

and this one to Baretti,

The good or ill success of battles and embassies extends itself to a very small part of domestic life: we all have good and evil, which we feel more sensibly than our petty part of public miscarriage or prosperity,³

and various other similar comments found throughout his work do support the idea that he found politics and its effects upon the private happiness of individuals negligible. If Johnson did feel that political affairs were insignificant in matters of individual happiness, if he thought attempts to achieve happiness through involvement in political problems and activity unavailing and fruitless, then it would appear illogical for him to bother writing or discussing anything of a political nature, and the illogicality would be especially blatant if he became passionately involved.

Macaulay, in his review of Croker's edition of Boswell's

¹The Poems of Samuel Johnson, ed. David Nichol Smith and E. L. McAdam (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1941), p. 380.

²R. W. Chapman, ed., The Letters of Samuel Johnson (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1952), III, 17.

³Ibid., I, 145.

Life of Johnson, argues exactly this point. He quotes Johnson's statement to Adam Fergusson, "I would not give half a guinea to live under one form of government rather than another," which Johnson follows almost immediately by, "Sir, I perceive you are a vile Whig. Why all this childish jealousy of the power of the crown? The crown has not power enough."¹ Macaulay then goes on to say,

If the difference between two forms of government be not worth half a guinea, it is not easy to see how Whiggism can be viler than Toryism, or how the crown can have too little power. If the happiness of individuals is not affected by political abuses, zeal for liberty is doubtless ridiculous. But zeal for monarchy must be equally so. No person would have been more quick sighted than Johnson to such a contradiction as this in the logic of an antagonist.²

Bertrand Bronson³ has attempted to answer Macaulay's charges by reconstructing Johnson's political philosophy and by examining the practical political situation to which Johnson refers. Johnson's political philosophy revolves, according to Bronson, around the necessity for an "impartial, absolute authority," which must exist in the state and to which all contestants can appeal; in the British system the King is the embodiment of this principle. Johnson felt the Whigs were attempting to undermine the Kings's authority and thus disrupt society by the ensuing struggles for power which

¹Life of Johnson, II, 170.

²Macaulay, pp. 529-30.

³"The Double Tradition of Dr. Johnson," in Eighteenth Century English Literature: Modern Essays In Criticism, ed. James Clifford (New York: Oxford University Press, A Galaxy Book, 1959).

must follow its displacement from him. In this light, Johnson's statement about the Crown not having power enough refers to a cardinal doctrine of his theory of state and is not simply the result of an emotional or irrational longing for authority.

Since his desire for the authority is based on a simple extension of his political theory, the logical dilemma complained of by Macaulay must come from Johnson's earlier statement about his lack of concern for the form of government under which he lives. Bronson explains this contradiction by completing the quotation, something Macaulay failed to do.

When I say all governments are alike, I consider that in no government power can be abused long. Mankind will not bear it. If a sovereign oppresses his people to a great degree, they will rise and cut off his head. There is a remedy in human nature against tyranny, that will keep us safe under every form of government.¹

For Johnson, the present form of English government was not an oppressive one, but one which was acceptable to the people because it provided them with a certain amount of security and let them pursue their private lives more or less as they pleased. These basic conditions are all that any government can provide, but when government fails to fulfill these principal obligations, when, in England's case, the king attempts to become a tyrant, then the people can

¹Life of Johnson, II, 170. Cf. an earlier statement made to Goldsmith, "if the abuse be enormous, Nature will rise up, and claiming her original rights, overturn a corrupt political system." (Johnson's italics.) Life of Johnson, I, 424.

"rise and cut off his head." Hence the form of government is unimportant, since if it is a bad government it will be unable to survive, and if it is a good one it provides the same service all good governments do. If it is an acceptable government, consequently, which Johnson considered the present English government, there is nothing contradictory in trying to maintain it, for the proved good should be preserved, whatever its form. The benefits of political activity are to be derived not from a transformation of society through political change but through the maintenance of the security and peace already established by the accepted form of English government. Johnson's attitude could perhaps be called negative in that it does not propose changes in search of better social conditions, but it cannot be classed as the negativeness which opposes change because of anxiety or insecurity. Johnson opposed change but he opposed it on rational principles.

iii

Bronson's argument seems to me to be at least tenable, especially when he discusses the place of sovereignty in Johnson's political theory, but there is another way to approach this problem of the importance of politics for Johnson, which will, I believe, explain why Donald J. Greene is right when he insists that

it is not true, as some writers have maintained, that politics played a relatively insignificant part in Johnson's life, thought, and writings, or that he was

a mere inept dabbler in the surface of politics, to be dismissed with a patronizing smile.¹

In Idler, No. 36, Johnson says,

The great differences that disturb the peace of mankind are not about ends, but means. We have all the same general desire, but how those desires shall be accomplished will for ever be disputed. The ultimate purpose of government is temporal, and that of religion is eternal happiness. Hitherto we agree; but here we must part, to try, according to the endless varieties of passion and understanding combined with one another, every possible form of government, and every imaginable tenet of religion.² (*Italics mine.*)

The contrast between the respective ends of government and religion explains Johnson's emphasis upon the value of religion and his consequent depreciation of the importance of politics. For there can be no comparison when it comes to the relative significance of what shall last forever and what shall last only a short span. When we consider not relative importance but importance within the life man alone, however, then politics has a major significance. Johnson makes this clear when he says that "political affairs are the highest and most extensive of temporal concerns."³ Within the temporal sphere, the desire for happiness is the paramount motive for all human actions, and since, as Johnson constantly reiterates, "Publick Happiness is the End of Government,"⁴ government becomes an essential, albeit temporal, concern of

¹Greene, p. 21.

²IV, 254-55.

³Idler, No. 48, IV, 292.

⁴"Debates," XI, 351.

man. Man in his desire for happiness has instituted government, of seemingly infinite variety, but all with this same goal. Granting the insignificance of this merely temporal happiness when compared to eternal happiness, an individual can still occupy himself with political affairs without any inconsistency in his actions and beliefs. Man becomes inconsistent only when he finds happiness on this earth the only goal, and devotes all his time and energy to searching for the form of government which can best deliver it.

Those who attack the English monarchical form of government by shouting liberty and crying out for the rights of the people, even if they are sincere in their belief, are still doubly mistaken. First, they exchange religious for merely human goals, since they already receive from that monarchy adequate liberty and privileges. Their fractious insistence on human happiness, which they mistakenly believe will come from the almost total liberty they demand, blinds them and their followers to the subordinate rank human happiness has in relation to eternal, and finally lures them into inverting their stations. The amount of attention diverted to temporary happiness and the means to attain it meant for Johnson an abandonment of the proper balance between politics and religion. The latter, instead of occupying its legitimate cardinal place, was then in danger of being reduced to the inferior position, and such a condition was both intolerable and tragic.

Second, the men bitterly attacking the government fail to see that there is a limited amount of happiness here on earth and that it will not be much enlarged or more equitably shared by change of government. For government does not and cannot promise happiness. It can, at best, provide a certain amount of security and order in which man is free to pursue happiness, but this rather negative function is about all government can contribute. Johnson thought that liberty which was seemingly in danger from the encroachment of the King was often, "to the lowest rank of every nation" at least, "little more than the choice of working or starving"; a choice he "supposed equally allowed in every country."¹ Liberty is not happiness; a certain amount of it is necessary, but no amount of it can either equal or promise happiness. (That Johnson thought his country had sufficient liberty is evidenced by his comment that the English should talk of it less and use it better.)

Thus, Johnson's statement about the unimportance of politics must be understood, it seems to me, in the light of his whole attitude towards happiness, the goal of both government and religion. Since eternal happiness is the highest possible good, all else is unimportant in comparison to it. From this unimportance comes Johnson's statement concerning the insignificance of politics. But if the individual

¹"On the Bravery of the English Common Soldiers," VI, 151.

recognizes the essential value of religion and religion's promise, then he can devote both time and effort to political affairs. The matter of emphasis and proportion is crucial, however, and if the temporal concerns about happiness through government, such as Adam Fergusson's fears of the monarchy, seem to overflow their proper bounds, then the proper course must be restored by a blunt restatement of respective value: eternal felicity versus temporal happiness.

This dichotomy between religion and politics influences Johnson's attitude within politics itself as well as toward the relative significance of each. If religion is the central fact of life, it is a fact which dictates in broad outline the activities of men in political affairs but not the specific mode or manner. Although Johnson believed that the political activities of men must be judged by religious standards--"polity being only the conduct of immoral men in publick affairs"¹--he was aware of the impossibility of applying literal Christian doctrine to the state. He consequently saw the necessity for using reason in the study and administration of government. Although man is "by the laws of his Creator howsoever promulgated . . . naturally and necessarily bound," he can know the Will of God only "by the revelation or the light of reason."² Now in

¹Review of Free Enquiry, VI, 74.

²"Vinerian Lectures," p. 82.

"what way, or by what means the patriarchial dominions of the first ages was actually exchanged for civil government" is unknown, "since even the most ancient and authentic of all histories, the Sacred Books of Moses, do not with precision inform us." We must, then, "be content to conjecture."¹ The available evidence is thus not capable of informing mankind how civil government started, how it is to be constructed, or how it is to function. Man must use his reason in determining how best to reach civil society's goal of temporal happiness, and then judge, by religious standards, whether the means are acceptable. This procedure is just another way of saying that we can achieve happiness only through virtue, since religion will approve only right measures of conduct. Johnson always assumed that "the only uniform and perpetual course of publick happiness is publick virtue."²

Thus it is that when he speaks of government and religion in a sermon written for John Taylor to deliver, he states that "the first duty . . . of a governor is to diffuse through the community a spirit of religion, to endeavour that a sense of the Divine Authority should prevail in all orders of men, and the laws should be obeyed, in subordination to the universal and unchangeable edicts of the Creator and Ruler of the World."³ (*Italics mine.*) A

¹Ibid.

²Sermon XXIV, IX, 510.

³Ibid., p. 513.

"spirit" of religion and a "sense" of the Divine Authority refer to inner states of men and not the external form of the one under which they live. Johnson knew that the outer form cannot confer upon government any assurance of stability or virtue, since government exists only in the actions of the men who make it up. Hence, any attempt to form a government upon literal Christian doctrine cannot but fail, since Christian doctrine was meant for the inner state of all men, man in his feelings, attitudes, and relationship to his Maker, and not for the political structure of a specific nation or state. If Christian doctrine is misapplied in this manner it can lead to a disastrous Civil War such as England endured, in which "laws were overruled, . . . [and] rights were abolished."

The usurpers gave way to other usurpers; the schismatics were thrust out by other schismatics; the people felt nothing from their masters but alternatives of oppression, and heard nothing from their teachers but varieties of error.¹

It was this knowledge of Civil War that led Johnson to believe that war

is one of the heaviest of national evils, a calamity in which every species of misery is involved.²

Since religion provided no formula for the construction of the proper form of government, reason must be the guide in determining this proper form, with the utilitarian standard of the most happiness for the most people as its rule.

¹Sermon XXIII, IX, 505.

²The Patriot, VI, 220.

Although Dr. Johnson refused to set up a state of nature and trace men's emergence from it to the blessings of civilized society as Hobbes and Locke did, he often used the contrast between the savagery of nature and security of civilization in discussing the value of government. His use of this contrast was for predominantly rhetorical purposes; he was usually more concerned to persuade an audience than to erect a logical or philosophical structure of politics. Nor was Johnson normally referring to a remote age when he spoke of the dangers of the "pretty state of equality"¹ in which no government existed. For him, government was daily threatened by the forces of brutality and malignity. The return to the chaos of ungoverned society was only one step away, that step consisting of prolonged disobedience on the part of citizens to their government. The practical facts, dismissing such metaphysical notions as "compacts" and contracts," were simply this: the state of nature from which man escaped into artificial society was an ever present potentiality that would become a reality the instant government failed.

As early as 1742 Johnson stated his belief about the "natural state" of man.

The Punishment of Wickedness, My Lords, is undoubtedly one of the essential parts of good Government, and in

¹Life of Johnson, II, 219.

reality the Chief Purpose for which Society is instituted; for how will that society in which any individual may be plundered, enslaved, and murdered without redress and without Punishment, differ from the State of Corrupt Nature, in which the strongest must be absolute, and right and Power always the same.¹

Unless men are checked and trained into patterns of civilized living, they will resort to power and force to settle any dispute, to enforce any demand, or to satisfy any desire.

Were all distinctions [i.e., different ranks in society] abolished, the strongest would not long acquiesce, but would endeavour to obtain a superiority by their bodily strength. . . . Were we all upon an equality, we should have no other enjoyment than mere animal pleasure.²

In a non-political state, then, where no government sets up law and rules for men to follow, and where no government enforces by penal sanctions, unfortunately necessary, the moral prohibitions and admonitions of religion, there exists no safety or real freedom, i.e., freedom from anxiety and freedom to live more or less as one chooses. In this state there is no security, only confusion.

The great benefit of society is that the weak are protected against the strong. The great evil of confusion is that the world is thrown into the hands, not of the best, but of the strongest; that all certainty of possession or acquisition is destroyed; that every man's care is confined to his own interest; and that general negligence of the general good makes way for general licentiousness.³

The state of nature which Johnson sets up often

¹"Debates," XII, 513.

²Life of Johnson, I, 442.

³Sermon XXIII, IX, 504.

results from the misuse of government, rather than from its absence. Since his concern was with practical government and its influence and since he distrusted speculative theories as a matter of course, Johnson naturally focussed his attention on the actual form of the civil state and the disastrous condition which would arise from its abuse and deterioration.

The results of this mistreatment are two:

Nor have Communities suffered more, when they were exposed to the passions and caprices of one man, however cruel, ambitious, or insolent, than when all restraint had been taken off the actions of men by public confusions, and every one left at full liberty to indulge his own desires, and comply, without fear or punishment, with his wildest imaginations.¹

The weakness or failure of government usually leads to anarchy, "this pretty state of equality" in which "men soon degenerate into brutes."² In this condition the "end of all civil regulations"--which is "to secure private happiness from private malignity; to keep individuals from the power of one another,"³--is defeated, and soon out of this confusion rises the stronger, and finally out of the stronger rises the strongest. In either case, no individual has any hope for security or happiness, for without government the life of man is passed in either anarchy or tyranny, complete freedom or complete dependence.

Now anarchy, where every man may act as he pleases

¹Sermon XXIV, IX, 507.

²Life of Johnson, II, 219.

³Idler, No. 22, IV, 214.

and take what he likes if his strength is sufficient, and tyranny, where every man must act as a single man dictates, are conditions of life without security or safety. Without freedom from anxiety or concern, happiness is impossible.

Man is, for the most part, equally unhappy, when subjected, without redress, to the passions of another, or left, without control, to the dominion of his own.¹

Many men fool themselves into thinking that, while all other men must be restrained from asserting themselves at the expense of others, they are capable of living above the law, in accordance with only their own wishes:

. . . all boys love liberty, till experience convinces them they are not so fit to govern themselves as they imagined. We are all agreed as to our own liberty; we would have as much of it as we can get; but we are not agreed as to the liberty of others; for in proportion as we take, others must lose.²

This belief that only oneself is "fit to be set free from the coercion of laws, and . . . abandoned entirely to his own choice,"³ would be practicable if

every man were wise and virtuous, capable to discern the best use of time, and resolute to practice it.⁴

In such a case, "it might be granted, . . . without hesitation, that total liberty would be a blessing."⁵ Johnson was not, however, a believer in the perfectibility of man, either

¹Sermon XXIV, IX, 507.

²Life of Johnson, III, 383.

³Sermon XXIV, IX, 507.

⁴Adventurer, No. 111, IV, 106.

⁵Ibid.

with or without institutions:

No man thinks laws unnecessary for others; and no man, if he considers his own inherent frailty, can justly think them unnecessary for himself.¹

If, therefore, man cannot be happy when he is a possible prey to all men stronger than he or to one man more powerful than all others, then some institution must be created which will protect him from other men. This protection can make possible the achievement of at least some happiness.

While mankind continued in the state of gross barbarity in which all were eager to do wrong and all unwilling to suffer, it is apparent that every man's fear would be greater than his hope; for an individual, thinking himself at liberty to act merely for his own interest, would consider every other individual as his enemy who acted only by the same principle. When they came to deliberate how they should escape what many had felt and all dreaded, they would soon find that safety was only to be obtained by setting interest on the side of innocence, by such a scheme of regulation as should give every man a prospect of living more happily by forbearing than by usurping the property of another, and which should repress the passions of anger and revenge by making their gratification the cause of immediate misery.²

In this way government erected "penal laws" to make "every man's danger . . . every man's safety," so that, "though all are restrained, yet all are benefited."³ The basic function of government is then the protection of the individual from those more powerful than he. By thus providing a fundamental liberty for the individual (hedged as

¹Sermon XXIV, IX, 515.

²"Vinerian Lectures," pp. 109-10.

³Sermon XXIV, IX, 507.

I will point out later by what Greene calls "Tory qualifications"), government also provides for the happiness of the whole society.

When Johnson writes that

Society implies in its nature an interest common to many individuals, a pursuit of the highest degree of happiness that can be obtained and enjoyed by any number, great or small, which that society comprises,¹

his point is that the happiness of society can be assured and achieved, if at all, only by attention to each individual who makes up that society. This attention should be devoted mainly to protecting the individual from attacks by others, for this basic protection which only government can provide is probably the one essential condition for man's happiness.

Government is, therefore, necessary, in the opinion of every one, to the safety of particular men, and the happiness of society.²

v

If government is essential to the happiness of mankind, then it must be invested with power to protect and to maintain itself, and to fulfill its function of providing the security necessary for men to achieve happiness.

To the happiness of the whole, it will be frequently necessary to sacrifice the happiness of a part, and as no man is naturally willing that his happiness should be diminished to increase another's, or that the profit should be divided among many when the labor or the danger is all his own, it is apparent that some public authority

¹"Vinerian Lectures," p. 83.

²Sermon XXIV, IX, 507.

must be necessary to overrule single opinion or private interest.¹

Thus, government must enforce its demands upon those unwilling to contribute their necessary share to the general happiness.

Such curtailment of individual liberty is bound to be distasteful to some and to raise an argument like this against the authority of government:

Liberty is the birthright of man, and where obedience is compelled, there is no liberty.²

Johnson's answer is equally short.

Government is necessary to man, and where obedience is not compelled, there is no government.³

It is by limiting the prerogatives--the liberty--of others that a share of liberty for all can be assured. If some men refuse to give up voluntarily some of their liberty, then they must be deprived of it by force for the sake of the whole; otherwise, government becomes ineffectual and anarchy follows.

Recognizing this fact, every "new society" has recourse to what Johnson calls "the unwritten law of social nature, . . . the great and pregnant principle of political necessity," which states that "all government supposes subjects, all authority implies obedience. To suppose in one

¹"Vinerian Lectures," p. 83.

²Taxation No Tyranny, VI, 257.

³Ibid.

the right to command what another has the right to refuse, is absurd and contradictory."¹

The basis of all political unions, consequently, must ultimately rest in power. This power need not and should not be utilized simply because it is there. Even when government is threatened by "open defiance,"--as it was for example by the poor who had become desperate by the scarcity of corn at one period in England--the "necessity of ruling by immediate force" can only be called "one of the greatest of political evils."² Yet evil as it is to rule by force, it is nonetheless better to do so than through negligence to permit mob rule, which is in reality only the shifting of power from a constituted authority, government, to an unconstituted one, the mob. For

There must, in every society, be some power or other, from which there is no appeal, which admits no restrictions, which pervades the whole mass of the community, regulates and adjusts all subordination, enacts laws or repeals them, erects or annuls judicatures, extends or contracts privileges, exempt itself from question or control, and bounded only by physical necessity.³

Johnson does not deny that this power can be abused, for it is, after all, given to men who suffer certain inevitable imperfections. As he noted early in his career, "every man that has the Power of Action, may sometimes act ill."⁴

¹False Alarm, VI, 161.

²Considerations on the Corn Laws, V, 322.

³Taxation No Tyranny, VI, 234.

⁴"Debates," XII, 234.

But even if this power "is not infallible, for it may do wrong, . . . it is irresistible, for it can be resisted only by rebellion, by an act which makes it questionable, what shall be thenceforward the supreme power."¹

When Johnson says, "In sovereignty there are no gradations," he is defining the term, not advocating an authoritarian form of government: sovereignty can reside in any established government, just as it can reside in a mob, a tyrant, or an army. Hence, it is better, in the long run, to locate and maintain this sovereignty in a government that has grown up through long generations and has been accepted by the people, than to shift power from one group to another and cause a great deal of insecurity and distress by the ensuing uncertainty as to where rule and authority are to be located. Thus Johnson can say:

If the subject refuses to obey, it is the duty of authority to use compulsion. Society cannot subsist but by the power, first of making laws, and then of enforcing them.²

In another context Johnson makes clearer the danger to the existence of government and the necessity for the use of power.

Laws which cannot be enforced can neither prevent nor rectify disorders. A sentence which cannot be executed can have no power to warn or to reform."³

¹Taxation No Tyranny, VI, 235.

²Ibid., p. 257.

³False Alarm, VI, 162.

Without power, government cannot perform its duty of protecting the weak from the strong; once government is only nominal, it is for all practical purposes nonexistent.

Hence, if any government is to exist and function it must be "ultimately and essentially absolute,"¹ although the people can, if necessary, destroy it by denying by force its absoluteness.

If civil society is in reality based upon power-- authority of a few men over many--then society must by its nature consist of a graded series in which some are superior to others.

Political society is that state of man in which some govern and others are governed; it therefore necessarily implies subordination, and ranks those of which it is composed in different degrees.²

Without this kind of subordination there would be no clearly drawn lines to guide men in their duties and prevent them from clashing over precedent and possession.

"Thus, Sir [Boswell reports Johnson as saying], there would be a perpetual struggle for precedence, were there no fixed invariable rules for the distinction of rank. . . ."³

Since these "contentions for superiority" are "very dangerous" to society

mankind, this is to say, all civilized nations, have settled it [precedence] upon a plain invariable principle.

¹Taxation No Tyranny, VI, 234.

²"Vinerian Lectures," p. 102.

³Life of Johnson, I, 448.

A man is born to hereditary rank; or his being appointed to certain offices, gives him a certain rank.¹

Although rank and position thus gained generally "creates" no jealousy, as . . . [they are] allowed to be accidental,"² there is still bound to be some unhappiness and misery at simply being in an inferior station. This misery is actually the price paid for the advantages of civilized society; it is the cost of subordination.

. . . it is better that some should be unhappy, than that none should be happy, which would be the case in a general state of equality.³

Without this subordination,

all would be losers. . . . We would have no intellectual improvement. All intellectual improvement arises from leisure: all leisure arises from one working for another.⁴

While this leisure cannot be obtained without subordination, it is equally true that it cannot be enjoyed or used without the same subordination, since "order cannot be had but by subordination,"⁵ and without order society cannot exist.

Johnson did not believe that this necessary subordination was an artificial condition imposed upon man's natural equality.

So far is it from being true that men are naturally equal, that no two people can be half an hour together, but one shall acquire an evident superiority over the other.⁶

¹Ibid., p. 442.

²Ibid., p. 448.

³Ibid., III, 26.

⁴Ibid., II, 219.

⁵Ibid., III, 383.

⁶Ibid., II, 13.

Men are simply not naturally equal on this earth. If one measures not by physical, intellectual, or social standards, but by religious standards, all men are equal since all men possess an incorruptible soul. But for the practical purpose of running society efficiently, this equality of spirit must give way to the subordination of men by talent, rank, or position. In this temporal sphere the easily ascertainable truth is that "mankind were never all equally wise or equally powerful."¹ Thus subordination is an actual condition of life and not an artificial one created by society.

The need for subordination and the inability of man to live, as it were, reasonably, adjusting his needs to the general good, arises from the individual temperament of men.

This same contrariety of impulse [as seen in the force which keeps the planets in their orbits] may be perhaps discovered in the motions of men: we are formed for society, not for combination; we are equally unqualified to live in close connexion with our fellow-beings, and in total separation from them; we are attract'd towards each other by general sympathy, but kept back from contact by private interest.²

Johnson's insistence on subordination,³ stemming from his observation of the contradictory nature of man, is based finally on practical reasons.

Nothing is more evident from daily experience than that in every undertaking in which many are employed there must be one presiding and superintendent mind. Some will

¹"Vinerian Lectures," p. 115.

²Adventurer, No. 45, IV, 18.

³"Vinerian Lectures," p. 83.

want diligence and some skill; and men equally skillful and equally diligent, if they are all left to their own direction, will counteract one another.¹

Johnson's refusal to compose a treatise setting forth his political philosophy can thus be traced, at least in part, to his skepticism about the value of such speculation. While recognizing this skepticism, one can still uncover in Johnson's work a definite attitude toward government: 1) it is absolutely necessary for the protection of society's peace and security; 2) it is capable of assuming any number of acceptable forms, so long as it does not violate the standards and principles of religion. To insure the first condition, men must give power and obedience to government; to guarantee the second, they should never forget that political acts and measures must always play a subordinate role in the religious drama of life.

¹"Vinerian Lectures," p. 83.

CHAPTER III

IRENE

i

Johnson's only play, Irene, was performed at the Drury Lane Theatre in February of 1749 and ran, thanks more to Garrick the manager than to the intrinsic value of the play, for nine nights. It had been composed much earlier than 1749. Of Johnson's longer and more important works it is the earliest; according to the editors of his poetry, the "completion and revision of the play . . . can be assigned to the spring and summer of 1737."¹ He was at this time twenty-eight and was still in the "youth of terrific storm and stress"² that Bertrand Bronson believes strongly influenced his treatment of the Irene story.³ He was also just starting his long and arduous career as a man of letters in London, which began by his doing mainly hack work for Edward Cave, editor and publisher of the Gentleman's Magazine, and

¹The Poems of Samuel Johnson, ed. David Nichol Smith and Edward L. McAdam (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1941), p. 239.

²Bertrand Bronson, Johnson Agonistes and Other Essays (Cambridge: The University Press, 1946), p. 128.

³Cf. Section III, "Johnson's Irene," in Bronson, ibid.

publishing separately such strongly political works as London, Marmor Norfolciense, and Vindication of the Licensers. Johnson's writings were never again so involved and saturated with political matters as they were from 1737 to 1744, the year he stopped composing the "Lilliputian Debates" for the Gentleman's Magazine. The beliefs and ideas expressed in Irene were to be tested through the next seven years by close and extensive involvement in the day to day political life of London. That many of them proved valid, as it appears to me they did, is a tribute to Johnson's clear insight into the workings of the political animal; yet it is not too surprising, since the activity of the political animal, as was noted earlier, is only the "conduct of immoral men in public affairs."¹

Even though Irene was written before Johnson's immersion in the agitated political waters of London of the late 1730's and early 1740's, and even though its political attitudes did not directly arise from observations of a large variety of men deeply engaged in politics, there was still an environmental force that was pushing him towards specific political considerations of society. As Bronson notes,

. . . the eight or ten years which preceded the composition of Irene must in many ways have been the most difficult years of his life. Everything in him was in ferment. His poverty, under the conditions of that time and place, was necessarily a matter of profound concern, forcing fundamental consideration of the structure

¹Review of Free Enquiry, VI, 74.

of society. His father died in that period, and Johnson, upon receiving the f20 which was his from the effects, wrote . . . "I now therefore see that I must make my own fortune. Mean while, let me take care that the powers of my mind may not be debilitated by poverty, and that indigence do not force me into any criminal act.¹

The distress about his own place in society and his concern for the future forced him to observe and inspect the nature and methods of men as they made their way in the world. And even at this early date, Johnson's great respect for the law, and the concomitant need for submission to it--a fundamental premise of his political theory--is expressed in his fear lest indigence force him to break the laws that bind men together in political union.

Johnson took his story from The Generall Historie of the Turkes, by Richard Knolles. The story is different in this work from the form in which it appears in Johnson's play. In Knolles, Irene, a beautiful Greek, was taken captive at the sack of Constantinople in 1453 and was given to Sultan Mahomet II, who immediately fell in love with her. He neglected his empire until a general discontent threatened his throne and forced him to make a drastic decision. Calling together all his military and diplomatic advisers, Mahomet let Irene come into their midst, where he asked of them whether they, too, would not neglect an empire for her. Struck by Irene's beauty, they all answered yes, whereupon Mahomet drew his "falchion, . . . [and] at one blow struck off her

¹Bronson, Johnson Agonistes, p. 129.

head, to the great terror of them all."² In this manner did Mahomet prove he could control his passions as a true leader of the faith should do.

Johnson changed the story considerably. In his play, Irene and another beautiful Greek, Aspasia, have both been captured at the sack. Although Mahomet is first infatuated with Aspasia, he transfers his attention to Irene when she is brought to him. Aspasia has refused to marry Mahomet and become apostate; her life is saved by Irene, who, as the center of the play, waivers between accepting the offer of Mahomet to be the Queen of Turkey or remaining true to her Christian faith.

Cali Bassa, the chief courtier of Mahomet, whom Johnson, despising the type, describes as "The Vet'ran Courtier/ . . . That oft' had practis'd Fraud, and oft' detected,"¹ fears that Mahomet intends to murder him. Cali had been responsible earlier for the return of Amurath, Mahomet's father, to the throne after some years of retirement, which return deprived Mahomet of this power and left him with a bitter hatred of Cali. Cali plots with two Greek heroes, Demetrius and Leontius, who had escaped captivity by disguising themselves in Turkish robes, to assassinate Mahomet in Irene's chambers. After the assassination, they plan to flee to the coast of Asia, where Cali Bassa hopes

¹Samuel Johnson, Irene, I, ii, 131-32, in Smith-McAdam. All further citations from Irene will be taken from this edition of the Poems.

to set up a separate state and free the Greeks from Turkish rule.

Involved in the conspiracy is Abdalla, a disgruntled Turkish captain, who feels Mahomet has slighted him. Through some plot machinations, the assassination attempt fails, but, by what is implied as Heaven's intervention, Irene is implicated in the attempt and executed by Mahomet's orders. Demetrius and Aspasia escape in the general confusion and Mahomet, when he finds that Irene was really innocent and had in fact attempted to save him and trap the plotters, decides to renounce his throne and retire forever from public life. Irene's death is attributable to "poetic justice," since she had rejected her own Christian faith, in contrast to Aspasia who remained virtuous, and through her rejection and death she provides the tragic element of this play.

This brief summary of the plot fails to do justice to the symmetrical structure of the play, attained mainly by the pairing of the characters. Irene, the apostate, contrasts with Aspasia, the faithful; Abdalla, the disgruntled captain, with Hasan and Caraza, the loyal captains; Cali Bassa, the traitorous minister, with Mustapha, the loyal general; and Aspasia and Demetrius, the faithful lovers, with Mahomet and Irene, the base lovers. The balance and antithesis of character was used by Johnson to drive home the truth or moral of the play: failure to maintain religious faith can lead only to destruction. The play is thus, as the editors call it,

"a drama of the struggle between virtue and weakness,"¹ but Johnson, in his concern with the moral, failed to give any kind of life to the characters who must embody that moral.

For the purposes of embodying in some kind of concrete form the abstract ideas of his political philosophy, however, Irene is not seriously damaged by its artistic weakness. The play presents characters whose actions are susceptible of general application in the political world and who therefore illustrate or exemplify more substantially than his essays, pamphlets, reviews, or criticism, Johnson's political beliefs. A study of the play pointing out the kind of situation containing within it an element of Johnson's political thought gives a dimension to that thought which an abstract formulation cannot give. It is, in a sense, doing to Johnson's political theory what Johnson often insisted be done to any theory: test its validity by its performance in the empirical reality of men's lives. This kind of particularization also helps to place Johnson in the various intellectual movements of his day, since it presents in miniature an important incident in the experience of man; Johnson's observation and emphasis of what is important in the incident; and, finally, the generalization that he drew from his observation. Seeing this process clearly can clarify Johnson's specific position within or without such movements of his own day as Deism, Primitivism, Sentimentalism, and so forth. In brief, a study

¹Smith-McAdam, p. 234.

of this kind can lead to Johnson's deepest beliefs about man and nature.

ii

Scene seven of Act Four consists of a soliloquy by Mahomet after he has just persuaded Irene to abandon her Christian faith and become his wife. Immediately after he announces Irene's capitulation, Cali Bassa, whom Mahomet now knows to be a traitor, professes great happiness at his future and vows his fidelity to the throne. As Cali leaves, Mahomet sends his general, Mustapha, to find the men who have been spying on Cali Bassa. Left alone, Mahomet speaks.

Whome'er the Hope, still blasted, still renew'd,
Of Happiness, lures on from Toil to Toil,
Remember Mahomet, and cease thy Labour.
Behold him here, in Love, in War successful,
Behold him wretched in his double Triumph;
His Fav'rite faithless, and his Mistress base.
Ambition only gave her to my Arms,
By Reason Not convinc'd, nor won by Love.
Ambition was her Crime, but meaner Folly
Dooms me to loath at once, and doat on Falshood,
And idolize th' Apostate I contemn.
If thou are more than the gay Dream of Fancy,
More than a pleasing Sound without a Meaning,
O Happiness! sure thou art all Aspasia's.
(1-14)

This apostrophe to blasted happiness states one of the main themes of the play, a theme which is related closely to a distinction Johnson makes in his political theory between the respective search for happiness through religion and through politics: religion attempts to attain eternal happiness; government attempts to achieve temporal happiness. Johnson thought any number of differing forms of government could

maintain order and stability within a given society and assure a minimum protection to its citizens. This protective function of government was its primary one, and was the most it could do in providing happiness. The recognition of this limitation was important, as it saved men from making fools of themselves in political affairs and by reminding them of the danger of losing those gains by a "Lust for Innovation," Johnson's description of that desire to find happiness by changing forms of government. Change in itself was to be mistrusted, since the limitation of government was often overlooked through ignorance or naivete, by those advocating the change.

Only religion could lead to the enduring happiness sought by all men. And religion could promise this happiness only after death. Hence, only a life of virtue, a life guided by religion, was capable of achieving eternal happiness. As far as temporal happiness was concerned, any measure not violating the standards of religion, any political gesture or movement, was allowable if it helped man attain happiness or avoid misery. But the two kinds of happiness must be kept distinct, and the less important one--temporal happiness--must not be allowed to usurp the importance and attention due eternal happiness. Thus although Johnson's concept of the state was hedonistic and utilitarian, it was still justified and subsumed under a Christian order.

Irene exemplifies in her actions in the play the

temptations to confuse the two kinds of happiness and invert their order of importance. The temptations of Irene to apostasy, to an abandonment of the true means to happiness, are couched in terms of earthly, that is, political happiness. Irene recognizes this herself when she begs Aspasia, who makes the proper distinction between the value of the two kinds of happiness, to help her as she fights these temptations.

Irene. Aspasia, yet pursue the sacred theme;
 Exhaust the stores of pious Eloquence,
 And teach me to repell the Sultan's Passion.
 Still at Aspasia's Voice a sudden Rapture
 Exalts my Soul, and fortifies my Heart.
 The glitt'ring Vanities of empty Greatness,
 The Hopes and Fears, the Joys and Pains of Life,
 Dissolve in Air, and vanish into Nothing.

(II,i,1-8)

Mahomet, when he tempts Irene, speaks of the pleasures of authority and power, for Johnson the twin pillars of all political structures.

Wilt thou descend, fair Daughter of Perfection,
 To hear my Vows, and give Mankind a Queen?
 Ah! cease, Irene, cease those flowing Sorrows,
 That melt a Heart, impregnable till now,
 And turn thy thoughts henceforth to Love and Empire.
 How will the matchless Beauties of Irene,
 Thus bright in Tears, thus amiable in Ruin,
 With all the graceful Pride of Greatness heighten'd,
 Amidst the Blaze of Jewels and of Gold,
 Adorn a Throne, and dignify Dominion.

(II,vii,1-10)

A little later, Mahomet succeeds in breaking Irene's resolve by describing in explicit terms the benefits and happiness she will be capable of bestowing through the possession of the political power that she will possess as his Queen.

Will it not charm a Mind like thine exalted,
 To shine the Goddess of applauding Nations,
 To scatter Happiness and Plenty round thee,
 To bid the prostrate Captive rise and live,
 To see new Cities tow'r at thy Command,
 And blasted Kingdoms flourish at thy Smile?

(II,vii,67-72)

The power to obtain temporal happiness for mankind is very appealing to Irene, much as Comus's arguments about the beauty and virtue of following natural desires are meant to be to the Lady in Milton's masque. But in both cases the appeal is specious, and indicates a weakness or aberration on the part of the tempter in failing to see that this kind of happiness, attained through political means in one and sensual in the other, is neither enduring nor intrinsically vital. In the soliloquy quoted earlier, Mahomet bitterly recognizes the hollow foundation upon which this kind of happiness is laid, but, pagan that he is, he cannot change, and suffers the misery at the end of the play that is the fate of those who place temporal happiness ahead of eternal. His fault is not that he values temporal happiness, but that he overestimates the amount of it available on earth and ignores the means of eternal happiness--the life of virtue.

Irene resorts to the same argument that Mahomet used when she attempts a halfhearted justification of accepting the Crown.

Irene. O! did Irene shine the Queen of Turkey,
 No more should Greece lament those Prayers rejected.
 Again should golden Splendour grace her Cities,
 Again her prostrate Palaces should rise,
 Again her Temples sound with Holy Musick:

No more should Danger fright, or Want distress
 The smiling Widows, and protected Orphans.
 (III,viii,51-57)

Irene is setting up the temporal happiness that she can create when she is Queen in opposition to and as more important than the eternal happiness which she will lose in apostasy. Johnson's point is that while the protection and relief of widows and orphans are both good and important goals, to achieve them requires action in the political world. This action, while it is not dictated specifically in any one form, must be sanctioned by religion. Aspasia uses this argument in her attempts to dissuade Irene.

Be virtuous Ends pursued by virtuous Means,
 Nor think th' Intention sanctifies the Deed:
 That Maxim publish'd in an Impious Age,
 Would loose the wild Enthusiast to destroy,
 And fix the fierce Usurper's bloody Title.
 Then Bigotry might send her Slaves to War,
 And bid Success become the Test of Truth;
 Unpitying Massacre might waste the World,
 And Persecution boast the Call of Heaven.
 (III,viii,58-66)

An important element of Johnson's political theory which will be discussed in the next chapter is involved here. Briefly stated, this idea is the following: Johnson believed a certain amount of competition and strife among men in civil society was inevitable, since the prizes were few but the contestants many in life. His fear was not, however, of competition--his own indulgence in conversational contests indicates a healthy love for it--but for the unlawful means men might resort to in order to attain the prizes. By refusing to strive within the sanctioned forms of competition

for wealth, honor, and position, man broke the laws of society and caused strife and dissension within it. This kind of unlawful strife generally arose from several sources, one of which was the use of unlawful means to attain lawful ends. Johnson's point is voiced through Aspasia's warning to Irene, whose failure to heed the warning results not in the achievement of temporal happiness for herself and suffering Greece, but in her own death. This kind of personal disaster has its equivalent in the disorders in the state when unlawful means are used to gain beneficial ends.

Donald Greene says, speaking of the effects upon Johnson of the destruction of his home town Lichfield during the Civil War, that

At the bottom of Johnson's political thinking . . . there would always have been a vivid awareness of the events of 1640 to 1660.¹

If he is correct, then the strife that Johnson fears will destroy the order and security of civil society is the kind that swept over England during the Civil War. Although Johnson did not indiscriminately condemn all Puritans, he was critical of the passion of that movement which sent it over the boundaries of law into the most extreme form of unlawful strife--civil war. It aroused in him, quite possibly,

an indignation at wanton destruction by narrow-minded doctrinaires of memorials of the continuity of the human intellect [the Cathedral at Lichfield], a healthy fear of

¹The Politics of Samuel Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 27.

the cruelty, anarchy, and eventually despotism entailed by violent subversion of the civil order.¹

Thus the kind of decision meditated upon by Irene and rationalized by her through the old argument of the end justifying the means is an embodiment of the same idea that appears in the political beliefs of Johnson when he points out the danger to society of the actions of men operating under the same slogan of the end justifying the means.

The mistake made by Irene when she surrenders to Mahomet's pleadings, and by the Puritans quite possibly, is a failure to distinguish between the relative importance of temporal and eternal happiness and the means to each. For neither Irene, nor Puritans would have resorted to such destructive methods in the political world had they remembered the limitations of the government in securing the felicities of life.

Mahomet and Cali Bassa are led astray through a similar confusion. Each in his own way is mistakenly pursuing a happiness by political means which only religion attains finally. From the first meeting in the play between Cali Bassa and Mahomet, the distinction Johnson draws between religion and government in their respective pursuits can be illustrated especially clearly, since in this meeting there is a specific conflict of religion and political intentions.

Cali Bassa's plan is to assassinate Mahomet in the

¹Ibid., p. 33.

chambers of Irene and then flee to the coast of Asia, "Which lately bless'd my gentle Government." (I,ii,75) With the Sultan dead, these coastal people would follow Cali Bassa in fighting the Turks and in this way Constantinople would be freed. The need for a ship to carry him to freedom prompts Cali Bassa to take Demetrius and Leontius into the plot, along with a hundred loyal Greeks to man the ship. In order to calm any suspicions about the ship, loaded with supplies and fully manned, Cali Bassa intends to ask Mahomet for permission to make his pilgrimage to Mecca in it. "Which granted, hides my Purpose from the World,/ And, though refus'd, conceals it from the Sultan." (I,ii,88-89)

Cali Bassa first reveals his complete absorption with temporal happiness in his secret meeting with Demetrius and Leontius. They are eager to attempt the assassination and free their country from the despot Mahomet. Cali Bassa explains that Mahomet spends most of his time in Irene's apartment trying to persuade her to abandon her religion and accept his Crown.

Cali. In her Apartments

He lives--

Leon. And there must fall.

Cali. But yet th' Attempt

Is hazardous.

Leon. Forbear to speak of Hazards,
What has the Wretch that has survived his Country,
His Friends, his Liberty, to hazard?

Cali. Life.

(I,ii,131-135)

In the word "Life" Cali sums up his total absorption in his earthly destiny and his total preoccupation in the means of attaining his goal, regardless of the morality or ethicality of those means. Because the cause is just and the methods proposed to achieve freedom legitimate, Leontius is willing to hazard his life without hesitation. Life, in other words, for Leontius is not important unless it is used and lived properly. For Cali Bassa, life is the only important thing, and therefore justifies any means of prolonging it and creating for it all possible pleasure.

Demetrius immediately contradicts Cali Bassa in his assertion of the value of temporal good.

The inestimable Privilege of Breathing!
Important Hazard! What's that airy Bubble
When weigh'd with Greece, with Virtue and Aspasia?
A floating Atom, Dust that falls unheeded
Into the adverse Scale, nor shakes the Balance.
(I,ii,136-140)

Cali's fear and desire drive him; Demetrius and Leontius wish to achieve happiness for their country and rid it of the misery of a conquered state, but their cause is just because it is sanctioned by a code higher than the purely hedonistic one of Cali Bassa. For had Cali some standard based on the distinction between earthly and "divine" happiness, some code that originated in religion, although it operated in civil life, he probably would not have become a traitor nor would he need fear at the present time for his life.

After dismissing the two Greek consipators, Cali

Bassa meets Mahomet. Mahomet assigns him to guard Irene in an adjoining palace, since

Sure, chill'd with sixty winter camps, thy Blood
At sight of female Charms will glow no more.
(I,v,5-6)

This comment, probably though unintentionally the best lines in the whole play, elicits from Cali Bassa an ironic answer.

These Years, unconquer'd Mahomet, demand
Desires more pure, and other Cares than Love.
Long have I wish'd, before our Prophet's Tomb,
To pour my Prayers for thy successful Reign,
To quit the Tumults of the noisy Camp,
And sink into the silent Grave in Peace.
(I,v,7-12)

The irony here resides in the duplicity of the answer. For what Cali Bassa is saying the audience knows to be untrue, and hence understands "Desires more pure" to mean Cali Bassa's desire for his own safety and his own throne in Asia, and not a wish to lead a virtuous life by following the instructions of religion in contrast to the urgings of the sensual life. The irony is emphasized by the true appropriateness of the lines. Cali Bassa should, as his life nears its end, be deeply concerned with his fate in the next world. He should have "other loves" than those which motivate his treason. But, unlike Demetrius and Leontius, Cali Bassa fails to distinguish between the permissible methods in the political sphere and the essential measures in the religious.

Cali Bassa's failure in this respect is one of will, not of knowledge. Even though he is a pagan, he is still a

man, and in the eighteenth century all men were thought alike in one respect--their reason. By reason they could discover certain universal truths. In a future chapter, I will point out that Johnson did not believe in the transcendent power of reason as did the followers of certain intellectual movements of his age. He did, however, make it a tremendously important faculty, since it led men to religion and, under religion's tutelage, helped them in their journey through life. In a soliloquy, Cali Bassa expresses a universal truth which his reason has discovered and which should, if acted upon by his will, deflect him from his traitorous and disastrous path.

How Heav'n in Scorn of human Arrogance,
Commits to trivial Chance the Fate of Nations!
While with incessant Thought laborious Man
Extends his mighty Schemes of Wealth and Pow'r,
And tow'rs and triumphs in ideal Greatness;
Some accidental Gust of Opposition
Blasts all the Beauties of his new Creation,
Oerturns the Fabrick of presumptuous Reason,
And whelms the swelling Architect beneath it.

(II,iii,1-9)

This passage shows that Cali Bassa is aware of the transitory nature of all human endeavours, especially those plans for achieving enduring happiness on earth. Had he utilized this knowledge in his actions toward Mahomet, instead of ignoring it in his drive for safety and power, he would not have come to what Johnson considered the inevitable destruction of such unlawful actions. His failure to do so is also an illustration of the distrust of reason and the necessity for law which are

important elements in Johnson's basic political beliefs.¹ Reason, even in a pagan, can advise man what is the proper course of action, but it cannot insure that he will follow it.

Mahomet's answer, his refusal of Cali Bassa's request, illustrates a corresponding confusion of values, although the explanation of the confusion involves different motives on the part of the two men. Mahomet tells Cali Bassa that now is not the time to think of peace and retirement.

What! think of Peace while haughty Scanderbeg
Elate with Conquest, in his native Mountains,
Prowls o'er the wealthy Spoils of bleeding Turkey?
(I,v,13-15)

When Cali Bassa tries to object by pointing out that "This pilgrimage our Lawgiver ordain'd--" (I,v,23) Mahomet vehemently answers:

For those who could not please by nobler Service.--
Our warlike Prophet loves an active Faith,
The holy Flame of enterprizing Virtue,
Mocks the dull Vows of Solitude and Penance,
And scorns the lazy Hermit's cheap Devotion;
Shine thou distinguished by superior Merit,
With wonted Zeal pursue the Task of War,
Till every Nation reverence the Koran,
And ev'ry Suppliant lift his Eyes to Mecca.
(I,v,24-32)

Mahomet's answer is interesting not only for the light it casts upon his own character, but as an expression of an attitude of religious imperialism, so to speak, which Johnson detested throughout his life. A few years prior to his completion of the script of Irene, Johnson composed his first

¹These points will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.

published work, an abridgment and translation of Father Jerome Lobo's Voyage to Abyssinia, for which he also provided a "Preface." Mahomet's interpretation of his religion in terms of an "active Faith" and his desire to propagate it by the sword finds a parallel in the Portuguese Jesuits' attempt to do the same thing in Abyssinia. Johnson condemns this attempt in his "Preface" and praises Lobo

for having dared so freely, in the midst of France, to declare his disapprobation of the patriarch Oviedo's sanguinary zeal, who was continually importuning the Portuguese to beat up their drums for missionaries who might preach the gospel with swords in their hands, and propagate, by desolation and slaughter, the true worship of the God of peace.¹

Johnson's intense dislike for colonization will be taken up later, but his attitude towards it is incorporated in Cali Bassa's next speech and is interesting as an example of a belief that Johnson arrived at early and kept all his life. He thought that colonization actually weakened and ended finally in misery and apathy in the mother country. Cali Bassa's answer to Mahomet's desire to colonize the world is motivated by his desire for Mahomet to grant his specious request to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, but despite the motivation, his answer embodies the same reasoning as Johnson's own when he discussed the effects of colonization on Spain.

This Regal Confidence, this pious Ardour,
Let Prudence moderate, though not suppress.
Is not each Realm that smiles with kinder Suns,
Or boasts a happier Soil, already Thine?

¹"Preface" to the translation of Father Lobo's Voyage to Abyssinia, V, 256.

Extended Empire, like expanded Gold,
Exchanges solid Strength for feeble Splendor.
(I,v,33-38)

The simile of beaten gold embodies the same idea of a wide area encompassed but encompassed without depth or strength as the phrase "Bulk without Strength" that Johnson was later to use in the Debates to describe the debilitating power of colonization. Colonies give only the appearance of power, whereas in reality they actually weaken a country. But Cali Bassa's point here is disregarded by the Mahomet, who has made of glory and honor the only means to happiness.

Preach thy dull Politics to vulgar Kings,
Thou know'st not yet thy Master's future Greatness,
His vast Designs, his Plans of boundless Power.
When ev'ry Storm in my Domain shall roar,
When ev'ry Wave shall beat a Turkish Shore,
Then, Cali, shall the Toils of Battle cease,
Then dream of Prayer, and Pilgrimage, and Peace.
(I,v,39-46)

Mahomet's intention is to achieve through conquest the highest position among men and by achieving this greatness, attain perfect happiness. But through a misinterpretation of Cali Bassa's dying confession that "Irene's Chamber,/[was] The Place appointed for his Master's Death," (V,viii,29-30) Mahomet has Irene executed. The irony involved in this execution arises from the actual faithfulness of Irene and her attempts to betray Aspasia and Demetrius after the failure of the assassination, when they try to persuade her to leave with them. Irene had sent her messenger, Murza, to tell Mahomet of the escape attempt of Aspasia and Demetrius, while she tried through a faked indecision to hold them in

her chambers. Because Murza failed to reach Mahomet, however, Irene had no evidence of her faithfulness. At the end of the play, following Irene's execution and the revelation of her innocence, Mustapha, Mahomet's loyal general, turns to Murza and says:

What Plagues, what Tortures, are in store for
thee,
Thou sluggish Idler, dilatory Slave?
Behold the Model of consummate Beauty,
Torn from the mourning Earth by thy Neglect.

Mur. Such was the will of Heav'n--A Band of Greeks
That marked my Course, suspicious of my Purpose,
Rush'd out and seiz'd me, thoughtless and unarm'd
Breathless, amaz'd, and on the guarded Beach
Detained me till Demetrius set me free.

Mus. So sure the Fall of Greatness rais'd on Crimes,
So fix'd the Justice of all-conscious Heav'n,
When haughty Guilt exults with Impious Joy,
Mistakes shall blast, or Accident destroy;
Weak man with erring Rage may throw the Dart,
But Heav'n shall guide it to they guilty Heart.
(V,viii,1-15)

The chance that Mustapha attributes to heaven is the same chance that Cali Bassa described in his soliloquy quoted earlier. This intervention makes any kind of certainty impossible in the affairs of man, particularly in man's attempts to secure happiness. It was this same chance that Johnson thought vitiated many speculative schemes in the political world. In the specific situation here, the effects of chance are illustrated by the fate of Irene, who would have become Queen of Turkey had it not been for that baleful force.

The death of Irene destroys the ambitions of Mahomet to conquer the world, and in effect destroys his scheme to

achieve enduring happiness through his conquests.

Robb'd of the Maid, with whom I wish'd to triumph,
 No more I burn for Fame or for Dominion;
 Success and Conquest now are empty Sounds,
 Remorse and Anguish seize on all my Breast;
 Those Groves, whose Shades embower'd dear Irene,
 Heard her last Cries, and fann'd her dying Beauties,
 Shall hide me from the tasteless World for ever.
 (V, XII, 42-48)

Since Mahomet has placed all his hopes for enduring happiness upon temporal means, the destruction of these means is in reality the destruction of Mahomet.

The actions of Aspasia and Demetrius are, conversely, paradigms of proper behaviour, based on a true insight into the nature of the two kinds of happiness involved. In a soliloquy, Aspasia struggles with herself to maintain the proper distinction between the two, in order not to succumb, as Irene has, to a complete involvement with the basically insignificant political concerns of temporal happiness. She is waiting for news of the assassination attempt on the Sultan's life, which will be the start of a revolution to free Greece from Turkish dominion.

In these dark Moments of suspended Fate,
 While yet the future fortune of my Country
 Lies in the Womb of Providence conceal'd,
 And anxious Angels wait the mighty Birth;
 Grant thy sacred Influence, pow'rful Virtue!
 Attention rise, survey the fair Creation,
 Till conscious of the incircling Deity,
 Beyond the Mists of Care thy Pinion tow'rs.
 This calm, these joys, dear Innocence! are thine,
 Joys ill exchang'd for Gold, and Pride, and Empire.
 (V, i, 1-10)

This temptation, if it can be called that, to forget the essential distinction between means and ends, the important

but still relative positions of political action to religious credence, is probably an attempt on Johnson's part to infuse into Aspasia some touch of human weakness which will make her character less stiff. Earlier in the play in a scene between Aspasia and Demetrius, the merits of each kind of activity and their final result have really already been presented.

Dem. Should Heav'n yet unappeas'd refuse its Aid,
Disperse our Hopes, and frustrate our Designs,
Yet shall the Conscience of the great Attempt
Diffuse a Brightness on our Future Days;
Nor will his country's Groans reproach Demetrius.
But how can'st thou support the Woes of Exile?
Can'st thou forget hereditary Splendours,
To live obscure upon a foreign Coast,
Content with Science, Innocence and Love?

Asp. Nor Wealth, nor Titles, make Aspasia's Bliss.
O'erwhelmed and lost amidst the publick Ruins
Unmov'd I saw the litt'ring Trifles perish,
And thought the pretty Dross beneath a Sigh.
Chearful I follow to the rural Cell,
Love be my Wealth, and my Distinction Virtue.
(IV,i,97-111)

A few years more experience in London, living among and observing the great variety of mankind exhibited there, would make Johnson as suspicious of the ability of the "rural Cell" to provide happiness, as he is of the sacrifice of religious belief and its promise of eternal happiness for temporal power and its hope of achieving earthly happiness. But this later skepticism is simply a widening and extending of the suspicion manifested here to encompass all earthly attempts at enduring happiness, and is not an abandonment of the fundamental conviction about the relative amount of care one

should devote to government and to religion.

Aspasia actually fears that Demetrius's cooperation with Cali Bassa and Abdalla violates the religious order to which the political order of the state should accomodate itself.

Asp. Think how the Sov'reign Arbiter of Kingdoms
 Detests thy false Associates black Designs,
 And frowns on Perjury, Revenge and Murder.
 Embark'd with Treason on the Seas of Fate,
 When Heav'n shall bid the swelling Billows rage,
 And point vindictive Lightnings at Rebellion,
 Will not the Patriot share the Traytor's Danger?
 O could thy Hand unaided free thy Country,
 Nor mingled Guilt pollute the Sacred Cause.

(IV,i,56-64)

Johnson thought the greatest of political blessings to be freedom and security of property,¹ and as such, in accord with Christian teachings. Aspasia calls Demetrius's attempts to free "Greece" a "Sacred Cause," which indicates not only the harmony of the political and religious order here, but also the necessity of attaining that freedom through lawful or justifiable means. Cali Bassa is, unlike Demetrius, not ridding his country of a foreign, hence unlawful, ruler, but is rebelling against the instituted forms of his own lawful government, a crucial distinction. Mahomet's speech upon discovering Cali Bassa's plot makes this point explicitly.

Has Treason's dire Infection reach'd my Palace?
 Can Cali dare the Stroke of heav'nly Justice,

¹I will give this important principle in Johnson's political theory fuller treatment in Chapter Six.

In the dark Precincts of the gaping Grave,
 And load with Perjuries his parting Soul?
 Was it for this, that sick'ning in Epirus,
 My Father call'd me to his Couch of Death,
 Join'd Cali's Hand to mine, and falt'ring cry'd,
 Restrain the Fervour of impetuous Youth
 With venerable Cali's faithful Counsels?
 Are these the Counsels? This the Faith of Cali?
 Were all our Favours lavish'd on a Villain?
 Confest?--

.....

All! all conspire
 To banish doubt, and brand him for a Villain.
 (II,vi,1-13,2021)

Demetrius answers Aspasia in this manner:

Permitted oft, though not inspir'd by Heav'n,
 Successful Treasons punish impious Kings.
 (IV,i,65-66)

The onus of rebellion against constituted authority is not to be imputed to Heaven, especially when it is successful, as Aspasia and Demetrius hope the one they are involved in will be, and as many had been in the past. Johnson's statement about the Glorious Revolution, "What we did at the Revolution was necessary: but it broke our constitution,"¹ is an indication of the same unwillingness to vindicate rebellion, regardless of its beneficial consequences. If Heaven used rebellion, it would be guilty of making the ends justify the means, a proposition Johnson would not allow.

Thus after Demetrius has justified his cooperation with "false Associates" in the attempted assassination on the grounds that it does not conflict with proper religious conduct, he tells Aspasia that they have done all they can;

¹Life of Johnson, IV, 170-71.

the rest is up to Providence.

Submissive and prepar'd for each Event,
Now let us wait the last Award of Heaven,
Secure of Happiness from Flight or Conquest.
(IV,i,112-114)

In this manner, Aspasia and Demetrius both recognize the vital distinction between the value of happiness as it is attainable in the temporal sphere through political action and in eternal life through virtuous conduct.

Aspasia and Demetrius escape from Constantinople in the ship prepared for them, their attempts to free their country having failed. But even in failure, Aspasia and Demetrius are successful, for they acted--unlike Mahomet, Cali Bassa and Irene--in accord with the dictates of their religious faith and consequently cannot really fail. For failure or success is, when placed in the balance with eternal happiness gained by a virtuous life, truly insignificant. After they have made their escape, Irene expresses this belief in a soliloquy, bitter as it is for her to recognize this truth, using imagery of the spiritual world which emphasizes the point.

Go, happy Bark,
Thy sacred Freight [Aspasia and Demetrius] shall
still the raging Main.
To guide thy Passage shall th' aerial Spirits
Fill all the starry Lamps with double Blaze;
Th' applauding Sky shall pour forth all its Beams
To grace the Triumph of victorious Virtue;
(V,vi.5-10)

Thus Aspasia and Demetrius, Cali Bassa and Mahomet, and Irene provide a concrete embodiment of a fundamental principle

in Johnson's political thought. Aspasia and Demetrius illustrate the proper moral conduct for the individual in an extremely difficult political situation. Cali Bassa and Mahomet, on the other hand, represent complete failure to distinguish between the importance of the political life and the religious one. Irene, set between the two pairs, surrenders to the temptations of power, the greatest pleasure man can enjoy according to Johnson, and in so doing commits the same fatal error as Cali Bassa and Mahomet. If in life outside a stiff and mechanical tragedy, chance and Heaven might not step in so happily to punish the wicked and save the virtuous, the principle was not necessarily invalidated. In the actual political life of the individual, the failure to recognize an ethical order might not be so drastic, but a corresponding emphasis upon a materialistic order alone to achieve happiness was still bound to fail, at least as far as Johnson was concerned. We shall find out only after death whether perfect happiness exists, but we need not wait that long to see that it never exists before that time. The lives of the major characters in the play exemplify this truth in a dramatic form and present it with special clarity and concreteness.

iii

Johnson embodies a second important principle of the first division of the theory in the opening of Irene. In this first scene Demetrius and Leontius are walking about

fallen "Greece," disguised in Turkish robes. It is a few days after the victory of the invaders, and both men lament the destruction they have seen going on as the Turks sack the city. The desire to kill and destroy being satiated, the Turks now force the citizens of the city to produce their secret hoards of gold.

Leo. The Lust of Gold succeeds the Rage of Conquest,
The Lust of Gold, unfeeling and remorseless!
The last Corruption of degenerate Man!
Urg'd by th' imperious Soldier's fierce Command,
The Groaning Greeks break up their golden Caverns
Pregnant with Stores, that India's Mines might envy,
The accumulated Wealth of Toiling Ages.

(I,i,13-19)

Demetrius's response to Leontius is shame and disgust at the selfishness of the citizens of the city, since their refusal to give their "accumulated Wealth" to their leader to buy protection destroyed the city.

That Wealth, too sacred for their Country's Use!
That Wealth, too pleasing to be lost for Freedom!
That Wealth, which granted to their weeping Prince,
Had rang'd embattled Nations at our Gates:
But thus reserv'd to lure the Wolves of Turkey,
Adds Shame to Grief, and Infamy to Ruin.
Lamenting Av'rice now too late discovers
Her own neglected, in the publick Safety.

(I,i,20-27)

Leontius answers this charge by citing the sense of false security that had been built up in the people by the often-repeated unsuccessful attempts to conquer the city. There was, besides, "not one Prodigy foretold our Fate," (I,i,35) not one warning from the "Power" that rules the world.

Demetrius becomes indignant at this defense of the people and describes the actual conditions of the city prior

to its fall.

Dem. A thousand horrid Prodigies foretold it.
A feeble Government, eluded Laws,
A factious Populace, luxurious Nobles,
And all the Maladies of sinking States.
When publick Villainy, too strong for Justice,
Shows his bold Front, the Harbinger of Ruin,
Can brave Leontius call for airy Wonders,
Which cheats interpret, and which Fools regard?
(I,i,36-43)

Because of this decay in the basic structure, the community has fallen prey to destruction. The "tow'ring Domes,/ Sacred to prayer," (I,i,62-63) and the streets where "Commerce lavish'd unexhausted Plenty,/ and Jollity maintain'd eternal Revels," (I,i,64-65) are now radically changed.

Dem. Now ghastly Desolation
In triumph sets upon our Shatter'd Spires,
Now Superstition, Ignorance and Error,
Usurp our Temples, and profane our Altars.

Leo. From ev'ry Palace burst a mingled Clamour,
The dreadful Dissonance of barb'rous Triumph,
Shrieks of Affright, and Wailings of Distress.
(I,i,66-72)

The city described here encompasses one of the most fundamental principles in the whole of Johnson's thought about the civil state. The devastation and ruin of the city, its possession by a mob of undisciplined and savage men who are intent upon taking whatever they can, represents for Johnson a state without government or law. The difference between this unregulated state and that of a political union governed by law and controlled by civil institutions was not depicted in Johnson's political theory by the spectacle of a savage army outside the walls, fighting to get and to lay waste the

community. The danger to civilized society arose from the same desire to possess and to destroy that drives a conqueror, it is true, but in his political theory Johnson made this desire the common property of mankind, a desire that must be controlled before any kind of peace or security could be achieved. Hence, people inside the city had within them potentially the same drives to destruction as those without; in either case, these drives must be controlled and guided into patterns of civilized competition for those "blessings" which the army outside the walls was using any destructive means available to win. If they were not controlled, if the army breached the walls, if the people who made up any community refused to obey their lawful governors and maintain their proper subordinate positions, then all order and stability must break under the impact of anarchy.

Demetrius makes it quite clear in the lines about the "Maladies of sinking States" that the essential conditions of civil society were disregarded by the Greeks and that the resulting destruction was an inevitable concomitant of that neglect. Johnson insisted on investing government with considerable power over its citizens. His reason for this investment was twofold: 1) if the established government did not possess this authority, it would pass to some other group, which would almost always be unlawful, such as a mob or tyrant; 2) this kind of power was necessary to protect and maintain the stability and orderly routine of the community.

Demetrius, in his description of the city, listed a "feeble Government, and eluded Laws" as prodigies that foretold its destruction and they proved accurate. For the power of ruling this society passed from "feeble Government" to the Turks, which passage vindicates Johnson's fear in reason number one above, and the failure to invest government with proper authority stopped it from protecting the people, which failure supports Johnson's belief in reason number two above.

The feebleness of government which was partially responsible for the fall of the city is shown in its inability to force the rich citizens to place their gold at the disposal of government for the safety of all. Had the "weeping Prince" possessed what Johnson considered his proper authority, the "eluded Laws" which allowed the people to hoard their gold would have been enforced. The forthcoming gold could have been used to pay mercenaries to fight the Turks and in this way, the community's security would have been preserved.¹ In this way, the opening scene of Irene helps explain Johnson's constant insistence on investing government with large powers of command and control and his conviction that a weak government was often worse than no government at all. For without power, government cannot

¹Johnson's usual attitude on the use of mercenaries was not at all as favorable as the one expressed through Demetrius here. He thought, for England at least, the use of mercenaries, "the desparate remedy of desparate distress," and that the best means of protecting one's country was through a home militia. See Observations on Treaties, VI, 142-47.

function properly, whereas a government with only nominal powers often provides a sense of false security by its seeming ability to protect the people, which proves illusory when subjected to the pressures and forces of savagery, rapine, and greed.

Two other characteristics of the government of the city provide specific examples of Johnson's abstract political principles. When Demetrius blames the ruin and destruction of the city on a "factionous Populace, [and] luxurious Nobles," (I,i,38) he is touching upon the political tenets concerning the responsibilities and rights of the governed and governors which are taken up in the next chapter.

Briefly stated, Johnson recognized that authority was bound to be abused excessively sometimes and that rebellion would eventually oppose that abuse. But even though rebellion was sometimes a necessity, it was a drastic and dangerous measure; it destroyed the greatest benefits civilized man had attained: a harmonious order in which he could pursue and enjoy his calling without debilitating fear or anxiety. Johnson also recognized that much political discord arose from the dislike certain subordinate members of society felt for their place in that society. There was always, then, a tendency in the people towards rebellion, a tendency, unless held in check by a strong government, which weakened government's effectiveness. The "factionous Populace" of Constantinople, refusing to respond to the commands

of government, enfeebled that government and was eventually responsible for its final rout in the battle against Turkish aggression. The refusal to maintain a reasonable obedience to government, which would have kept it strong, ended in disaster.

The circumscriptions of authority, the duty of the ruler as opposed to the subject, is also reflected in this part of the play. Authority was invested in a class of rulers to protect and to maintain the privileges and possessions of the people. It did not give anyone the right to use it arbitrarily, to enhance himself at the expense of others or to utilize authority for personal gain. Authority was legal and proper only in so far as it was used for the good of the whole; when it deviated from that purpose, it lost the sanction of justice. The "luxurious Nobles," effeminate in proportion as the "Populace" was factious, had not properly led the people, nor set them what Johnson would call a virtuous example. Instead of strengthening the state by working diligently for its defense, they had enjoyed the privileges and wealth that high position afforded, rendering themselves equally responsible with the people for the fall of Constantinople.

Two other incidents of the play touch upon political beliefs of Johnson not yet discussed. The first concerns the refusal of the people to give up their gold to their "weeping Prince." This act is singled out as the immediate

cause for the fall of the city. While Johnson believed that only a moral regeneration of the individuals who made up the state could guarantee enduring security, he knew that such regeneration of imperfect man was impossible; hence, the force of law was going to be necessary to make many people contribute a share of their private good for the protection and sustenance of the whole. But as Demetrius says,

Lamenting Av'rice now too late discovers
Her own neglected, in the publick Safety.
(I, i, 26-27)

What Avarice has discovered is the second belief mentioned above. Stated as concisely as possible, the political belief touched upon is this: the happiness of the people arises from the combined efforts of the governed and governors. Only when the ruled recognized the need for restricting their private liberty for the greater liberty and freedom of the whole, and only when the rulers themselves recognize the need for abiding by the law they administer and for setting examples of fidelity and justice to those whom they rule, then and only then will society be capable of protecting itself and securing its blessings.¹

iv

One of the commonest of recurring topics of Johnson's

¹Of all of Johnson's political beliefs, this one is perhaps the most fundamental. It is both the premise from which Johnson develops his political theory and it is the reward which an adherence to theory will provide. Its significance is treated at greater length in Chapter Six.

political theory is subordination. Johnson thought this principle, operating through an accepted hierarchy of classes, necessary to the maintenance of an even tenor in society: it kept the various members of political body from attacking one another for the "blessings" that only a few could possess. Those who held the higher positions in this kind of organized state subsisted upon the work of the lower ranks, but Johnson justified their leisure by the "intellectual improvement" that resulted from freeing certain men from laborious tasks and allowing them to study various intellectual disciplines. Finally, subordination was a "natural" condition in the sense that there were obvious inequalities between the talents and abilities of men, and unless one, or one group, led the others, there would be only aimless movement and meaningless change.

Many men, however, dislike subordinate positions in civil society, since they do not enjoy knowing that some one has power over their lives and property.¹ The desire to possess greater wealth, greater honor, greater position than one has is naturally implanted in man, Johnson thought, and must be constantly controlled through reason and religion, reinforced by the power of law. Unless a person recognizes the necessity for accepting a subordinate role in life and for fulfilling the less pleasant, less honorable, and less lucrative duties of that position, he is doing harm to the

¹Johnson's belief stated in this and the following paragraph are discusses at greater length in Chapter Four.

good of the whole community. Cooperation of the ruled is a basic condition for securing peace and stability. Hence, if a society is to be successful as a political union, that is, gain the harmony and stability that are the goals of political unions, the subordinate members of that society must cooperate.

Unfortunately, many men fail to place the advantages of the whole above their own immoderate desires and are willing to jeopardize the total good by rebelling against their assigned positions. Since government is an institution composed of a few men wielding power over a number many times larger than themselves, it follows that that power, and the government it supports, can exist and do its work only so long as those who are ruled accept the exercise of it. Once the laws and orders of government have been disregarded without penalty, that government is a government in name only and is a failure. From this failure arises the disorder and confusion of the non-political state and the destruction of any hope of happiness or enjoyment of the individual. Since the passions of men are so much stronger than their reason, the temptations to upset the subordinate structure of society are often going to be too strong to be resisted. Hence, unless government is invested with large powers to control men, these rebellions can end only in the destruction of all political order and government.

Johnson gives a concrete expression to this integrated system of political doctrines through the actions of two sets of related characters: Demetrius and Leontius; and Cali Bassa and Abdalla. Involved in each relationship is the subordination of one man to another, with the correct attitude towards subordination represented in the first pair listed above and the hazards of rebellion against it presented in the second. By creating parallel situations, with significant variations in attitudes on the part of the figures in the situations, Johnson makes his theory of subordination more explicit and distinct, while he simultaneously reveals its origin in his observations of the necessary steps in getting things done.

In the first scene of Act One, Leontius's relationship to Demetrius is implied in a short speech which occurs when Leontius tries to calm Demetrius's sorrow over the sack of the city and the loss of Aspasia.

Enough of unavailing Tears, Demetrius,
 I came obedient to thy Friendly Summons,
 And hop'd to share thy Counsels, not thy Sorrows.
 (I,i,104-106)

Leontius's obedience and his hope to share in the counsels indicate that he looks to Demetrius for guidance. He is not subservient, subservience not being a quality Johnson associated with subordination nor practiced himself to any man, but is acting as one who recognizes both his own worth and the necessity for that worth to be directed by a superior.

A statement Boswell records in The Life of Johnson exemplifies Johnson's attitude toward subordination. "Sir says Johnson, I would no more deprive a nobleman of his respect, than of his money. I consider myself as acting a part in the great system of society, and I do to others as I should expect he would behave to me, were I a nobleman and he Sam. Johnson."¹ A system of subordination, for Johnson, society's only practical means to secure order among men, demands that some ranks be given more prestige, wealth, and honor than others. Those not fortunate enough to have been born into a high position owe it to the general good to respect those who were, for the sake of the general good achieved through the system. This respect is really a tribute to the system and not to a single individual, just as today in politics, diplomacy, the military or a number of other professions, deference is paid to those in high position and not to the policy or personality of the person occupying that position.

Johnson told Boswell the following story to illustrate this point:

Sir, there is one Mrs. Macaulay in this town, a great republican. One day when I was at her house, I put on a very grave countenance, and said to her, "Madam, I am now become a convert to your way of thinking. I am convinced that all mankind are upon an equal footing; and to give you an unquestionable proof, Madam, that I am in earnest, here is a very sensible, civil, well-behaved fellow-citizen, your footman; I desire that he may be allowed to sit down and dine with us." I thus, Sir,

¹Life of Johnson, I, 447.

shewed her the absurdity of the levelling doctrine. She has never liked me since. Sir, your levellers wish to level down as far as themselves; but they cannot bear levelling up to themselves. They would all have some people under them; why not then have some people above them?¹

Deference to position did not endanger in any way the self-respect or independence of the individual. On the contrary, it maintained the system that protected the liberty of the individual, something the "levellers" failed to take into consideration.

Leontius's trust in Demetrius's guidance is further illustrated when Cali Bassa questions Demetrius about Leontius's loyalty and fidelity.

Cal. But can thy [Demetrius] Friend [Leontius] sustain
glorious Cause,
The Cause of Liberty, the Cause of Nations?
(I,ii,8-9)

Demetrius defends Leontius as a courageous and resourceful fighter, but Leontius regards Cali Bassa's questions as insults.

Leo. I scorn a Trust unwillingly repos'd;
Demetrius will not lead me to Dishonour;
Consult in private, call me when your Scheme
Is ripe for Action, and demands the Sword.
(I,ii,34-37)

Leontius is a follower of Demetrius, then, and he willingly agrees to serve Demetrius in Cali Bassa's assassination scheme. This acceptance on more or less blind faith is, of course, not characteristic of Johnson or of the kind of man he admired. Except for religion, Johnson believed firmly in

¹Life of Johnson, I, 447.

investigating an issue thoroughly before committing himself to it. However, when the situation was critical, e.g., when the peace of society was threatened by war or by mob action, then Johnson would commit himself wholeheartedly to governmental action to maintain order. When the crisis had passed, he would return to his more usual stance. Johnson clarified his position on this matter in a discussion of the correct attitude for a citizen to take in matters of governmental policy. First,

The time is now come, in which every Englishman expects to be informed of the national affairs, and in which he has a right to have that expectation gratified.¹

Following this line of reasoning, one can say that Leontius has a right to know what the plan proposed by Cali Bassa involves. Second,

For whatever may be urged by ministers, or those whom vanity or interest make the followers of ministers, concerning the necessity of confidence in our governours, and the presumption of prying, with profane eyes, into the recesses of policy, it is evident, that this reverence can be claimed only by counsels yet unexecuted, and projects suspended in deliberation.²

The "counsels yet unexecuted" are plans for the assassination. The urgency of the need for killing Mahomet and freeing Greece, and the dangerous position Demetrius and Leontius find themselves in provide the necessary conditions for claiming that "reverence" which accepts a policy or plan without long and deliberate investigation. But once accepted

¹Observations on the State of Affairs in 1756, VI, 113.

²Ibid.

and once executed, the individual has every right--in this case if he survives--to demand a full and explicit presentation of the factors which led to the policy and the effects of its execution.

But when a design has ended in miscarriage or success, when every eye, and every ear, is witness to general discontent, or general satisfaction, it is then a proper time to disentangle confusion, and illustrate obscurity; to show by what causes every event was produced, and in what effects it is likely to terminate; to lay down, with distinct particularity, what rumor always huddles in general exclamations, or perplexes by undigested narratives; to show whence happiness or calamity is derived, and whence it may be expected; and honestly to lay before the people, what inquiry can gather of the past, and conjecture can estimate of the future.¹

Johnson was never servile, but he was aware that prompt obedience was sometimes necessary during certain periods of stress.

It is in the fourth act, the night of the assassination attempt, that the subordinate relationship of Leontius to Demetrius is suddenly strained by the pressure of Leontius's desire to be actively involved in the assassination. Leontius announces that the ship, manned by one hundred loyal Greeks, awaits on the shore to take the conspirators to the coast of Asia after they have killed the Sultan.

Leo. Our Bark unseen has reach'd th' appointed Bay,
And where yon Trees wave o'er the foaming Surge
Reclines against the Shore: our Grecian Troop
Extends its Lines along the Sandy Beach;
Elate with Hope, and panting for a Foe.

(IV,iii,1-5)

Cali answers:

¹Ibid., pp. 113-14.

'Tis well--A single Blow compleats our Wishes:
Return with speed, Leontius, to your Charge;
The Greeks disorder'd by their Leader's Absence,
May droop'd dismay'd, or kindle into Madness.

(IV,iii,8-11)

Leontius immediately objects to his assignment, since it seems to imply that Cali Bassa still does not believe him loyal or brave.

Leo. Suspected still?--What Villain's pois'nous Tongue
Dares join Leontius' Name with Fear or Falshood?

(IV,iii,12-13)

Cali Bassa answers that he cannot distrust Leontius, since the lives of all of them, as well as "Greece," are bound up in the venture, so that if one fail they all fail.

Cal. Hast thou not search'd my Soul's profoundest Thoughts?
Is not the Fate of Greece and Cali thine?

(IV,iii,18-19)

Leontius refuses to accept this answer and demands to know why he must wait on the beach, while Demetrius leads the assassination attempt. This supposedly inferior position, Leontius feels, will ruin his reputation as a warrior and man, and make him a coward in the eyes of succeeding generations. Leontius is being driven here by his desire for glory and honor, the same passions that are rooted in all men and are responsible for the difficulties in maintaining subordination within society.

Leo. Why has thy [Cali Bassa] Choice pointed out Leontius,
Unfit to share this Night's illustrious Toils?
To wait remote from Action, and from Honour,
An idle List'ner to the distant Cries
Of slaughter'd Infidels, and Clash of Swords!
Tell me the Cause, that while thy Name, Demetrius,
Shall soar triumphant on the Wings of Glory,

Despis'd and curs'd, Leontius must descend
 Through hissing Ages, a proverbial Coward,
 The Tale of Women, and the Scorn of Fools?
 (IV,iii,20-29)

Leontius has not forgotten the cause in which he enlisted--the freedom of Greece--but the duties assigned him in pursuit of that cause are very distasteful. In like manner, a member of society may wish his country well and wish to work actively towards that goal, but by the dissension he provokes in trying to achieve a higher, more powerful, and more prestigious position, he may do serious harm to his own cause.

Demetrius tells Leontius that the final achievement is much more important than any individual's contribution toward it.

Dem. Can brave Leontius be the Slave of Glory?
 Glory, the casual Gift of thoughtless Clouds!
 Glory, the Bribe of avaricious Virtue!
 Be but my Country free, be thine the Praise;
 I ask no witness, but attesting Conscience,
 No Records, but the Records of the Sky.
 (IV,iii,30-35)

The freedom of Greece in the play, the peace and security of a well-ordered society in the political realm, are the results of men working together--leaders and followers. In both cases, the final results are the important thing; the various roles of the players, in relation to this great good, are not of special importance. But in both cases, subordination is essential to success.

Leontius's reply to Demetrius is the logical reply of a subordinate to a superior who is preaching the sacrifice of personal good for the good of the whole.

Leo. Wilt thou [Demetrius] then head the troop upon the
shore,
While I destroy th' Oppressor of Mankind?
(IV,i,36-37)

Demetrius's answer involves what Johnson considered a fundamental truth about mankind accessible to anyone who would simply look around him: all men are not equal. Of course, this inequality has to be qualified, since it refers to the talent, intelligence, ability, and so forth, and not to the intrinsic worth of the individual considered as a creation of the "Supreme Being." Although all men are equal sub specie aeternitatis, they are not so on earth, and by choosing the best men to lead and direct the others, mankind can avoid much misery and make some improvement in intellectual, cultural, and moral spheres. Those who have, in society, cultivated through leisure the arts and sciences constitute the best, i.e., they are the most experienced in these matters and are consequently to be most trusted in them.

It is this argument that Demetrius presents to
Leontius.

What can'st thou boast superiour to Demetrius?
Ask to whose Sword the Greeks will trust their Cause,
My Name shall echo through the shouting Field;
Demand whose Force yon Turkish Heroes dread,
The shudd'ring Camp shall murmur out Demetrius.
(IV,iii,38-42)

Demetrius is asking Leontius to suppress his natural desires for fame and glory by allowing one who is better equipped for the task to attempt it. Although he sacrifices some of his personal hopes, Leontius will still share in the achievement--the freedom of Greece. In like manner, each citizen

shares in the general good of society, when he sacrifices some of his personal hopes and liberty for the sake of that good.

Cali Bassa interrupts at this moment with what is actually a warning of the dangers to the whole endeavour by any insubordination.

Cal. Must Greece, still wretched by her Children's Folly,
For ever mourn their Avarice or Factions?
(IV,iii,43-44)

Greed for honor and contempt for subordination are the two most dangerous enemies to both society--a group of people joined together to achieve a common freedom, liberty, and order--and the conspirators--a group of men joined for the same purpose. The analogy here illustrates how the politics and literature of Johnson can illuminate each other and define with some precision a number of his fundamental ideas.

Leontius, recognizing the cogency of the arguments, capitulates for the benefit and purpose of the entire group,

My Pride shall ne'er protect my Country's Woes;
Succeed, my Friend, unenvied by Leontius.
(IV,iii,47-48)

Although this is an ideal representation of Johnson's concept of subordination and its value, its application in society need not attempt such perfection. It need only receive the general admission and acceptance of the persons who make up the community for it to secure the "blessings" of civil society.

In contrast to this proper recognition by Leontius of subordination's natural and fruitful place in the organization and direction of man's energies, the refusal of Abdalla to abide by it stands out sharply. The character of Abdalla shares several qualities with Leontius's. Both are passionate men who have difficulty in controlling those passions. Demetrius tells Leontius in the first scene of the first act that he was first contracted by Cali Bassa through the "fiery Chief Abdalla" whose "quick Impatience seiz'd my doubtful Hand" (I, i, 125-126) one night and led the way to the first meeting with Cali Bassa. Later when Abdalla tells Cali Bassa that he has fallen deeply in love with Aspasia, Cali Bassa asks why he is so intense and restless.

Abd.

Because I love:

Because my slighted Passion burns in vain!
 Why roars the Lioness distress'd by Hunger?
 Why foam the swelling Waves when Tempests rise?
 Why shakes the Ground, when subterraneous Fires
 Fierce through the bursting Caverns rend their Way?
 (III, i, 48-53)

This outburst is similar in nature, if not in kind, to Leontius's when he is commanded to return to the boat at the beginning of the assassination attempt. Both men have a highly developed sense of honor and place which leads them to explosive outbursts if they think themselves offended. Abdalla is thus established in the first act as a man of strong passion and a lieutenant of Cali Bassa, in the last quotation as one who has an intense conviction of his own worth, each

of which qualities parallels Leontius in temperament and relationship with Demetrius.

The two temptations of Leontius and Abdalla to break the chain of subordination are both presented as examples of passion overcoming reason. In Leontius's case, however, the passion which drives him to seek glory and fame and avoid the name of coward and fool is checked by his reason, strengthened as it is by the arguments of Demetrius. In Abdalla's case the passion which battles with his reason is love, and Aspasia is the temptation which brings on the conflict.

At the beginning of Act Three, Cali Bassa and Abdalla meet. Cali upbraids Abdalla for not concentrating upon the dangerous business of the assassination. Abdalla asks Cali,

Must then Ambition's Votaries infringe
The Laws of Kindness, break the Bonds of Nature?
And quit the Names of Brother, Friend and Father?
(III,i,15-17)

Cali Bassa's answer shows quite clearly that he, like Abdalla, has allowed his reason to succumb to the dictates of Passion.

This sov'reign Passion, scornful of Restraint,
Ev'n from the Birth affects supreme Command,
Swells in the Breast, and with resistless Force,
O'erbears each gentler Motion of the Mind.
(III,i,18-21)

It is appropriate for Cali Bassa to be overcome by "Ambition," since, as Mahomet remarked earlier, sixty winter camps have reduced the dangers from more earthly passion to his reason. Abdalla, however, is a fiery young officer and one of reason's greatest enemies at his age is love.

Abd. Yet can Ambition in Abdalla's Breast

Claim but the second Place: there mighty Love
 Has fix'd his Hopes, Inquietudes, and Fears,
 His glowing Wishes, and his jealous Pangs.
 (III,i,25-29)

Cali Bassa is justifiably afraid that Abdalla's passion might make him recalcitrant and threaten the success of the whole scheme. He tries to convince Abdalla that Love, "indeed the Privilege of Youth," (III,i,29) may be very important, but on this particular day his mind must be clear and his hand steady. "But let us reason--" he starts out, but is interrupted violently by Abdalla.

Hast thou grown old amidst the Croud of Courts,
 And turn'd th' instructive Page of Human Life,
 To cant, at last, of Reason to a Lover?
 Such ill-tim'd Gravity, such serious Folly,
 Might well befit the solitary Student,
 Th' unpractis'd Dervise, or sequester'd Faquir.
 Know'st thou not yet, when Love invades the Soul,
 That all her Faculties receive his Chains?
 That Reason gives her Scepter to his Hand,
 Or only struggles to be more enslav'd?
 ASPASIA! who can look upon thy Beauties?
 Who hear thee speak, and not abandon Reason?
 Reason! the hoary Dotard's dull Directress,
 That loses all because she hazards nothing:
 Reason! the tim'rous Pilot, that to shun
 The Rocks of Life, for ever flies the Port.¹
 (III,i,32-47)

¹Johnson's comments in his Preface To Shakespeare on the use of love in drama is perhaps pertinent here. In comparing Shakespeare's use of a large number of "passions" as motivating forces in characters to other dramatists, he says:

Upon every other stage the universal agent is love, by whose power all good and evil is distributed, and every action quickened or retarded. To bring a lover, a lady, and a rival into the fable; to intangle them in contradictory obligations, perplex them with oppositions of interest and harass them with violence of desires inconsistent with each other; to make them meet in rapture, and part in agony; . . . is the business of a modern dramatist. For this, probability is violated, life is misrepresented,

Cali Bassa sees that if Demetrius learns of Abdalla's love for Aspasia the whole plot must fail. His problem is to convince Abdalla that he must sacrifice his personal desire, as Leontius has had to do, for the sake of the general good: the success of the assassination. In the presence of Abdalla, almost immediately after he has announced his love for Aspasia, Cali Bassa is forced to grant to Demetrius the opportunity to visit Aspasia. As Demetrius leaves to await Cali Bassa's call, Abdalla breaks out angrily:

And this is my reward--to burn, to languish,
 To rave unheeded, while the happy Greek,
 The Refuse of our Swords, the Dross of Conquest,
 Throws his fond Arms about Aspasia's Neck,
 Dwells on her Lips, and sighs upon her Breast;
 Is't not enough, he lives by our Indulgence,
 But he must live to make his Masters wretched?
 (III, iv, 1-7)

and language is depraved. But love is only one of many passions; and, as it has no great influence upon the sum of life; it has little operation in the dramas of a poet, who caught his ideas from the living world, and exhibited only what he saw before him. (V, 107)

This deprecation of love as a motive force perhaps explains why Johnson changed Irene from a story of a struggle between love and duty on Mahomet's part, with Irene as a helpless pawn, to one of a "struggle between virtue and weakness." Johnson wanted to broaden the drama, give it more of the "living world," by utilizing the passions for honor, glory, liberty, and religion as motivating forces. He was probably trying to emulate Shakespeare who

knew that any other passion, as it was regular or exorbitant, was a cause of happiness or calamity. (V, 107)

This desire may be responsible for the dominant intellectual tone of the play and the absence of any depth or contour in the various characters. But for the purpose of illuminating intellectual beliefs in the political sphere, Johnson's failure as a dramatist is compensated for by the fruitfulness of the intellectual matter displayed.

When Cali Bassa asks what right Abdalla has to claim Aspasia, Abdalla answers:

The Claim of Pow'r,
The unquestion'd Claim of Conquerors, and Kings!
(III,iv,8-9)

Abdalla may be one of the conquerors of Greece but he is still a subordinate. He is here rebelling against the subordinate position he has been assigned and claiming the power that is rightfully Cali Bassa's as the leader of the conspirators. Cali tries to point this out when he says,

Yet in the Use of Pow'r remember Justice.
(III,iv,10)

The mention of Justice by the traitor Cali Bassa is turned ironically against him by Abdalla.

Can then th' Assassin lift his treach'rous Hand
Against his King, and cry, Remember Justice?
Justice demands the forfeit Life of Cali;
Justice demands that I reveal your Crimes;
Justice demands--But see th' approaching Sultan.
Oppose my Wishes, and--Remember Justice.
(III,iv,11-16)

Abdalla's accusation against Cali Bassa is a just one, but it can be levelled equally against himself. Both are violating an ethical standard by their political acts. In Johnson's political system, such actions must be censured, regardless of the validity or merit of their purpose. But in relation to the necessity of subordination for the proper functioning of society, the point here is that by his refusal to allow himself to be ruled, Abdalla threatens the whole enterprise. Abdalla is furious at what he considers an injustice done to him by a superior, a danger Johnson specifically noted

in discussing the discontent aroused by subordination. Johnson believed this kind of discontent would always exist, but must be overcome by those suffering it for the benefit of all. If it were not overcome by the individual, then it must be by the society within which that individual lives. In a soliloquy a short time later, Cali Bassa speaks specifically of this problem and its solution.

Far more I dread Abdalla's fiery Folly,
Than all the Wisdom of the grave Divan.
Reason with Reason fights in equal Terms,
The raging Madman's unconnected Schemes
We cannot obviate, for we cannot guess.
Deep in my Breast be treasur'd this Resolve,
When Cali mounts the Throne Abdalla dies,
Too fierce, too faithless for Neglect or Trust.
(III,vi,7-14)

This drastic measure is inevitable in a land where there is no law or government except a tyrant's will. In a legitimate political body, as conceived by Johnson, a man such as Abdalla would be restrained by law. Even if his execution were necessary there, it would still be for the peace of the whole community and not merely one man's whim.

Abdalla's untrustworthiness in the conspiracy grows out of his frustrated passion for Aspasia which overcomes his reason. Abdalla's resentment against his superior, Cali Bassa, is paralleled by his resentment against Mahomet and explains why Abdalla is involved in the conspiracy in the first place. When Mustapha and Mahomet receive the report of the spies set upon Cali Bassa, they are amazed to learn that he is attended by Abdalla. Carza, one of the spies, says that as

they watched Cali

With him Abdalla we beheld--

Mus. Abdalla!

Mah. He wears of late Resentment on his Brow,
Deny'd the Government of Servia's Province.
(IV,viii,8-11)

Abdalla thus resents both the authority of his lawful ruler, Mahomet, and his acknowledged one in the conspiracy, Cali Bassa. His character embodies concretely the specific manner in which men rebel against their proper subordinate position in the hierarchial structure of society or of a conspiracy because of resentment and frustration. These last two qualities arise in turn from reason's inability to control appetites and passions for the benefit of the whole. An individual must sacrifice some of his own liberty, his own hopes, his own desires, for the order and stability by which all may gain some satisfaction. By refusing to serve the general good, however, the individual often destroys both his own and the public well being.

As the time for the assassination becomes imminent, Abdalla begins breaking the bond of subordination that held him to Cali Bassa and to his assignment in the plot. He demands that Cali Bassa grant Aspasia to him, instead of to Demetrius as Cali Bassa has just done.

Is this the Reçompence reserv'd for me?
Dar'st thou thus dally with Abdalla's Passion?
Henceforward hope no more my slighted Friendship,
Wake from thy Dream of Pow'r to Death and Tortures,
And bid thy visionary Throne farewell.
(IV,iv,7-11)

Cali Bassa objects that Aspasia is not his to give, but that if Abdalla is able,

Obtain her and possess, thou know'st thy Rival.
(IV,iv,18)

Cali's intention is to let Abdalla take Aspasia and kill Demetrius after they have executed the Sultan. But Abdalla, declining to renounce his own private designs for the higher objectives involved, refuses to wait, to obey the orders of Cali Bassa.

Cal. O spare the gallant Greek, in him we lose
The Politician's Arts, and Heroe's Flame.

Abd. When next we meet before we storm the Palace,
The Bowl shall circle to confirm our League,
Then shall these Juices taint Demetrius's Draught,
[Shewing a Phial.
And stream destructive through his freezing Veins:
Thus shall he live to strike th' important Blow,
And perish ere he tastes the Joys of Conquest.
(IV,iv,26-33)

Abdalla's plan will theoretically allow Cali Bassa to use Demetrius in the plot and at the same time remove him from competition for Aspasia. Cali Bassa does not oppose Abdalla, but Abdalla's interference of the regular plan results in disastrous failure for the conspiracy. If Abdalla is not being specifically insubordinate here, his modification of the scheme disrupts his superior's plans and hence is dangerously close to it, since it is an employment of power that should properly be used by only Cali Bassa. The execution of Abdalla's plan signals the beginning of the end for the conspiracy. Demetrius explains to Aspasia what happened as they prepare to escape the vengeance of the Sultan.

Or meanly fraudulent, or madly gay,
 Abdalla, while we waited near the Palace,
 With ill-tim'd Mirth propos'd the Bowl of Love.
 Just as it reach'd my Lips, a sudden Cry
 Urg'd me to dash it to the Ground untouch'd
 And seize my Sword with disencumber'd Hand.

Asp. What Cry? The Stratagem? Did then Abdalla?--

Dem. At once a Thousand Passions fir'd his Cheek:
 Then all is past he cried--and darted from us;
 Nor at the call of Cali deign'd to turn.

Asp. Why did you stay? deserted and betrayed?
 What more could Force attempt, or Art contrive?

Dem. Amazement seiz'd us, and the hoary Bassa
 Stood torpid in Suspense; but soon Abdalla
 Return'd with Force that made Resistance vain,
 And bade his new Confederates seize the Traitors.
 Cali disarm'd was born away to Death;
 Myself escap'd, or favour'd or neglected.

(V,iii,24-41)

Abdalla, seeing his plan to poison Demetrius fail, completely rejects his part in the intrigue and betrays his former plotters. He is directly responsible for the failure of the conspiracy by his refusal to maintain and fulfill the duties of the station assigned him. Conversely, because Leontius placed the general good above his own personal enhancement, he has the boat ready on the beach to carry Demetrius and Aspasia to freedom in "Tuscany," so that at least the part of the plot which was devoted to the escape worked.

The contrast between the actions of Leontius and Abdalla illustrates Johnson's belief in the necessity of subordination for the successful maintenance of society. In the play society is analogous to the plotters; their failure, as a result of insubordination, is analogous to the anarchy and

destruction which bursts forth when the hierarchy of the society breaks down and insubordination undermines the order and peace that is the general aim as well as the good of all civil unions.

Irene has, then, three major affinities with the first division of the political theory. First, Johnson's crucial distinction between religion and politics emerges through the different fates of Demetrius and Aspasia on the one hand, and Irene, Mahomet, and Cali Bassa on the other, as they recognize or fail to recognize the subordinate rank of politics in life. Second, his belief that the "natural"--as opposed to the political--state of man was one of turmoil and destruction manifests itself in the collapse and ruin of "Greece." Third, his insistence upon subordination to avert such subversion of the social order rises out of the contrast between the destructive actions of the insubordinate Abdalla and the beneficial conduct of the willing Leontius.

Johnson's concern with his poverty and future plans, his inheritance from Lichfield, and his inexperience in the political world can also be seen in Irene, involved as it is with war, invading armies, and rebellion. At this stage in his life, he may not have been so certain of exactly how government should function, but he was, nevertheless, sure that without it, there was no safety and happiness.

The second major division of his theory does concern the practical relationships of ruler and ruled, the proper

manner for each to perform his duty and the difficulties for each. This section finds expression in the imaginative works mainly through the allegories, written as they were after Johnson's close observation of and varied experience with the machinery of government in London and devoted to teaching the correct and practical way to live.

CHAPTER IV

THE POLITICS OF SAMUEL JOHNSON: GOVERNMENT, ITS METHODS AND PROBLEMS

i

Once government has been satisfactorily established, with the majority of the people accepting their place in the social structure, one must still not expect to find all strife and confusion checked, and all competition softened into cooperation. Since it requires "no proof" that

the life of man is unhappy, that his days are not only few, but evil, that he is surrounded by dangers, distracted by uncertainties, and oppressed by calamities,¹

then what Johnson calls "speculative reason" would expect such

beings, not brute and savage, but endowed with reason, and united in society . . . should join in a perpetual confederacy against the certain, or fortuitous, troubles to which they are exposed . . . [and] that they should universally cooperate in the proportion of universal felicity.²

Unfortunately, "speculative reason" must always bow to experience, and this instance is no exception. For even

¹Sermon XXIII, IX, 496.

²Ibid.

under government in a civilized society, men sometimes ignore the general happiness of the community, which they inevitably share in, and work diligently only for their own goals, which are the more valuable for them as the less attainable by other members of society.

The hostility perpetually exercised between one man and another, is caused by the desire of many for that which only a few can possess. Every man would be rich, powerful, and famous; yet fame, power, and riches are only names of relative conditions, which imply the obscurity, dependence, and poverty of greater numbers.¹

Under these conditions, the competition among many for the few available prizes must inevitably lead to disappointment and pain for some, as others more fortunate than they gain happiness. For when the

general good of mankind is subdivided into the separate advantages of individuals, it must necessarily happen, that many will desire what few can possess, and consequently, that some will be fortunate by the disappointment or defeat of others, and since no man suffers disappointment without pain, that one must become miserable by another's happiness.²

Nevertheless, when one considers the kind of creature man is, one can see that the pursuit of "private interest" and disregard of the "general good" are inevitable elements in the "natural condition of human life." For man is an imperfect being and finds it very difficult to act without self-interest, even though his own good is served, to some degree, by acting out of interest for the society of which he is part,

¹Rambler, No. 183, III, 354.

²Sermon XXIII, IX, 497.

the happiness of the whole being necessarily composed of and shared in by all the parts. Johnson utilized exactly this principle, without much success, when he argued that the colonies need not fear an unjust taxation by England even though they were not represented in the English Parliament.

We [England] shall be restrained from oppression [i.e., unjust taxes] by that great principle which holds all empires together, "that the happiness of the whole is the happiness of its parts."¹

Whether by nature or by selfish motives, many men simply cannot see that the public good is in any way related to their own private good. Finally, men cannot wait for all their private needs to be filled by "publick plenty," nor can they wait for the difficulties and "vexations" in their private lives to be quieted by "universal peace."² Hence,

the misery of the world, therefore, so far as it arises from inequality of conditions, is incurable. These are desires, which almost all feel, but which all cannot gratify. Every man may, without a crime, study his own happiness, if he be careful not to impede, by design, the happiness of others. In the race of life, some must gain the prize, and others must lose it; but the prize is honestly gained by him who outruns his competitor, without endeavouring to overthrow him.³

The main duty of the subject in this kind of society is to obey lawful authority and thereby assure a controlled competition which will not endanger the peace of the state;

¹"Vinerian Lectures," in E. L. McAdam, Jr.'s Dr. Johnson and the English Law (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1951), p. 106.

²Sermon XXIII, IX, 498.

³Ibid., p. 498.

these lawful means of competition exclude the destructive methods of attaining honor, wealth, and position.

Since there is to be an inevitable competition, an honest and honorable one, between men for the "blessings" of life, there will also inevitably be some strife between the competitors. This strife is beyond eradication and is to be expected, however, and will not seriously disrupt the machinery of society if it is controlled by the acknowledged rules and regulations of lawful government. This

strife [arising from honest competition] would be without confusion, if it were regulated by reason and religion, if men would endeavour after lawful ends by lawful means.¹

A force operating within a political union which aids in the control of competition among men and the strife arising from it is "habit." Johnson often used the word "reverence" in his political writings as a synonym for the word "habit." Both words mean the custom of obedience to established laws that was ingrained in the members of society who have grown up under them. Johnson referred to this fact--relied on heavily by Burke in Speech on American Taxation² (1774)--when he said:

The general story of mankind will evince, that lawful and settled authority is very seldom resisted when it is well employed. Gross corruption, or evident imbecility, is necessary to the suppression of that reverence with which the majority of mankind look upon their governors.

¹Ibid.

²Cf. Selected Writings of Edmund Burke, ed. Walter Jackson Bate (New York: The Modern Library, 1960), pp. 67, 100-101.

. . . For though men are drawn by their passions into forgetfulness of invisible rewards and punishments, yet they are easily kept obedient to those who have temporal dominion in their hands, till their veneration is dissipated by such wickedness and folly as can neither be defended nor concealed.¹

Johnson did not restrict the beneficial use of habit to political affairs. As Katherine Balderston points out, he shared with William Law a deep "concern for the power of habit, both for good and ill, in the economy of the moral life."² Professor Balderston goes on to add that this "idea, as all readers of Johnson know, is omnipresent in his works,"³ and in attempting to illustrate what she considers the strong influence of Law on Johnson, says that Law may quite possibly be the source of Johnson's belief in the beneficial use of habit. She argues,

An outgrowth . . . of Law's belief that the power of habit may be utilized for good, by making our bodies conform to "such habits of life as naturally produce habits in the soul" . . . did, I believe, influence Johnson and help to explain those practices of his religious life which his contemporaries found so singular. I refer to Law's regimen of "rules," in small things as well as great. . . . The rules thus set up and strictly obeyed discipline the Christian in the subjugation of his body, and strengthen the soul in the habit of obedience to God.⁴

Johnson made rules for himself throughout his life, as is

¹Rambler, No. 50, II, 242.

²Katherine Balderston, "Dr. Johnson and William Law," PMLA, LXXV (September, 1960), 388.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

"abundantly evident from the Prayers and Meditations," although he seldom ever kept them, particularly the ones concerning early rising. The interesting point here is his adaptation of a moral insight, whether taken from Law or not, into the political world. This adaptation indicates the closeness of political issues with moral issues in Johnson's mind and illustrates in reverse his method of reducing large political questions to their effect upon the individual. If general policy must be empirically tested in the practical world of men and women, then those methods which have been proved effective in the ethical life of the individual can be practiced in the larger realm of general politics for their beneficial effect.

Much good can come as a result of the aforementioned kind of "prosecution of private interest." In the community, the desire of the individual citizen to better his condition of life can lead him to work industriously and diligently at his trade; in this way, he provides not only himself but also all his fellow citizens with more of the "conveniences" of life. In the world of the intellect, as opposed to that of physical labor, "neighbourhood [colleges or groups of scholars], where it does not conciliate friendship, incites competition, and he that would contentedly rest in a lower degree of excellence, where he had no rival to dread, will be urged by his impatience of inferiority to incessant endeavors after great attainments. These stimulations of

honest rivalry, are, perhaps, the chief effects of academies and societies."¹ Hence, the inequality of conditions, while it can and does cause some pain and distress, must be considered natural and ordained; it is also responsible for much of the improvements of mankind, both in the domain of physical needs and mental activity.

Johnson consequently places the responsibility for effective government squarely upon the two classes who compose it: those who rule and those who are ruled. Unlike those who held to the growing belief that man was inherently good, but was made evil by unnatural customs, prejudicial institutions and laws, and that he need only "change the environment in which children grow up, and in a generation or two all the evils will wither and blow away,"² Johnson clung to his view that wholesale change was dangerous in the extreme and that the present system was adequate if each member of society fulfilled his individual responsibility to the community. The effectiveness of government, therefore, depended upon the manner in which ruler and subject performed their respective duties.

ii

There is, unfortunately, another kind of strife that neither meliorates the "condition of life" nor advances the

¹Adventurer, No. 45, IV, 20.

²Louis Bredvold, The Brave New World of the Enlightenment (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1961), p. 108.

"boundaries of science." This kind, caused predominantly by envy or "interest," that is, greed, is "of a pernicious and destructive kind,

which daily disturbs the quiet of individuals, and too frequently obstructs, or disturbs, the happiness of nations; a strife which always terminates in confusion."¹

The envy which produces this kind of strife is present in all levels and precincts of life.

Envy is almost the only vice which is practicable at all times, and in every place; the only passion which can never lie quiet for want of irritations: its effects therefore are everywhere discoverable, and its attempts always to be dreaded.²

It is "mere unmixed and genuine evil; it pursues a hateful end by despicable means, and desires not so much its own happiness as another's misery."³ It is produced by the

hope of alleviating the sense of our disparity by lessening others, though we gain nothing to ourselves.⁴

Since the strife proceeding from this source is so dangerous to political society and since envy is so "various in its appearance, . . . often disguised by specious pretences" or "removed from notice by intermediate causes,"⁵ every individual who is desirous of maintaining order and peace in civil society through government should recognize

¹Sermon XXIII, IX, 498.

²Rambler, No. 183, III, 356.

³Ibid., p. 358.

⁴Ibid., p. 355.

⁵Sermon XXIII, IX, 500.

what Johnson calls "tokens" of that strife proceeding from envy.

One symptom of this malevolent strife arising from "corrupt Passions" is a disproportion between the significance of the ends proposed and the "vehemence" of the means to those ends. As most men prefer quiet to discord and would rather live in ease than expend great energy for some cause, so most men involve themselves in "tasks of difficulty" or "suffer hardships" only for some reward greater than the ease which they give up. If, however, the end for which a man labors does not seem worthy of "so much assiduity," then he may justly be suspected of forming, to himself,

some imaginary interest, and . . . seeking his gratification, not in that which he himself gains, but which another loses.¹

The kind of strife which disrupts society, proceeding as it does from envy, can also be recognized by a second token, the use of "unlawful means" to attain the "blessings" of this life. Even if a man proposes for himself some acceptable or valuable end, he has no right to utilize any but

the just and allowed methods of attaining it. To do evil that good may come, can never be the purpose of a man who has not perverted his morality by some false principle.²

This point was made by Johnson in a debate he wrote much

¹Ibid., p. 501.

²Ibid.

earlier, though there it was applied specifically to men in office.

If the Legislative Powers shall, in making Laws, discover that they regard any Motives before the Advantage of their Country, or that they pursue the Public Good by Measures inadequate and ill-concerted, what can be expected from the People, but that they should set up their own Judgment in Opposition to that of their Governors, make themselves the Arbiters in all doubtful Questions, and Obey or disregard the Laws at Discretion.¹

That the ends never justify the means is not simply a moral maxim for private conduct but is a principle applicable in every compartment of life. Johnson's application of moral principles to political actions illustrates his approach to the problems of life: all questions concerning men are ultimately moral and can find their satisfactory answer only in solutions based solidly on religious principles.

A third "token" of that pernicious kind of strife which disorders society can be seen in the use of "unlawful means . . . in preference to those which are recommended by reason, and warranted by justice."² The unnecessary utilization of power in gaining an object when that object could be obtained through law or mediation can mean only that power was chosen not to gain but to humble the former possessor. An individual can therefore utilize unjust means not only to obtain whatever ends he desires, but also to cause misery or distress by choosing them in lieu of readily available means

¹"Debates," XII, p. 240.

²Sermon XXIII, IX, 501.

sanctioned by society. The former kind of immoral activity arises from greed, the latter from envy, probably the most vicious of sins in Johnson's eyes. Johnson makes this observation the basis of his plea for moderation in the conflict of England and Spain over Falkland's Islands.

But when we [England] have obtained all that was asked, [an apology and withdrawal from the islands by Spain] why should we complain that we have not more? . . . To push advantages too far is neither generous or just. . . . The utmost exertion of right is always invidious.¹

iii

There is yet one other kind of strife in the affairs of men. It cannot be judged with absolute certainty as to its origins and validity, that is, whether it proceeds from just or unjust motives. This is that which arises from contentions against "legal superiority." The difficulty in judging arises from the nature of government, which gives to some men power over others. This power too frequently blinds those who possess it to the needs of the people for which it is exercised. Thus it happens that

Power will sometimes be abused, and Punishment sometimes be escaped.²

In its most extreme form the effect is this:

Mankind has learned . . . by Experience that exorbitant Power will always produce Exorbitant Pride, that very few when they can oppress with Security, will be contained within the Bounds of Equity by the Restraints of Morality or of Religion.³

¹Thoughts on the Late Transactions respecting Falkland's Islands, VI, 196, 197, 207.

²"Debates," XI, 457.

³Ibid., XIII, 453.

If those in possession of power misuse it to the detriment of society, and in so doing fail of their responsibility as leaders and rulers, then

such insolence . . . may justly be restrained and such oppression . . . may be lawfully resisted.¹

This is the only place in Johnson's works that I have found in which he justifies rebellion to acknowledged authority. Here, rebellion is permitted on the basis of the failure of those who possess that authority to use it properly, to provide a fundamental security and protection for the individual, without which no individual in society can pursue the blessings and happiness of life. This is more of an apparent than a real contradiction of Johnson's usual position, I believe, since his words are "lawfully resisted," not "lawfully rebelled against." Johnson is advocating resistance but not total rebellion against the established order. Total rebellion--complete overthrow of the government--had occurred and would possibly occur again, but such rebellion usually took place in such a desperate situation that law and order was already lost and each political act could be measured only against its ability to return society to its former harmony.

This belief is at the bottom of Johnson's argument with Adam Fergusson about power and the king.

The crown [he says to Fergusson] has not power enough. When I say that all governments are alike, I consider that in no government power can be abused long. Mankind will not bear it. If a sovereign oppresses his people

¹Sermon XXIII, IX, 502.

to a great degree, they will rise and cut off his head. There is a remedy in human nature against tyranny, that will keep us safe under every form of government.¹

Rebellion is such a desperate act that although it has happened on certain occasions, it must be remembered that

many modes of tyranny have been practiced in the world, of which it is more natural to ask, with wonder, why they were submitted to so long, than why they were at last opposed and quelled.²

One example of this fact for Johnson was the unhappy state of Ireland.

The Irish are in a most unnatural state; for we see there the minority prevailing over the majority. There is no instance, even in the ten persecutions, of such severity as that which the Protestants of Ireland have exercised against the Catholics.³

The wonder in this case is not so much at the submission to English tyranny--English arms being the obvious explanation--but at the boldfaced manner in which this tyranny is imposed.

Man has then a remedy for the misuse of government which is both accessible and practical, although as Johnson

¹Life of Johnson, II, 170. Johnson did not foresee the great progress in technology that science was to make and therefore could not know how it would be possible for modern forms of totalitarian government to control large numbers of the population of a country through the use of highly developed means of communications, of powerful weapons, and of rapid methods of transportation. His point, nevertheless, still has validity, I believe, in that the only real safeguard against tyranny must come from the people who are being governed and from them alone. No outside force can render a country safe from despotism, even though it may remove a particular tyrant at a particular time. Liberty must grow from within; it cannot be grafted on from without.

²Sermon XXIII, IX, 502

³Life of Johnson, II, 255.

is always quick to point out, it is also a dangerous and drastic one. Rebellion is a great upheaval in the body politic in which no man can feel safe or secure. It is actually a war, a civil war, and to Johnson "war . . . was one of the heaviest of national evils, a calamity in which every species of misery is involved."¹

Johnson's recognition of the need for an escape from the abuse of power is not, of course, a criticism of authority and power per se.

. . . history and experience inform us that power and greatness grow wanton and licentious, that wealth and prosperity elate the mind, and enslave the understanding to desire, and when men once find that no one has power to control them, they are seldom very attentive to justice, or very careful to control themselves.²

There are facts which must be recognized, but, even though they are acknowledged, they must not be allowed to distract from other equally pertinent truths: the strife that arises from objections to and altercations with recognized authority is very often the result, not of honest or just attempts to rectify the misuse of authority, but of the discontent of those who find living under the regulations of a civil state, administered by men given superior places by that state, a distressing and vexing experience. We do well to recognize the temptations that beset men in authority but

history and experience will likewise show us, that the contrary condition has its temptations and its crimes,

¹The Patriot, VI, 220.

²Sermon XXIII, IX, 502.

that he, who considers himself as subject to another, and liable to suffer by caprice or wickedness, often anticipates the evils of his state, imagines himself to feel what he only fears, and imputes every failure of negligence, or start of passion, to studied tyranny and settled malevolence.¹

This kind of destructive strife is unfortunately possible under any form of government:

whoever rises above those who once pleased themselves with equality, will have many malevolent gazers at his eminence. To gain sooner than others that which all pursue with the same ardour, and to which all imagine themselves entitled, will for ever be a crime.²

This uneasiness in the presence of superiority is unhappily an inevitable reaction, since it arises, Johnson believed, from the constitution of man himself.

There is in every mind, implanted by nature, a desire of superiority, which counteracts the pleasure, which the sight of success and happiness ought always to impart. Between men of equal condition, and therefore willingly consulting with each other, any flow of fortune, which produces inequality, makes him who is left behind look with less content on his own condition, and with less kindness on him who has reduced him to inferiority. The advancement of a superior gives pain by increasing that distance, by difference of station, which was thought already greater than could be claimed by any difference.³

The temptation to the governed is thus in the direction of anarchy, just as the temptation of the governors is in the direction of tyranny. Both governed and governors must control those impulses and submit, one to the responsibilities of power, the other to the duties of a citizen.

¹Ibid.

²Rambler, No. 172, III, 310. •

³Sermon XI, IX, 389.

If the impulse to resist is not subdued but is allowed expression, then danger to society grows with each expression.

When the passions of resistance [to lawful authority] are once in motion, they are not easily appeased, or checked. He that has once concluded it lawful to resist power, when it wants merit, will soon find a want of merit, to justify his resistance of power.¹

This kind of destructive resistance must be stopped at once, since it strikes at the foundation of the political order--obedience to government--and provides a rationalization for the improper resistance to lawful authority. This belief of Johnson's concerning envy as the basis of much rebellious activity stands behind his famous, "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel." Many political agitators were simply men envious of the superiority granted others by governmental position. By declaring the honor and safety of government their motive, these men hoped to win, through their "patriotism," the power they displaced from those in office by their vicious attacks. Their actual motives were, of course, envy and greed.

iv

The nature of government is therefore responsible for the grave danger involved in these attacks on it. If

all government is the power of the few over the many,
[then] all government subsists upon opinion.²

By opinion, Johnson means the willingness of those ruled to

¹Sermon XXIII, IX, 503.

²"Vinerian Lectures," p. 84.

submit to the guidance and control of the few men who are invested with the office of government. Thus:

. . . once we [the House of Lords] lose the Esteem of the Public, our Votes, while we shall be allowed to give them, will be only empty Sounds, to which no other Regard will be paid than a standing army shall enforce.¹

For this reason Johnson refuses the name of patriot to one who would

insult a king with a rude remonstrance, only because there is no punishment for legal insolence. . . . For it tends to the subversion of order, and lets wickedness loose upon upon the land, by destroying the reverence due to sovereign authority.²

Much of the criticism of various forms of government, then, stems from the "vitious passion" of an individual who is rebelling against his proper subordinate position in the scheme of civil society. Such criticism believes

that every mischief of chance . . . [results from] ill designs, and that . . . they are . . . injured by an administration, either unskillful, or corrupt.³

The men who believe this fail to consider that

If possibility of abuse be an argument against authority, no authority ever can be established: if the actual abuse destroys its legality, there is no legal government now in the world.⁴

The best that can be expected of "those who are intrusted with the Chief Direction of great Numbers of Sub-officers" is that under them

¹"Debates," XI, 395.

²The Patriot, VI, 217.

³Sermon XXIII, IX, 503.

⁴False Alarm, VI, 159.

corrupt Practices are not frequent, and their Justice such, that they are never unpunished when legally detected.¹

If men refuse to understand this fact about government, and create difficulties and strife which undermine it, they do injury to society and injustice to those who compose the government.

Just as the strife which accompanied the competition for superiority, preference, and position produced both the "necessities" and "conveniences" of life and the advancement of science, so the strife which is involved in the unjust attempts of men to gain the "blessings" of life or to rebel against the lawful power of the state will end in the

destruction of order, . . . the abolition of stated regulations, [and] must fill the world with uncertainty, distraction, and solicitude.²

Whatever the motives, however--boredom, desperation, hurt pride, or despair at the status quo--many men have ignored the pain and distress caused society by the dissolution of government, so that they may have a better chance at "honor or wealth." For

when sedition and uproar have once silenced law, and confounded property, then is the hour when chance begins to predominate in the world, when every man may hope without bounds, and those who know how to improve the lucky moment, may gain in a day what no length of labour could have procured, without the concurrence of casual advantage.³

¹"Debates," XI, 457.

²Sermon XXIII, IX, 503.

³Ibid., p. 504.

One man's advantage here is society's disaster. The confusion and disorder that enable a few men to gain riches and honor immediately have a price paid by the many in "universal misery." The confusion which follows this evil strife completely foils the purpose of government and permits the return of the state of unrestrained nature.

The great benefit of society is that the weak are protected against the strong. The great evil of confusion is that the world is thrown into the hands, not of the best, but of the strongest; that all certainty of possession or acquisition is destroyed; that every man's care is confined to his own interest, and that general negligence of the general good makes way for general licentiousness.¹

From unlawful or unjust opposition to government to the unregulated rule of the strongest is but a step, for government is a fragile thing, built on the mutual consent of government and people--governors and governed. If the consent of the governed is destroyed by the insidious and pernicious efforts of corrupt men, then chaos and old night are come again.

But as the great end of government is to give every man his own, no inconvenience is greater than that of making right uncertain. Nor is any man more an enemy to public peace, than he who fills weak heads with imaginary claims, and breaks the series of civil subordination, by inciting the lower classes of mankind to encroach upon the higher.²

But government must equally have the consent of those in authority if it is to function properly.

¹Ibid.

²Life of Johnson, II, 244.

Politicians remark, that no oppression is so heavy or lasting as that which is inflicted by the perversion and exorbitance of legal authority. The robber may be seized, and the invader repelled, whenever they are found; they who pretend no right but that of force, may by force be punished or suppressed. But when plunder bears the name of impost, and murder is perpetrated by a judicial sentence, fortitude is intimidated, and wisdom confounded: resistance shrinks from an alliance with rebellion, and the villain remains secure in the robes of the magistrate.¹

This consent is given implicitly by the possessors of rank and power, when they act in accord with what Johnson considers the duties and responsibilities of authority. In a system such as the English one, for instance,

the true Interest . . . of every Monarch, is to please the People.²

As the monarch is

invested with all the rights and powers of royalty, so he must necessarily be bound . . . to the performance of those duties for the sake of which his rights and powers are conferred on him.³

The first of these duties consists of the proper use of power.

Their superiority is not to be considered as a sanction for laziness, or a privilege for vice. They are not to conceive, that their passions are to be allowed a wider range, or their appetites set more free from subjection to reason, than those of others. They are not to consult their own glory, at the expense of the lives of others; or to gratify their avarice, by plundering those whom diligence and labour have entitled to affluence. They are not to conceive that power gives a right to oppress, and to punish those who murmur at oppression.⁴

¹Rambler, No. 148, III, 201.

²"Debates," XI, 414.

³"Vinerian Lectures," p. 94.

⁴Sermon XXIV, IX, 508.

Second, he must, if the "true tenderness for the People" be his guide,

consult their Advantage, . . . protect their Liberty, and . . . preserve their Virtue.¹

To put it another way, he should

preserve their Liberties, their Reputations, and their Commerce.²

In more general terms, those who are placed in authority

are to look upon their power, and their greatness, as instruments placed in their hands, to be employed for the publick advantage. . . . They must reflect, that it is their duty to secure property from the attempts of rapine and robbery, and that those whom they protect will be very little benefited by their care, if what they rescue from others they take away themselves.³

These are heavy duties for any occupation. It is understandable that people in a subordinate position should accept that position even though it is displeasing to them, since a revolt against their station on the part of a large number means the loss of all positions, security, and order. Thus an individual receives the benefits of peace for accepting an unpleasing state of inferiority. But why should a person placed in authority accept all these difficult restrictions on its use? No doubt, the examples of Charles I and James II provided some kind of incentive to discretion in its exercise, but many other men who misused their power,

¹"Debates," XI, 410.

²Ibid., p. 414.

³Sermon XXIV, IX, 508.

Charles II to go no further, could be cited as encouraging examples to wilfulness. This danger alone would not stop the abuse of power.

The practical benefits of government are peace and order--not national peace or international peace--but peace in every day life, in the village, town, and city. The disorder that follows insubordination is equally concrete, for in the anarchy that fills the space left by government, man is

driven, by force, from the comforts of life, is compelled to leave his house to a casual comer, and, whatever he does, or wherever he wanders, finds, every moment, some new testimony of his own subjection to the anarchic forces of brute strength.¹

Johnson answers the question of practical benefits to the ruler by turning to the actual experience of men with power as it has been recorded throughout history.

It appears from those struggles for dominion, which have filled the world with war, bloodshed, and desolation, and have torn in pieces almost all the states and kingdoms of the earth. . . . that there is somewhat in power more pleasing than in any other enjoyment; and, consequently, to bestow upon man the happiness of ruling others, is to bestow upon him the greatest benefit he is capable of receiving.²

The benefits of the rulers corresponding to those of the ruled, then, are the intense gratifications derived from the use of power, and they are the price paid for the difficult job of properly exercising power.

¹Taxation No Tyranny, VI, 229.

²Sermon XXIV, IX, 508-509.

The bestowal of the privilege of power upon an individual places that individual under great debt. For if the pleasures of power are so great, then the possessors of power are greatly in debt to the people responsible for giving them that power. Hence, the responsibilities of authority are not only enforced by the dangers of not meeting them, that is, rebellion, but also by the moral law in which justice requires that an individual "requite . . . a benefit."

Nothing then can equal the obligations of governors to the people, and nothing but the most flagrant ingratitude can make them careless of the interests, or unconcerned at the misfortunes, of those to whom they owe that, for which no danger has been thought too dreadful to be encountered. . . . [For] gratitude is a species of Justice.¹

But those in power must obey a law other than the one which dictates an honest return for a privilege bestowed, important as this law is. This other law is based on the rights of the people, the rights Johnson has sometimes been accused of ignoring.

The Welfare of the Publick . . . has always been allowed the supreme Law, and when any Governors sacrifice the general Good either to private Views, or temporary Convenience, they deviate at once from Integrity and Policy, they betray their Trust, and neglect their Interest.²

Johnson knew that the problems of government were not solved even though men recognized its importance to mankind. Within a governed state, man must not expect all the strife of the "natural" state to disappear. But this strife need

¹Ibid., p. 509.

²"Debates," XIV, 19.

not be destructive if all members of that society abide by the civilized rules of competition. If they do not, then they endanger the stability of the state by the destructive nature of their unjust methods of competition.

An equally dangerous weakness of government lies in the temptations of the governors. If they do not place the interest of the people above their own gain, then the people will, sooner or later, rise up and destroy them. In the process, the peace of the community will also be destroyed.

Johnson thus put the responsibility for the safety and happiness of the people upon the willingness of those people and their rulers to refrain from indulging their own desires at the expense of their fellow men.

CHAPTER V

THE ALLEGORIES

i

Johnson's two extended allegories, The Vision of Theodore, The Hermit of Teneriffe, and The Fountains: A Fairy Tale were separated by an interval of eighteen years,¹ the former being published in 1748 and the latter in 1766. The two works were probably both written immediately prior to their publication--Johnson's usual habit of composition. By 1748 Johnson had a long and varied career as a journalist, mainly for the Gentleman's Magazine, which meant that he had become deeply involved in the most important political events of the last fifteen years: the fall of Walpole, the failure to impeach him, the War with Spain, and the War of the Austrian Succession. The Parliamentary Debates which he wrote from 1741 to 1744 provided him with an excellent opportunity to observe the actual workings of England's government, while at the same time it gave him a chance to investigate from several directions many of the most important political

¹William Prideaux Courtney and David Nichol Smith, A Bibliography of Samuel Johnson (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1925), pp. 21-22, 111-12.

principles of his day. As James Clifford says,

Forced to make up a large part of his material, Johnson took the opportunity to stress many of his own dominant interests. In his imagined great arena of Parliament he could discuss what most concerned him--the power of the people, representative government, basic questions of individual liberty and civic morality. He was always intent on a larger design, on universal principles. . . . Here was a ready-made public forum in which he could discuss at length the major political and ethical problems of the age.¹

The effect of the years in London upon Johnson can be seen in the contrast between the attitudes toward pastoral retreat from the world as a method for finding happiness as presented in Irene, written prior to Johnson's arrival in London, and in The Vision of Theodore, The Hermit of Teneriffe, written over a decade after his arrival. In Irene, Demetrius asks Aspasia if she will be able to stand the forced withdrawal from hereditary "Splendours" caused by a failure in the assassination attempt on Mahomet. He wonders if she will be content

To live obscure upon a foreign Coast,
Content with Science, Innocence and Love?
(IV,i,104-105)

As was noted earlier in Chapter Three, Aspasia denies any intrinsic worth to court society.

Nor Wealth, nor Titles, make Aspasia's Bliss.
O'erwhelmed and lost amidst the publick Ruins
Unmov'd I saw the glitt'ring Trifles perish,
And thought the pretty Dross beneath a Sigh.
Chearful I follow to the rural Cell,
Love be my Wealth, and my Distinction Virtue.
(IV,i,106-111)

¹Young Sam Johnson (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1955), p. 259.

such sentiments about the ability of a "rural Cell" to provide enduring happiness and pastoral innocence delighting in "Love" and "Virtue" suffered severely in Johnson's hands many times later in his life, nowhere more devastatingly perhaps, than in Chapter XIX of Rasselas, "A Glimpse of Pastoral Life." In The Vision of Theodore, this belief is discredited through the allegory of the Mountain of Existence.

The plot of the tale can be briefly summarized. Theodore, the hermit, has retreated from the world because he found in it no happiness.

I [Theodore] was once what thou [the reader of this tale] art now, a groveller on the earth, and a gazer at the sky; I trafficked and heaped wealth together, . . . I was ambitious, and rose to greatness; I was unhappy and retired.¹

After forty-eight years of retirement, Theodore is pestered by a restlessness that drives him to seek the summit of Mount Teneriffe, at whose foot he had been living all these years. He finally gives in to his restlessness and attempts an ascent. Being old and laden with heavy supplies, he soon tires and falls asleep upon a small plain. He is awakened by a "benevolent Being," who learns that Theodore is seeking a "more extensive prospect of the works of nature"² at the top of the mountain.

Theodore's "preceptor" then reveals to him in a vision the Mountain of Existence upon which an allegorical presenta-

¹The Vision of Theodore, IX, 162.

²Ibid., p. 164.

tion of life as a journey upward takes up the rest of the tale. At the foot of the mountain where the ground was smooth and safe, "a modest virgin in a white robe"¹ guided the people for a short while. She very soon gave over her followers to Education, "a nymph more severe in her aspect,"² who led them more cautiously and authoritatively into narrow and confined paths. Appetite began tempting the travellers at this time but was an easy enemy for Education to control, particularly when it was separated from Habit, Education's most dangerous adversary.

Habit appeared in the form of a pygmy that could either aid or hinder the sojourner up the mountain. If guided by Education, Habit helped smooth the road and grew slowly in size; but if Habit and Appetite joined, Habit soon grew large and bound the individual in slight but powerful chains which hindered or stopped him from following Education. From its first appearance, Habit remained a constant companion for each person, whether for good or evil.

As the way grew steeper and rougher, Education turned her followers over to the last two guides: Reason and Religion. Although Reason "appeared capable of presiding in senates, or governing nations,"³ she still followed carefully the steps of Religion and "was visibly confounded and perplexed"⁴

¹Ibid., p. 165.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 167.

⁴Ibid.

if Religion left her. Reason was, of "all subordinate beings the noblest and the greatest,"¹ but only Religion, as Reason explained to the new group, could guide them safely up the steep and difficult path to the mist at the top of the mountain, wherein existed the "temples of Happiness."²

Those who followed Religion and Reason were tempted along the way by Appetites and Passions. These "seducers" were much more successful with the pilgrims who followed only Reason, than with those who followed both Religion and Reason. For Religion had Conscience as an aide in recalling those who faltered, whereas Reason possessed only Pride, which often times betrayed rather than supported her. The greatest danger to the disciples of Religion was not Passion or Appetite, however, but Habit, which used its seemingly small and slight but actually powerful chains to bind those who wished desperately to return to Religion's road. Of course, if Habit were constantly controlled and made to work for the individual as he followed Religion, his path became easier, especially as he neared the mist at the top through which all travellers must at last pass.

For those who followed Reason alone, the path was naturally the same as that of Religion, Reason being merely the follower of Religion, but those who trod on it were inevitably led aside either by Passion, or by Appetite. Reason

¹Ibid., p. 168.

²Ibid., p. 169.

was incapable of guiding man on his proper course without the help of Religion. As Theodore was "musing on . . . [the] miserable scene"¹ which the fate of those who left the true path of Reason and Religion presented, ending as they did in the Cavern of Despair, he suddenly awoke from his vision with a last warning from his preceptor.

Remember, Theodore, and be wise, and let not Habit prevail against thee.²

Theodore had noticed that some of the travellers disliked the treatment they received from Education and attempted to return to the first part of the mountain.

Some went back to the first part of the mountain, and seemed desirous of continuing busied in plucking flowers, but were no longer guarded by Innocence; and such as Education could not force back, proceeded up the mountain by some miry road, in which they were seldom seen, and scarcely ever regarded.³

There is no way to escape the necessity of Education. The abortive return to childhood, the retreat to the pastoral innocence of simple flower plucking, must fail, since that life can only be satisfactory to a child whose innocence makes him ignorant of the difficult moral problems of life. (Melville's Typee is a good example of this kind of failure: the author cannot remain on the island because the satisfactions that are perfectly adequate to the natives in their childlike innocence cannot satisfy or fulfill his adult desire

¹Ibid., p. 175.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 165.

for insight and knowledge into the deeper problems of man.) The "miry road" followed by those who refuse to follow Education symbolizes several things. First, a person might quite literally be forced to walk in the dirt and mire if he is not educated, since only the meanest occupations would be open to him. But more significantly, the refusal to grapple with the difficult and complex moral issues in life, which a retreat into a "rural Cell" often, if not always, involved, meant that an individual was incapacitated for the truly meaningful task of civilization and consequently would never achieve any award or honor from the adult community. The "miry road" was neither the road of duty nor of honor; it was the road of retreat and failure.

Johnson did not indiscriminately condemn all withdrawals from society, but only those made by persons who believe that happiness or bliss could be attained and misery and distress avoided by them. Man took his problems with him wherever he went,¹ but if he understood this and was more

¹Milton made this particular delusion one of the means of illuminating Satan's evil and of exposing the crippling of his reason, which resulted from his sin. Johnson did not need Milton to arrive at this moral insight, but he would not have found it presented so dramatically or forcefully in any other author. In Paradise Lost, Satan first is described:

Horror and doubt distract
His troubled thoughts, and from the bottom stir
The Hell within Him, for within Him Hell
He brings, and round about him, nor from Hell
One step no more than from himself can fly
By change of place.

(IV, ll. 18-23)

Satan admits the truth of this description in a soliloquy

capable of dealing with them in solitude and retreat, then Johnson would not condemn him. This problem arises in Ras-selas and Johnson presents what is probably his considered opinion through Imlac, the philosopher. Nekayah, the princess, asks Imlac,

Do you think . . . that the monastick rule is a more holy and less imperfect state than any other? May not he equally hope for future happiness, who converses openly with mankind, who succours the distressed by his charity . . . and contributes, by his industry, to the general system of life . . . ?¹

Imlac answers:

This . . . is a question which has long divided the wise, and perplexed the good. I am afraid to decide on either part. He that lives well in the world, is better than he that lives well in a monastery. But, perhaps, every one is not able to stem the temptations of publick life; and, if he cannot conquer, he may properly retreat. Some have little power to do good, and have, likewise, little strength to resist evil. . . . In monasteries, the weak and timorous may be happily sheltered, the weary may

a short time later when he says,

Me miserable! which way shall I fly
Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?
Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell;
And in the lowest deep a lower deep
Still thret'ning to devour me opens wide,
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.
(IV, ll. 73-78)

Satan is a type of super rationalist who believes he can overcome the moral problems of living by reason ("mind") alone, whereas the figures who retreat in Johnson's allegory hope to evade them by refusing to use reason at all. The misuse of reason by both parties comes about through the same mistake in believing man's moral problems can ever be avoided or escaped.

11, 303.

repose, and the penitent may meditate. Those retreats of prayer and contemplation have something so congenial to the mind of man, that, perhaps, there is scarcely one that does not propose to close his life in pious abstraction with a few associates, as serious as himself.¹

Johnson, like Milton, is unwilling to "praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed,"² but he can see, unlike Milton in Areopagitica, some value in a retreat. The conditions he insists upon, such as weakness or old age on the part of the monastics, excludes from consideration the popular notion of the bliss of rural retreat and the joys of pastoral innocence. Theodore himself has retreated from the world, not to find happiness, but to avoid the necessity "of purchasing the assistance of men, by the toleration of their follies"³; but even he is unable finally to still the restlessness and discontent brought on by the solitude. Irene, if we could follow her to her "rural Cell," would undoubtedly suffer the same fate.

ii

A deep involvement with the political and intellectual life of London, therefore, gave Johnson much material and experience to draw upon, particularly in the composition of an allegory. Both examples under discussion here draw heavily upon that experience as they embody in concrete form

¹I, 303-304.

²Areopagitica in John Milton, Complete Poems and Major Prose ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1957), p. 728.

³IX, 162.

the specific problems which arise in the pursuit of happiness. In The Vision of Theodore that happiness is specifically eternal happiness, signified by the "Temples of Happiness" which sit at the top of the Mountain of Existence. Of the two, The Vision of Theodore is concerned with the more general issues involved in questions of conduct, such as the proper use of reason, the need for education, the common dangers to moral judgments from the passions and the appetites; The Fountains on the other hand, deal with more specific issues, such as the need for obedience of a daughter to her mother, the treachery of beauty and/or wealth in personal and intimate relationships, the uselessness of trying to enforce faithfulness on a lover through external controls, and so on.

Since the second division of the political thought was specifically concerned with the problems of conduct for the individual in society, the allegories most clearly translate the abstract formulations of this division.

The reason for this relationship can be found in the intention of the allegories. An allegory by its nature is intended to direct and reveal proper modes of behavior. Two of the greatest in the English language, Everyman and Pilgrim's Progress, are both conduct books whose primary purpose of instruction has been fused with great literary ability; in creating allegorical figures of intense depth and unique detail, their authors have made them literary classics. Johnson's creations do not possess the enduring literary art of Everyman

or Pilgrim's Progress, but his allegories share with them a moral purpose of persuasion and instruction in the conduct of life.¹ It is this similarity in purpose between the second division of the politics and the allegories which accounts for their close relationship.

The Vision of Theodore embodies particularly, first, the important distinction between religion and reason as approaches to happiness and, second, the potentiality of habit for good and evil in the conduct of man in civil society. The former belief is one that continually appears in one form or another in a large variety of Johnson's works, both fiction and non-fiction. Such recurrences of this question are not uncommon in Johnson's age, since the impetus of scientific advancements, particularly of Newton in mathematics and astronomy and Locke in psychology, were directing men to a re-examination of every area of life, including religion. What is unusual, however, is Johnson's constant and undeviating subordination of reason to religion in the fulfillment of

¹The Vision of Theodore was first published appropriately enough in the Dodsley's The Preceptor: Containing A General Course of Education Wherein The First Principles of Polite Learning Are laid down In a Way most suitable for trying the Genius, and advancing the Instruction of Youth. (Courtney and Smith, p. 22.) Johnson also supplied the "Preface" to this work. The importance of The Vision of Theodore as evidence in assessing Johnson's thought may perhaps be indicated by a statement of Boswell's. "The Bishop of Dromore [Percy] heard Dr. Johnson say, that he thought this was the best thing he ever wrote." (Life of Johnson, I, 192.)

The Fountains was first published in Miscellanies in Prose and Verse, by Anna Williams, in 1766, a work Johnson helped publish for the benefit of this blind lady who lived in his home. (Courtney and Smith, pp. 111-12.)

man's infinite capacity for desiring happiness--illustrated particularly well by the allegories and *Rasselas*. He refused to accept the popular belief that reason, utilizing the scientific method in all provinces, could solve the age-old problems that beset man. This attitude in the eighteenth century that Johnson opposed is summed up by one modern his-
in this manner:

Newton's life work, and especially for perfection of the calculus and his grand mathematical formulation of the relation of the planets and the laws of gravity, seemed to contemporaries to explain all natural phenomena, or at least to show how all such phenomena--including the behavior of human beings--could be explained. Locke, taking the methods of clear simple reasoning out of the bewildering metaphysics where Descartes had landed them, seemed to make them a nice extension of common sense. He seemed to show men the way Newton's great successes could be applied to the study of human affairs.¹

The popular belief in the fabulous abilities of "reason" which Johnson opposed led many to hope for perfection.

Reason is at its clearest . . . as mathematics. Reason, argued the agents of Enlightenment, enables us to penetrate from appearances to reality. . . . Reason applied to human relations will show us that kings are not fathers of their people, that if meat is good to eat on Thursday it is good to eat on Friday. . . . Reason will enable us to find human institutions, human relations that are "natural"; once we find such institutions, we shall conform to them and be happy. Reason will clear up the mess that superstition, revelation, and faith (the devils of the rationalists) have piled up here on earth.²

To Johnson, nevertheless, religion, not reason, had already shown that these problems had no final solution on earth,

¹Crane Brinton, Ideas and Men, The Story of Western Thought (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1950), pp. 369-70.

²Ibid., p. 370.

but must be wrestled with by every individual in his progress towards his final destiny, be it salvation or damnation. This kind of attitude was unpopular during Johnson's own day and probably accounts for the disdain Macaulay held for him and certainly for the exaggerated praise Carlyle heaped upon him in the nineteenth century when the problem of science and religion became acute.

Although the distinction between the importance of religion and reason in man's pursuit of happiness is found in the first division¹ of the political thought and not the second--the section which the allegories illuminate most completely--it is too central and distinct in this tale, also, to ignore. Briefly, Johnson's thesis is that temporal happiness is always inconstant and that perfect happiness can exist only in another world. Accordingly, it is to this next world that religion directs men, while it is in this world that reason dictates to them the form of government under which they hope to avoid as much of the misery and attain as much of the "blessings" of this life as is possible. There must always be, consequently, a strict division between the function and importance of religion and reason in man's search for happiness. This complex attitude is basic to The Vision of Theodore and is used as the premise from which certain other truths, ethical and, by implication, political, are drawn.

¹See pp. 29-32 for this discussion.

Even though the specific realms of reason and religion receive their demarcation in the first division, the distinction does have a particular relevance to the problems of conduct, for "reason" is assumed by Johnson in his political theory and explicitly stated in this allegory to be capable of functioning efficaciously in judging and following the best course to happiness. This is, of course, a general assumption which is not invalidated by the failure of men to actually choose the right path; the failure of men to actually do so indicates only the possibility of wrong choice.

Existence is divided into three stages in the tale: childhood, adolescence and maturity, and old age. Theodore's description of the mountain clearly implies this division.

I [Theodore] . . . observed the bottom of the mountain to be of gentle rise, and overspread with flowers; the middle to be more steep, embarrassed with crags, and interrupted by precipices. . . . The tracts . . . nearest the top were generally barren.¹

The individual is led by Innocence, personified by a "modest white virgin in a white robe,"² through the gentle and harmless paths at the bottom of the mountain (childhood and adolescence), until Education, "a nymph more severe in her aspect, and imperious in her commands,"³ accepts them from Innocence and directs their steps onto the first of the more

¹The Vision of Theodore, IX, 164.

²Ibid., p. 165.

³Ibid.

difficult passages. Upon entering maturity, the individual is released by Education, and his journey towards happiness becomes very difficult.

At this stage, Reason and Religion are introduced into the allegory, Reason being described, as was quoted above, "as capable of presiding in senates, or governing nations."¹ Theodore is directed by his "protector" to speak to these two "powers of superior aspect." He approaches them and addresses the "inferiour nymph."

Bright power . . . by whatever name it is lawful to address thee, tell me, thou who presidest here, on what condition thy protection will be granted?²

Reason's answer indicates the important position that Johnson gives to this faculty in life.

It [protection] will be granted . . . only to obedience. I am Reason, of all subordinate beings the noblest and the greatest.³

The most important benefit Reason can confer upon man accounts for its primacy in the hierarchy of man's powers. Reason announces to Theodore,

if thou wilt receive my laws, [I] will reward thee, like the rest of my votaries, by conducting thee to Religion.⁴

The positive function of Reason in aiding man in his difficult journey toward happiness is to lead him to Religion,

¹Ibid., p. 167.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., pp. 167-68.

⁴Ibid., p. 168.

the only guide who can be trusted on the dangerous and treacherous path up the Mountain of Existence.

Reason has also a negative function which is carried out by its reinforcement of the teachings of Education. As the travellers leave the tutelage of Education, they are met by Reason who expatiates upon the grave dangers that await them during the rest of their journey.

Reason counselled them. . . . to enlist themselves among the votaries of Religion; and informed them, that if they trusted to her alone, they would find the same fate with her other admirers, whom she had not been able to secure against Appetites and Passions, and who, having been seized by Habits in the regions of Desire, had been dragged away to the Caverns of Despair. . . . Pride has sometimes reproached me with the narrowness of my view, but, when she endeavoured to extend it, could only show me, below the mist, the bowers of content; even they vanished, as I fixed my eyes upon them; and those whom she persuaded to travel towards them, were enchained by Habits, and ingulfed by Despair, a cruel tyrant, whose caverns are beyond the darkness on the right side and on the left, from whose prisons none can escape, and whom I cannot teach you to avoid.¹

The warning issued by Reason convinced some of the travellers of the truth of the lessons of Education.

Such was the declaration of Reason to those who demanded her protection. Some that recollected the dictates of Education, finding them now seconded by another authority, submitted with reluctance to the strict decree, and engaged themselves among the followers of Religion.²

Important as reason is the life of man, however, it nonetheless is still quite limited; it can only advise; it cannot compel. It can neither lead an individual to the per-

¹Ibid., pp. 168-69.

²Ibid., p. 169.

fect happiness of the Temples of Happiness nor provide enduring happiness here on earth, the former being the province of Religion, the latter an impossibility. The inadequacy of Reason and the superiority of Religion in these matters is first confessed by Reason herself.

The path [of life up the Mountain] seems now plain and even, but there are asperities and pitfalls, over which Religion only can conduct you. Look upwards, and you perceive a mist before you, settled upon the highest visible part of the mountain; a mist by which my prospect is terminated, and which is pierced only by the eyes of Religion. Beyond it, are the Temples of Happiness, in which those who climb the precipice by her direction, after the toil of their pilgrimage, repose forever. I know not the way, and, therefore, can only conduct you to a better guide.¹

The dangerous weakness of Reason is next illustrated a short time later by the results of the conflicts between Habit and Reason or between Habit and Religion. When an individual is overcome by Habit and cannot follow Reason and Religion, he can and often does call upon them for help.

Habit, insolent with her power, would often presume to parley with Reason, and offer to loose some of her chains, if the rest might remain. To this, Reason, who was never certain of victory, frequently consented, but always found her concession destructive, and saw the captive led away by Habit to his former slavery.²

As a conductor along the precarious road to the perfect happiness of the Temples, Reason lacks both the power to control and the strength to guide man.

Religion [on the other hand] never submitted to treaty, but held out her hand with certainty of conquest; and if

¹Ibid., pp. 168-69.

²Ibid., p. 171.

the captive to whom she gave it did not quit his hold, always led him away in triumph, and placed him in the direct path to the Temple of Happiness.¹

The limitations of Reason are conclusively illustrated once more at the end of the journey up the Mountain. Those who have used Habit wisely in the practice of Reason and Religion walk serenely and confidently into the mist where Reason cannot see.

. . . they, whose Habits were strong, advanced towards the mists with little emotion, and entered them at last with calmness and confidence; after which, they were seen only by the eye of Religion; and though Reason looked after them with most earnest curiosity, she could only obtain a faint glimpse, when her mistress, to enlarge her prospect, raised her from the ground. Reason, however, discerned that they were safe, but Religion saw that they were happy.²

Thus Reason cannot promise security and happiness in this life, nor lead man to it in the next.

iii

Johnson's concept of reason has ramifications throughout his political theory. The weaknesses of this faculty account for his insistence upon government and law as the only means of insuring order, since the "state of nature" which is the obverse of political union was merely a state of anarchy and savagery, whose only law was power and might. Johnson further believed that reason, by itself, was inadequate to control men in a civil state, because even just and honest men sometimes disagreed, thereby engendering a need

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 172.

for some objective tribunal to settle the dispute before it was settled by peace-destroying force. Johnson also knew that just men were not in all circumstances able to remain just, and, finally, that some men were simply going to ignore reason's dictate to sacrifice part of their own private happiness for the sake of the general good. Their refusal must result in the use of force to make them comply.

The embodiment of this complex of ideas in the forms of allegorical representation--the first indication of the deficiency of reason as the sole counsellor and judge in life--occurs when Theodore relates how quickly those who are climbing the Mountain of Existence are left by Innocence and taken by Education. The personified innocence of this early part of the journey is the innocence of childhood in which the young are protected and shielded from the cares and responsibilities that will be theirs soon enough. This childish innocence can exist only in the absence of power to do harm to others or to themselves (Innocence smiled if anyone "plucked a thistle for a flower,"¹ a thistle being a harmless thing compared to the dangerous or poisonous fruits and flowers in the latter part of the journey which symbolize intemperance or indolence), for as the child grows to the man, so grows his power to destroy. Because this power must be controlled and channeled for the safety of civil society, Education soon forces these early travellers into

¹Ibid., p. 165.

"certain paths, in their opinion too narrow and too rough."¹
 The failure of some to follow Education throws some interesting light on Johnson's relationship to one of the commonly accepted beliefs of the age.

Some went back to the first part of the mountain, and seemed desirous of continuing busied in plucking flowers, but were no longer guarded by Innocence; and such as Education could not force back, proceeded up the mountain by some miry road; in which they were seldom seen, and scarcely ever regarded.²

In a seminal article entitled "The Parallelism of Deism and Classicism,"³ Arthur Lovejoy attempts to "outline briefly the characteristic idea-complex which constitutes what is commonly called the 'rationalism of the Enlightenment.'"⁴ One of these characteristics Lovejoy called Rationalistic primitivism, which was the belief that, since reason was the same in all men, the truths of reason were known to all men of all ages and races. Further, since the "minds of men of first ages were not corrupted by 'prejudices' at all," then "What is universal and uniform in man"⁵ must have been better known to them than to any other age. For these universal truths apprehensible by all men have been "overlaid and obscured by historic accretions in the

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³In Essays in the History of Ideas (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1948), pp. 78-98.

⁴Ibid., p. 78.

⁵Ibid., p. 86.

unhappy diversities of belief and practice of modern and civilized peoples."¹

Now while Johnson believed reason was the same in all men ("Uniformitarianism" as Lovejoy calls it in this same article), this kind of rigorously logical application of it--particularly by the Deists in their attempts to arrive at a "natural Religion," of which modern Christianity was but a corrupted and impure version--is explicitly contradicted here. Those who attempt to escape Education, and what is logically implicated, the life of Reason and Religion that Education leads to, proceed in life by some "miry" road, i.e., the road of a beast not a man. Man cannot live as a man except by the use of his reason; it is his most important faculty. But for Johnson, this importance was not to be understood as granting reason the power to rule alone. The "noble savage" was savage but not noble. He was closer to a beast than a man, since Education did not lead him to the proper use of his Reason.

Thus, Johnson's rationalism did not direct him to the primitivism of Deists in religion, nor did it lead him to an application of it in aesthetics, where enthusiasts found as yet uncorrupted reason creating the best literature in the earliest ages. Johnson deeply admired ancient literature, but on literary grounds; his rejection of the Ossian forgeries of MacPherson plainly indicates his refusal to subdue

¹Ibid.

his critical sense to the primitivist theory of unspoiled reason.¹ Johnson believed deeply in the power of reason, as the example of those who escaped it shows, but this belief was neither uncritical nor naive. For if reason had great power, it had also great weaknesses, and its gains were to be found where the primitivists believed they were lost--in Education and in the civilized training of reason.

Since Education needs to be "severe" and to come so early, that which is to be trained, the reason, must be either weak at this early stage, or weak at all times and in need of various supports, such as law, government, and religion. The example of those who attempt to follow only

¹This belief also led to the search for the untutored and "natural" poet, e.g., "Stephen Duck, the poetical thresherman, Henry Jones, the poetical bricklayer discovered by Chesterfield in Ireland, James Woodhouse, the poetical shoemaker whom Johnson advised to stick to his last, and Ann Yearsley, the poetical pig-woman of Bristol." (Italics mine.) (Louis Bredvold, The Literature of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century, 1660-1798, Vol. III of A History of English Literature ed. Hardin Craig (New York: Collier Books, 1962), pp. 162-63. See C. B. Tinker, Nature's Simple Plan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1922) for a discussion of these "natural" poets and the belief that led to a search for them.) The Woodhouse incident referred to occurs in Boswell:

He spoke with much contempt of the notice taken of Woodhouse, the poetical shoemaker. He said, it was all vanity and childishness: and that such objects were, to those who patronised them, mere mirrors of their own superiority. "They had better (said he,) furnish the man with good implements for his trade, than raise subscriptions for his poems. He may make an excellent shoemaker, but can never make a good poet. A school-boy's exercise may be a pretty thing for a school-boy; but is no treat for a man."

(Life of Johnson, II, 127.)

reason, as described by Theodore, proves the latter to be true.

These seducers [Appetites and Passions] had the greatest success upon the followers of Reason, over whom they scarcely ever failed to prevail, except when they counteracted one another. . . . They that professed to obey Reason, if once they forsook her, seldom returned; for she had no messenger to summon them but Pride, who generally betrayed her confidence, and employed all her skill to support Passion; and if ever she did her duty, was found unable to prevail, if Habit had inter-posed.¹

The "benefactor" who awakened Theodore from his sleep to the vision of the Mountain of Existence points out at the end of the tale the fate of those who, after leaving Education, take only Reason as their guide. Theodore sees that the road of Reason is identical with the road of Religion, but that Reason had discovered the right way because Religion had instructed her. After this repudiation of the Deistical belief in "natural religion," that is, a religion discoverable by all men through the light of reason, Theodore describes what happens to those who attempt to guide their lives by Reason.

Reason was however at last well instructed [by Religion] in part of the way, and appeared to teach it with some success, when her precepts were not misrepresented by Passion, or her influence overborne by Appetite. But neither of these enemies was she able to resist. When Passion seized upon her votaries, she seldom attempted opposition: she seemed, indeed, to contend with more vigor against Appetite, but was generally over-wearied in the contest; and if either of her opponents had confederated with Habit, her authority was wholly at an end.²

¹The Vision of Theodore, IX, 170.

²Ibid., p. 173.

The nature of man makes a life of reason impossible. The power of his appetite and passions--as was noted before, Theodore gives intemperance as a specific example for the former and ambition for the latter--is too strong for reason alone. The effects of this weakness demand in communal life civil institutions to sanction and to enforce the dictates that reason receives from religion. But in both the political theory and this allegory, Johnson emphasizes the inadequacy of reason as a guide for civilized living. In the former, reason must be supported by government to be effective and in the latter by religion. What the allegory makes clear is that Johnson's insistence in his political theory upon endowing government with strong powers stems from the experiences daily life presented to him of the pliability of reason, of its failure to remain inflexible under the assaults of "Passion and Appetites." If in private life the failure of religion led to the "Caverns of Despair," then man, by giving government power to control and support reason, might possibly avoid this fate in the state.

The emphasis in The Vision of Theodore is constantly upon the unique ability of religion to provide permanent happiness and upon the inability of reason to do more than guide man to, and at times with, religion; however, in his political utterances, Johnson laid great emphasis upon the value of reason in raising government to protect men and

in creating laws for them to live by. The difference in judgment is explained by the purpose of each. The Vision of Theodore is a moral allegory, stressing the religious nature of life; the political axioms are temporal guides, stressing the possible benefits that can be had without conflicting with the religious order in life. In both cases, the root idea is the same: permanent happiness can be achieved only by religion; temporal, unstable, brief earthly happiness can be sometimes attained by reason working through government and law. But reason must always turn for guidance, judgment, and sanction to religion, and must always expect failures and disappointments.

iv

With the importance of reason properly defined and affirmed along the same lines as those laid down in the first division of the political thought, Johnson then embodies in the tale the potentiality of habit for good and evil, a potentiality which, in civil society, has a very strong influence upon the achievement of order and peace or upon the failure of that achievement.

Johnson considered all government simply the power of a few over the many. As a consequence of this structure, power could be effectively utilized only so long as the people accepted it and followed its direction. Generally speaking, people tended to obey those in authority by habit, by long continuance under the same laws and rules, providing there were no gross or outrageous abuses. Thus the habit

of obedience to lawful government was an important factor in maintaining peace and order, and for that reason, among others, Johnson opposed changes which disrupted the old habits.

It may, however, be considered, that the change of old establishments is always an evil; and that, therefore, where the good of the change is not certain and constant, it is better to preserve that reverence and that confidence, which is produced by consistency of conduct and permanency of laws.¹

In the same manner, a long, continued discord in the community likewise became a habit, one which destroyed security and peace. Thus it was necessary, habit growing so quickly, to suppress as soon as possible "irreverence . . . to publick institutions,"² since that irreverence soon became a constant and corrosive attitude to government and law. It was the long habit of acceptance of the Hanovers by the English people that finally led Johnson to accept them as the rightful heirs to the throne.

In the allegory under consideration, Education's counsel to those in her charge is closely related to this political principle.

As Education led her troop up the mountain, nothing was more observable than that she was frequently giving them cautions to beware of Habits; and was calling out to one or another, at every step, that a Habit was ensnaring them; that they would be under the dominion of Habit before they perceived their danger; and that those whom Habit should once subdue, had little hope of

¹Considerations on the Corn Laws, V, 327.

²Sermon XXIV, IX, 515.

regaining their Liberty.¹

Habits, appearing on the Mountain as a "troop of pygmies" walking in front of these travellers and smoothing their way, each possessed a small chain in his hand with which he attempted to bind the person who followed him. The travellers were benefited by the actions of these creatures so long as Education kept them from Appetite and forced them to clear away some of the roughness of the road.

Habits grew constantly, but at different rates of speed. Under Education, Reason, and Religion, they grew slowly but strongly, till at the end of the long journey they helped their followers walk calmly into the mist, the allegorical representation of death. But when joined with Passion or Appetite, they grew quite differently.

But if they [Habits] once deviated at the call of Appetite, their stature soon became gigantick; and their strength was such, that Education pointed out to her tribe many that were led in chains by them, whom she could never more rescue from their slavery.²

As noted before, Reason's counsel to them as they enter under her control is similar to Education's.

If they [the people travelling up the Mountain] trusted to her [Reason] alone, they would find the same fate with her other admirers, whom she had not been able to secure against Appetites and Passions, and who, having been seized by Habits in the Regions of Desire, had been dragged away to the caverns of Despair.³

¹The Vision of Theodore, IX, 165.

²Ibid., p. 166-67.

³Ibid., p. 168.

Johnson's insistence in his political beliefs on the necessity for the state to set up regular observances is based upon his awareness of the power of habit. Boswell reports an incident which involves this belief.

One of them [Quakers] having objected to the 'observance of days, and months, and years,' Johnson answered, 'The Church does not superstitiously observe days, merely as days, but as memorials of important facts. Christmas might be kept as well upon one day of the year as another; but there should be a stated day for commemorating the birth of our Saviour, because there is danger that what may be done on any day, will be neglected.'¹

(Boswell goes on to say in the following paragraph,

He said to me at another time, 'Sir, the holidays observed by our church are of great use in religion,'

to which he adds a characteristically Boswellian comment:

There can be no doubt of this, in a limited sense, I mean if the number of such consecrated portions of time be not too extensive.²)

The habit of religious observance, like the habit of obedience to constituted authority, was an impelling force towards the maintenance of religion in the individual's life and of order within the state. The converse was unfortunately true, as Theodore relates.

I soon found that the great danger to the followers of Religion was only from Habit; every other power was easily resisted, nor did they find any difficulty, when they inadvertently quitted her, to find her again by the direction of Conscience, unless they had given time to Habit to draw her chain behind them, and bar up the way by which they had wandered.³

¹Life of Johnson, II, 458.

²Ibid.

³The Vision of Theodore, IX, 170.

Johnson's apprehension of habit's potentiality for good and evil finds expression in The Vision of Theodore and his political utterances. If in the political beliefs, Johnson's insistence upon obedience seems arbitrary, in the allegory it is shown to arise from his observation of the great power that habit can almost invisibly secure over people and the consequent necessity to combat an evil habit as soon as it appears. If a man can become addicted to wine or food, or become wedded to ambition through habit, it is equally possible and dangerous that he can become, through irreverence to the law, addicted to disorder and lawlessness.

It is therefore crucially important that evil habits in the state--consisting primarily of a disregard for the law and order which government creates so that its subjects may pursue their own happiness--be discouraged. If they are not, this disregard upon the part of some unscrupulous or dishonest men sets a disruptive pattern which is imitated by others, until this imitation becomes an evil habit. The final result of such conduct will be to arouse such powerful and destructive strife within society that order, concord, and peace are destroyed.

Johnson gives a more concrete expression in The Vision of Theodore to other fundamental political ideas than just the two discussed. For example, Theodore is perturbed by his restless desire to leave his hermitage after forty-eight years and climb to the summit of the mountain.

This motion of my thoughts I endeavoured to suppress, not because it appeared criminal, but because it was new; and all change not evidently for the better, alarms a mind taught by experience to distrust itself.¹

This is a basic conservative principle of Johnson's and has been used in attacks upon him as a blind reactionary. But in the allegory, Theodore's mistrust is justified. First, Theodore left society where "he was ambitious, and rose to greatness," because after his rise he "was unhappy, and retired."² It is not just an inflexible principle that Theodore falls back on in not wanting to change; it is the experience that he has had which undeniably tells him that the change will merely be to what he has already found unsatisfactory and has deserted. Second, the change that Theodore finally makes in leaving his hermitage and climbing the mountain "to enjoy a more extensive prospect of the works of nature"³ is stopped by his exhaustion before it gets fairly started. When he is awakened from his sleep and explains why he is climbing Mount Teneriffe, the "benevolent being" tells him, "Attend first . . . to the prospect which this place affords, and what thou dost not understand I will explain."⁴ What Theodore is seeking is actually there before him, just as what most men are seeking, at least in politics,

¹Ibid., p. 163.

²Ibid., p. 162.

³Ibid., p. 164

⁴Ibid.

is already there, for example, liberty of the English people and freedom from the tyranny of monarchy. If they are not present, however, they will not be gained by simply changing from one form of government to another.

This shared attitude towards change in this allegory and the political theory is only one of several others that could be mentioned. But the two discussed earlier are the major concepts which the two works have in common and which receive most illumination by being compared.

v

The second allegory of Johnson's is The Fountains: A Fairy Tale. In this tale Floretta, a young girl, rescues a beautiful goldfinch from a hawk and then immediately frees it. The goldfinch turns out to be a fairy called Lady Lili-net, who had been turned into a goldfinch by the Queen of Fairies for disobedience and sent out into the world in this shape until a single human being should disinterestedly help her. As a reward for her service, Lilinet takes Floretta into a cavern wherein two fountains called the Spring of Joy and the Spring of Sorrow rise out of the ground. There Lilinet tells her that her wishes will be granted when she drinks from the sweet waters of the Spring of Joy, but that the "ill effect" of any foolish wish can be remedied only by drinking the bitter waters of the Spring of Sorrow.

Floretta wishes for in turn, and retracts soon after, perfect beauty, a faithful lover, a powerful will, wealth, wit, great length of life, and finally, death. With possible

exception of death, none of the granted wishes of Floretta proves capable of providing enduring happiness, but often brings misery instead. As in Rasselas and The Vision of Theodore, the search is for happiness, with a guide leading and teaching the initiate in and through the normative periods of life. These typical experiences are made possible by the device of the supernatural, with the exception of Rasselas where the wealth of the prince fulfills that function, and their lesson is the same: permanent happiness is impossible, although a certain amount of content and joy is possible if one will recognize and accept it.

The major relationship between the political beliefs of Johnson and his imaginative works rests upon this search and desire for happiness. The conditions of life that Johnson presents in concrete and individual terms in his imaginative literature are the same conditions that dictate his political beliefs. The Fountains illustrate in some specific detail two important tenets of his political theory, one involving the dangers of insubordination, and the other the ineffectiveness of external agencies in promoting just conduct in society.

A certain amount of strife and contention was an inevitable concomitant of political union. This competition did not have to be destructive, but could be actually constructive if it followed the rules of reason and law. Certain other kinds of strife, however, were inevitably

present in society and tended to destroy peace and order, arising as they did from contempt of authority, from envy, or from some other "corrupt passion." Whatever the reason, such contention tended to erode the effectiveness of the institutional authority set up by society to distribute justice and to maintain the equilibrium and harmony of the state. When people, who were accustomed to "reverence" these institutions, saw them flaunted, decried, or contemptuously opposed, their respect--the basis of their obedience--for those institutions and the rules of order they enforced was diminished and in time destroyed. This kind of strife was in large part responsible for the necessity of authority in government and power in law to control it.¹

Johnson embodies the first of these political concepts in one of the episodes of The Fountains. Some time after receiving the special gift of the fairy Lilinet, Flor-etta was

on some occasion thwarted by her mother's authority, [so] she went to Lilinet, and drank at the alabaster fountain [Spring of Joy] for a spirit to do her own way.²

One of the special qualities of the two fountains was that the intensity of sweetness or bitterness increased as the wish was raised higher and higher. Johnson's great sensitivity to the pleasures that possession of power granted the individual--he

¹This point is taken up in the next chapter.

²The Fountains: A Fairy Tale, IX, 183.

made it the reward for the heavy duties and severe restrictions that should always accompany its use--and the difficulties in subduing the will to an inferior position when society decreed it--the "natural" desire of all men for superiority protested against submission--is indicated by the sweetness of the water.

Lilinet saw that she drank immoderately, and admonished her of the danger; but spirit and her own way gave such sweetness to the water, that she could not prevail upon herself to forbear, till Lilinet, in pure compassion, snatched the cup out of her hand.¹

The great sweetness of the water indicates the powerful pressures within men that push them from civil society, from surrendering some of their own liberty for the liberty of all. Such pressures, in turn, explain why Johnson insisted on granting strong authority and power to government as reinforcements to man's reason in giving up that liberty.

The results of Floretta's draught are soon apparent.

When she came home every thought was contempt, and every action was rebellion: she had drunk into herself a spirit to resist, but could not give her mother a disposition to yield; the old lady asserted her right to govern; and, though she was often foiled by the impetuosity of her daughter, she supplied by pertinacity what she wanted in violence; so that the house was in a continual tumult by the pranks of the daughter and opposition of the mother.²

Floretta's failure to assume her properly subordinate position results in a "constant tumult" in the house, which is, in the political sphere, anarchy in the state. For

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., pp. 183-84.

anarchy comes into being when men leave their subordinate positions and refuse to obey their lawful superiors.

Johnson's later criticism attacking the supporters of both the Wilkes position and the American colonies in their disputes with England is implicitly contained in this incident. In the first conflict, the refusal of the Middlesex voters to return a new candidate after Wilkes had been expelled and the general discontent raised against the King and government over his expulsion correspond to Floretta's resistance and the resulting confusion in her home. In the latter case, Floretta represents the American colonies in their "spirit to resist" while Floretta's mother's "right to govern" represents England's legitimate demands upon America, at least as far as Johnson interpreted the situation later. In the case of Wilkes and the colonies, however, the ending was quite dissimilar from that of Floretta's rebellion.

In time, Floretta was convinced that spirit had only made her a capricious termagant, and that her own ways ended in error, perplexity, and disgrace; she perceived that the vehemence of mind, which to a man may sometimes procure awe and obedience, produce to a woman nothing but detestation; she, therefore, went back, and by a large draught from the flinty fountain, though the water was very bitter, replaced herself under her mother's care, and quitted her spirit and her own way.¹

The colonies and Wilkes found the fountain too bitter and set up, as it were, their own home.

The relationship of England to her colonies, and of

¹Ibid., p. 184.

one borough, county, or parish to England as a nation, were for Johnson closely analogous to that of parent and child. If the child rebelled against the lawful authority of its parent, it must, for its own sake as well as for the sake of the whole house, be brought under control. The limitation of the analogy is obvious: England may be the mother of her colonies or the different parts of the nation, but both of these have independent rights which, to carry the analogy further, have accrued to them as they have grown to maturity. The conflict centers upon what, in the analogy, is to be considered most important: the rights of the child or the peace of the home obtained by the authority of the parent.

Burke attacks just this analogy in his Speech on American Taxation and exposes the weakness.

A noble lord [Lord Carmarthen], who spoke some time ago, is full of the fire of ingenuous youth. . . . He has said that the Americans are our children, and how can they revolt against their parent? He says, that, if they are not free in their present state, England is not free; because Manchester, and other considerable places, are not represented. So, then, because some towns in England are not represented, America is to have no representative at all. They are "our children"; but when children ask for bread, we are not to give a stone. . . . When this child of ours wishes to assimilate to its parent, and to reflect with a true filial resemblance the beautiful countenance of British liberty, are we to turn to them the shameful parts of our constitution? are we to give them our weakness for their strength, our opprobrium for their glory, and the slough of slavery, which we are not able to work off, to serve them for their freedom?¹

Burke's approach to the problem, from the vantage point of history, appears to be more reasonable, more practicable, and

¹Burke, pp. 101-02.

more capable of execution than the plan Johnson advocated and which Lord North followed. But the incident of the allegory places this fault where it belongs, on Johnson's sincere desire for peace and equally sincere belief in the lawfulness of the authority of England's Parliament over its colonies and subordinate parts.

vi

The second fundamental political principle which Johnson expresses through the allegory occurs in the working out of another of Floretta's wishes. Floretta's first wish was for perfect beauty, but when it had been granted the jealousy and envy of other women and the obviously insincere compliments and flattery of courtiers soon destroyed the illusion that perfect beauty could bring perfect happiness. After she had drank the bitter water from the Fountain of Sorrow to return to her former "agreeable" state, she "lived some time with great content; but content is seldom lasting."¹ Floretta returned to the Fountain of Joy and wished for a "faithful lover."

After her return she was soon addressed by a young man, whom she thought worthy of her affection. He courted, and flattered, and promised; till at last she yielded up her heart. He then applied to her parents; and, finding her fortune less than he expected, contrived a quarrel, and deserted her.²

Floretta's disappointment sends her in anger to Lili-

¹The Fountains, IX, 183.

²Ibid.

net, whom she accuses of deceit.

Lilinet asked her with a smile, for what she had been wishing; and being told, made her this reply. "You are not, my dear, to wonder or complain: you may wish for yourself, but your wishes can have no effect upon another. You may become lovely by the efficacy of the fountain, but that you shall be loved is by no means a certain consequence; for you cannot confer upon another either discernment or fidelity; that happiness which you must derive from others, it is not in my power to regulate or bestow.¹
(Italics mine.)

Floretta wished to receive the happiness that comes from a faithful lover; she attempted to obtain that happiness by the use of an external agency--magic. But this external agency is incapable of supplying happiness, of imposing upon another certain traits: faithfulness and honesty; and insuring certain results: happiness. Floretta's lover, dissatisfied with her fortune, ignored the demand of either justice or duty and left. In the same way, men wished for stability and security, within which they could have a certain amount of freedom to live as they chose. In pursuing this desire, they joined in a political union and set the external agencies of government and the law to procure for themselves the happiness of a peaceful state. But like the case of Floretta's unfaithful lover, these agencies can be only as dependable as the disposition and character of the people who control them. Hence, to grant certain men high offices and the rewards that go with them will not insure probity or integrity. The men who are entrusted with the control and reg-

¹Ibid.

ulation of society through the established institutions of government must adhere to a moral standard in the performance of their duties. This moral standard in turn must be instilled early and practiced generally by a society if it is to prevail. In other words, the rewards and benefits of life cannot by themselves protect a people; the people must protect themselves by maintaining through their conduct the principles of justice and honor.

The root idea in both cases here is the same: from the character of man issues the quality of all his works and acts. In the political world, then, liberty and happiness are not to be assured by civil institutions, but are to be gained only by placing good men within those institutions; in the private world of men and women, the happiness of a faithful lover can be assured only by the honest character of that lover. In neither case, in so far as Johnson could see, can there ever be absolute certainty.

In these allegories of Johnson four major tenets of his political philosophy have received expression in concrete and particularized form: 1) the important distinction between the respective ability of religion and reason to provide or guide man to happiness; 2) the potentiality of habit for good and evil; 3) the disorder resulting from insubordination to lawful authority; 4) the inefficiency of external controls in securing proper conduct in government. The first point is probably the most significant of all four

and to a certain extent is the basic premise for the other three, their true importance being always contingent upon an awareness of reason's limitations and religion's centrality. The last three beliefs are related to each other by their basis in the problem of conduct. All three, in effect, point up the same Johnsonian hypothesis: government will succeed if each individual recognizes his duty to the general good and acts upon that principle. The key to effective government, as well as to all of mankind's complex problems, is the moral consciousness of the individual.

Some of what seems arbitrary, reactionary, or merely prejudicial in Johnson's political theory becomes here more comprehensible, if not necessarily more valid. In the two works under consideration in this chapter, the clarification of Johnson's insistence on obedience and his indifference to politics seem to me the chief contribution in this regard. By obedience to lawful authority, Floretta received one of the great benefits of society--peace and order--just as a habit of obedience to the same lawful authority provided ease to those struggling up the Mountain of Existence. Since Johnson emphasized the avoidance of misery more than the achievement of happiness, Floretta and the travellers really gain by avoiding the misery of strife and roughness.

Johnson's apparent indifference to politics is clarified by the limited ability of reason, operating within any political framework, to do much more than follow the path

of religion, which will lead eventually to the only permanent happiness that exists: the Temples of Happiness after death. The incident of Floretta's unfaithful lover illustrated the weakness of all external agencies in providing happiness and explained, somewhat, why Johnson cared little for the outer form of government, but concerned himself greatly with the character of the men within it.

CHAPTER VI

THE POLITICS OF SAMUEL JOHNSON: SOCIETY, ITS BENEFITS, DISADVANTAGES, AND WEAKNESSES

i

Johnson thought the fundamental goal of government, attained usually through the exercise of legal authority by individuals possessing governmental offices, should always be the happiness of the people. The primary function and duty of authority, then, is to provide the means for the attainment of happiness. Johnson turned to Locke in deciding how this happiness is best to be promoted. Certain conditions are necessary for the growth of happiness:

It is well known that Gratitude is the Foundation of our Duty to our Country, and to our Superiors . . .
[Because] we receive Protection from them, and are maintained in the quiet Possession of our Fortunes, and the Security of our Lives.¹

In defining the end of law--the arms of government--Johnson also emphasized the practical means, or what is the same thing, the Lockean means available to government for promoting happiness.

The end of all law is suum cuique tribuere, to give to

¹"Debates," XI, 519.

everybody that which he may justly claim, and the design of all juridical maxims and institutions is to adjust and satisfy the various degrees of right which may arise in the devolutions of succession, the reciprocations of contracts, the terms or conditions of credit and of partnerships and the various combinations of accident or commerce.¹

Certain inalienable rights of man, liberty and property primarily, form the heart of Locke's system of government, and Johnson takes them over more or less completely.

That established property and inviolable freedom are the greatest of political felicities, no man can be supposed likely to deny. To depend upon the will of another, to labour for that, of which arbitrary power can prohibit enjoyment, is the state to which want of reason has subjected the brute. To be happy we must know our own rights; and we must know them to be safe.²

The function of government, as was noted earlier, is therefore to protect man, his property, and his enjoyment of that property, from the power of all men stronger than he or of one man who has established himself through strength over all others. Johnson does not here mention the "extension of commerce" which he says elsewhere is one of the great demands made upon government in England, along with "security of property, and the confirmation of liberty."³ The reason for omitting this function as one of the important duties of government is his assumption about the essential and non-essential responsibilities of government. If "human society

¹"Vinerian Lectures," in E. L. McAdam, Jr.'s, Dr. Johnson and English Law (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1951), p. 119.

²Sermon XXIV, IX, 510.

³Ibid.

has its present form" from the "care to provide against the evils, and to attain the blessings of life,"¹ then, in a world where there is "much to be endured and little to be enjoyed," the prevention of misery must be vital, while what energy is left can be devoted to the pursuit of the "little" that is to be enjoyed. Combined with this practical reason is perhaps a more compelling one: government cannot provide actual happiness to any individual, for happiness is an inner state dependent upon, finally, inner resources.

Thus it is that once Johnson has insisted that government provide men with security for their freedom and property, he goes on to say that although this security "be necessary to happiness . . . it is not sufficient,"² even in a

nation like ours, in which commerce has kindled an universal emulation of wealth, and in which money receives all the honours which are the proper right of knowledge and virtue.³

Spain provided an excellent example of the inadequacy of mere material possessions to happiness which Johnson used in the introduction he wrote for the Lilliputian Debates, the flimsy disguise used by the Gentleman's Magazine in reporting the debates in the English Parliament.⁴

¹Sermon XVIII, IX, 452.

²Sermon XXIV, IX, 511.

³Idler, No. 73, IV, 365.

⁴Johnson also used Spain to illustrate the failure of colonies to provide happiness for the mother country.

Even Iberia [Spain], a Country at the Southwest Point of Degulia [Europe], whose Inhabitants were the first Discoverers of Columbia [America], tho' she boasts herself Mistress of the richest and most fertile part of that Quarter of the World, which she secured to herself by the most dreadful Massacres and Devastations, has not yet, in all the Gold she has imported, received an Equivalent for the Numbers of her Natives sent out to people those Kingdoms her Sword has wasted; so that the whole Advantage of her mighty Conquests, is Bulk without Strength, and Pride without Power.¹

The power and strength of the Spaniards have, in effect, provided them with the opportunity to do evil to others.

Had the Spanish used their advantages properly,

when they first took possession of the newly-discovered world, . . . had [they] either the urbanity or the policy to have conciliated them by kind treatment, . . . such an accession might have been made to the power of the King of Spain as would have made him far the greatest monarch that ever yet ruled in the globe; but the opportunity was lost by foolishness and cruelty.²

Even as

there is no desire so extensive, so continual in its exertions, that possesses so many minds, or operates with such restless activity; [as] there is none that deviates into greater irregularity, or more frequently corrupts the heart of man, than the wish to enlarge possession and accumulate wealth,³

so when possessed,

liberty, if not regulated by virtue, can be only license to do evil; and property, if not virtuously enjoyed, can only corrupt the possessor, and give him the power to injure others. Trade may make us rich; but riches, without goodness, cannot make us happy.⁴

¹Quoted by Hoover, Samuel Johnson's Parliamentary Reporting (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1953), p. 177.

²An Introduction to the Political State of Great Britain, VI, 129-30.

³Sermon XVIII, IX, 453.

⁴Sermon XXIV, IX, 511.

Government, therefore, not only is limited in its ability to achieve happiness for the citizens it serves, but also can actually provide some of them with opportunity to do evil to others: to spoil the happiness of many and to destroy the basic privileges realized by government. Johnson is here forcing political theory to operate on the practical level of human experience in order to ascertain its strength and its weakness. What he finds here, as he usually does, is that government partakes of the imperfections of the men who make it up and, hence, can be no better or worse than these men are.

ii

Even if "riches and liberty" are not in themselves capable of supplying happiness, nor free from destructive potential, they are still valuable in that they do dispel the misery and unhappiness of poverty and want. The next problem for government is "how riches and liberty can be secured."

To this the politician has a ready answer, that they are to be secured by laws wisely formed, and vigorously executed.¹

This answer, however, only apparently solves the problem, for as Johnson points out,

It has appeared to some a question difficult of decision what is the use of a court of equity if our laws are right, and what is the use of laws if they are wrong. This question supposes in human institutions

¹Ibid.

a degree of excellence which they never have attained. No human law was ever perfect; it has always equity for its object, but it sometimes misses of its end.¹

Johnson explained, a trifle impatiently, to the American colonies this inevitable weakness of law and government.

That governours have sometimes been given them only that a great man might get ease from importunity, and that they have had judges, not always of the deepest learning, or the purest integrity, we have no great reason to doubt, because such misfortunes happen to ourselves. Whoever is governed, will, sometimes, be governed ill.²

It is undoubtedly "an evil" that the "innocent should be confounded with the guilty," but "it is an evil which no care or caution can prevent."³ As with riches and liberty, so with laws: their value depends wholly on the quality of the men who create them and the use to which they are put.

Government suffers an intrinsic and inevitable flaw in its structure.

The inseparable imperfection annexed to all human governments, consisted, he [Johnson] said, in not being able to create a sufficient fund of virtue and principle to carry the laws into due and effectual execution. Wisdom might plan; but virtue alone could execute. And where could sufficient virtue be found? A variety of delegated, and often discretionary, powers must be entrusted somewhere; which, if not governed by integrity and conscience, would necessarily be abused.⁴

It was by this consideration that Johnson stated:

It is, perhaps, impossible for human wisdom to go

¹"Vinerian Lectures," p. 101.

²Taxation No Tyranny, VI, 250.

³The Patriot, VI, 222.

⁴Life of Johnson, II, 118.

further, than to contrive a law of which the good is certain and uniform, and the evil, though possible in itself, yet always subject to certain and effectual restraints.¹

The attainment of any kind of perfection of government, any kind of permanent assurance of security and order for the individual under government, is impossible. The best that can be done is to provide as many safeguards as possible against the inevitable deficiencies. Even so, all

human laws, however honestly instituted, or however vigorously enforced, must be limited in their effect, partly by our ignorance, and partly by our wickedness.²

Johnson's observations did not lead him to despair of all government. In a perhaps uncommon optimistic moment, he stated:

There is reason to expect, that, as the world is more enlightened, policy and morality will, at last, be reconciled, and that nations will learn not to do what they would not suffer.³

The practical good of government, arrived primarily through obedience to the law, can be achieved only by the willingness of the people to abide by them. This willingness cannot be legislated nor promoted by any outside means but must come about through an inner conviction. Thus,

The only uniform and perpetual cause of publick happiness is publick virtue. . . . [The] deficiencies in civil life can be supplied only by religion.⁴

¹Considerations On the Corn Laws, V, 324-25.

²Sermon XXIV, IX, 512.

³Thoughts on the late Transactions respecting Falkland's Islands, VI, 184.

⁴Sermon XXIV, IX, 510; 512.

It must be remembered of course that this "perpetual cause" will never be strong enough to completely overcome the inherent evil in the world.

Infelicity is involved in corporeal nature, and interwoven with our being; and all attempts, therefore, to decline it wholly are useless and vain: the armies of pain send their arrows against us on every side; the choice is only between those which are more or less sharp, or tinged with poison of greater or less malignity; and the strongest armour which reason can supply, will only blunt their points, but cannot repel them.¹

What virtue can do is make rulers and followers persevere in their duty and in this way maintain the public peace.

Unfortunately, the present state of the world affords us little hope, that virtue can, by any government, be so strongly impressed, or so widely diffused, as to supersede the necessity of suppressing wickedness.

. . . However virtue may be encouraged or rewarded, it can never appear to all minds the shortest means of present good. There will always be those who would rather grow rich by fraud, than by diligence, and who will provide for vitious [sic] pleasures by violence, rather than by labour.²

Though a governor may promote religion by maintaining and ordering public worship, by rewarding those who are most "eminent for sanctity of life," and by encouraging in every other way possible by example and precept the value of righteousness, he cannot finally hope to effectually rule by these methods alone. He must resort to what Johnson calls "the vindictive law," the "Lex armata, that stands forth the champion of the weak, and the protectress of the innocent."³

¹Rambler, No. 32, II, 157.

²Sermon XXIV, IX, 514.

³Ibid.

The nature of the world therefore requires us to turn to this kind of law.

The world is full of fraud and corruption, rapine or malignity; interest is the ruling motive of mankind, and every one is endeavouring to increase his own stores of happiness by perpetual accumulation, without reflecting upon the numbers whom his superfluity condemns to want: in this state of things a book of morality is published, in which charity and benevolence are strongly enforced. . . . The book is applauded, and the author is preferred. . . . Let us look again upon mankind: interest is still the ruling motive, and the world is yet full of fraud and corruption, malevolence and rapine.¹

The effect of virtue is thus, while not ineffective over a long period as Johnson makes very clear in this same Adventurer, not immediately or apparently of much force. Since "the greater part of mankind are corrupt in every condition, and differ in high and low stations, only as they have more or fewer opportunities of gratifying their desires, or as they are more or less restrained by human censures,"² the necessity for law remains.

iii

Government must also use law for another reason in ruling men. Even though all members of civil society were just and virtuous, there would still arise disputes which would destroy quiet and security,

Because it may easily happen, and, in effect, will happen, very frequently, that our own private happiness may be promoted by an act injurious to others, when yet no man can be obliged, by nature, to prefer, ultimately, the happiness of others to his own.³

¹Adventurer, No. 137, IV, 140.

²Rambler, No. 172, III, 310.

³Review of Free Enquiry, VI, 71.

Force can be used to insure that a person will sacrifice some of his own happiness, but

of force, it is apparent, that the exertion of it is an immediate evil, and that prevalence at last will be no proof of justice.¹

Whereas in law,

A subject has . . . a rule of action always safe, and commonly right; and where it happens to be wrong a remedy is provided.²

The law is thus the means of establishing order and security, by replacing the judgment of one man over another with an established rule to which all men can agree.

Even in the best of civil societies, laws and government will consequently be necessary, because civil society is in reality only a group of individuals who have banded together for mutual benefit and safety by surrendering some of their private liberty for public good. But the whole system depends upon the willingness of these individuals to follow the articles of agreement. It was apparent to Johnson that this willingness was not going to be forthcoming at all times, dependent on man's imperfect nature as it was.

. . . reason and experience are always ready to inform us of our real state; but we refuse to listen to their suggestion, because we feel our hearts unwilling to obey them.³

People can generally recognize their duties but they are

¹Sermon XXIV, IX, 514.

²"Vinerian Lectures," p. 101.

³Adventurer, No. 111, IV, 115.

either not willing or able, by nature or circumstances, to perform them. Even though

The depravity of mankind is so easily discoverable, that nothing but the desert or the cell can exclude it from notice,¹

it is still true that

We frequently fall into error and folly, not because the true principles of action are not known, but because, for a time, they are not remembered.²

"Error" and "folly" are misdemeanors, slight faults that need not imply "depravity" or corruption. But these faults are unfortunately not the most common, as Johnson points out in another context.

In publick, as in private transactions, men more frequently deviate from the right, for want of virtue, than of wisdom.³

Consistency, especially in virtuous conduct, is simply not a characteristic of man, so law and government are required for all.

The wisest man is not always wise, and the best man is not always good. We all sometimes want the admonition of law, as supplemental to the dictates of reason and the suggestions of conscience.⁴

Since so much depended upon law and since the individual's obedience to that law was subject to so many disruptive and debilitating forces, Johnson analyzed at some length the

¹Rambler, No. 175, III, 322.

²Ibid.

³Observations On The Treaty, VI, 143.

⁴Sermon XXIV, IX, 515.

the process of effective enforcement. He saw that the establishment of the vindictive law and its ability to work in society

arises from the constitution of things ordained by Providence, by which man is so formed and disposed that he can suffer more than he can enjoy.¹

This principle, that "pain would be too powerful for pleasure," was responsible for creating the law, which promises "every man a prospect of living more happily by forbearing than by usurping the property of another," and which results in the repression of the "passions of anger and revenge by making their gratifications the cause of immediate misery."²

The fundamental nature of men again dictates the structure of the political state in which they live.

He [a "tragick poet"] might have said, with rigorous propriety, that no man is happy but as he is compared with the miserable; for such is the state of this world, that we find in it absolute misery, but happiness only comparative; we may incur as much pain as can possibly endure, though we can never obtain as much happiness as we might possibly enjoy.³

iv

Nevertheless, even by making great misery and pain the result of disobeying the law, society cannot make the law permanently and totally effective. In the same way, the encouragement of virtue in society cannot make men virtuous enough to obey the law, simply through their reverence for

¹"Vinerian Lectures," p. 110.

²Ibid.

³Adventurer, No. 111, IV, 105.

the rights of men that law protects. For "disobedience and perverseness" on the part of some men, and what Johnson calls "radicated wickedness" on the part of others, will undoubtedly frustrate the effect of government at various times. Now to hinder and frustrate government leads, too quickly, to the eventual chaos of anarchy, which usually leads in turn to tyranny. The natural course was this:

Power is always gradually stealing away from the many to the few, because the few are more vigilant and consistent; it still contracts to a smaller number, till in time it centres in a single person.¹

A state of anarchy simply provided the few with a good opportunity to gain power without the necessary restrictions, as the safeguards against tyranny are destroyed by the general subversion of all law. Thus, when complaining to Boswell about the decay of subordination, Johnson stated:

My hope is, that as anarchy produces tyranny, this extreme relaxation will produce freni strictio [a tight rein].²

To avoid both tyranny and anarchy, reasonable men must maintain and support government; they must stall its disintegration by obeying the law and opposing those who are obstructing government or weakening it by harsh or unnecessary criticism.

Johnson was particularly sensitive to the weaknesses that endangered the actual survival of government and was

¹Adventurer, No. 45, IV, 18.

²Life of Johnson, III, 262.

quick to criticize those who were unwittingly weakening the very supports and foundation of civil institutions. This quickness stemmed from his knowledge of the fragileness of government, from his fear that the tenuous bonds of society would be unintentionally or maliciously broken.

The good of the whole demanded that some of the private good of the parts be sacrificed. As some men were obviously going to be unwilling to make this sacrifice, the law was necessary to enforce it. The law, and the government for which it acts, depend, however, on "opinion," the cooperation of the many so the few can enforce these regulations. With this consideration in mind,

no man, who desires the publick prosperity, will inflame general resentment by aggravating minute injuries, or enforcing disputable rights of little importance.¹

By raising petty grievances and complaints into serious charges against government, the individual creates a potentially dangerous situation.

Nor is any man more an enemy to publick peace, than he who fills weak heads with imaginary claims, and breaks the series of civil subordination, by inciting the lower classes of mankind to encroach upon the higher.²

The consequences of such irresponsibility is that

he that encourages irreverence, in himself, or others to publick institutions, weakens all the human securities of peace, and all the corroborations of virtue.³

¹The Patriot, VI, 220.

²On Lay Patronage, V, 478.

³Sermon XXIV, IX, 515.

This kind of constant care for the civil institutions of society is crucial because it takes only a few men to raise a large amount of discontent, which eats at the foundation of government.

Nothing, my Lords, is more necessary to the Legislature than the Affection and Esteem of the People, all Government consists in the Authority of the Few over the Many, and Authority, therefore, can be founded only on Opinion, and must always fall to the Ground, when that which supports it is taken away.¹

The consent to be governed will not be given long if rumors and false reports are spread about the corruption, inefficiency or dangerous tendencies of any government. Since, as was shown above, many men spread these kinds of reports for their own gain and for expression of their own discontent at inferiority, then

the first duty . . . of subjects is obedience to the laws; such obedience as is the effect, not of compulsion, but of reverence; such as arises from a conviction of the instability of human virtue, and of the necessity of some coercive power, which may restrain the exorbitances of passions, and check the career of natural desires.² [As Johnson put it in another context, "every man desires to retain his own in proportion as he desires to seize what is another's, and no man can be allowed to rob, where none are willing to be robbed."³]

Johnson did not, however, think it necessary to censor all political writings, but only those which tended to provoke what modern historians have pointed out, at least for London, was a populace easily aroused and difficultly

¹"Debates," XII, 668.

²Sermon XXIV, IX, 515.

³"Vinerian Lectures," p. 108.

appeased. He makes this point in his review of a book on Roman history that had contemporary applications, The Memoirs of ~~the~~ Augustus by Thomas Blackwell.

Among other affectations of this writer, is a furious and unnecessary zeal for liberty; or rather, for one form of government as preferable to another. This, indeed, might be suffered, because political institutions are a subject in which men have always differed, and, if they continue to obey their lawful governors, and attempt not to make innovations, for the sake of their favorite schemes, they may differ forever, without any just reproach from one another.¹

It must always be remembered, especially by those who are prone to criticize slight faults, that all governments are made up of men. Hence all governments partake of the same imperfections of men and suffer their same flaws. As Johnson puts it, "all institutions are defective by nature; and all rulers have their imperfections, like other men."² One corollary of this fact is that "Every human Establishment has its Advantages and its Inconveniencies,"³ and another is "No government could subsist for a day, if single errors could justify defection."⁴

Man must be willing to put up with the faults in government for the good that government can do. If perfection is expected, then government cannot exist. To quote again one of Johnson's empirical observations:

¹Review of Memoirs of the Court of Augustus, VI, 12.

²Sermon XXIV, IX, 515.

³"Debates," XI, 629.

⁴Taxation No Tyranny, VI, 250.

If possibility of abuse be an argument against authority, no authority ever can be established: if the actual abuse destroys its legality, there is no legal government now in the world.¹

If an individual understands this radical imperfection in the basic configuration of authority and its exercise, he will also know that

it is always to be remembered, that even errors and deficiencies of authority must be treated with respect.²

v

Johnson's attitude towards imperfection in government explains his explosions against much of the political agitation of the day.

We live in an age, in which there is much talk of independence, of private judgment, of liberty of thought, and liberty of press. Our clamorous praises of liberty sufficiently prove that we enjoy it; and if, by liberty, nothing else be meant, than security from the persecutions of power, it is so fully possessed by us, that little more is to be desired, except that one should talk of it less, and use it better.³

Not that recognition of the inevitability of imperfection in government meant that one should ignore or fail to correct it, if possible. Johnson quotes Jenyns with approval on this point: "What has here been said of their [governments] imperfections and abuses, is, by no means, intended as a defence of them; every wise man ought to redress them to the utmost

¹False Alarm, VI, 159.

²Sermon XXIV, IX, 515.

³"Account of a Book Entitled, An Historical and Critical Enquiry into the Evidence Produced by the Earls of Moray and Morton against Mary Queen of Scots," VI, 80.

of his power."¹

In such a complex thing as national affairs, it is likewise to be expected that there shall occur occasional errors, that "deceptions . . . [and] negligence should sometimes find their way."² And since national affairs are complex, the government which ministers to them must be equally complex.

Governments formed by chance, and gradually improved by by such expedients, as the successive discovery of their defects happened to suggest, are never to be tried by a regular theory. They are fabricks of dissimilar materials, raised by different architects, upon different plans. We must be content with them, as they are; should we attempt to mend their disproportions, we might easily demolish, and difficultly rebuild them.³

All government is built by different men over long periods of time and has its "Parts . . . like a complicated Machine . . . fitted to each other."⁴

Johnson implies in the closing paragraph of a sermon he wrote for John Taylor many of the basic principles from which he drew his political comments and judgments.

The happiness of a nation must arise from the combined endeavours of governours and subjects. The duties of governing can be the lot of few, but all of us have the duties of subjects to perform; and every man ought to incite in himself, and in his neighbour, that obedience to the laws, and that respect to the chief magistrate, which secure and promote concord and quiet. Of this,

¹Review of Free Inquiry, VI, 74.

²Sermon XXIV, IX, 516.

³False Alarm, VI, 164.

⁴"Debates," XI, 629.

as of all other virtues, the true basis is religion. The laws will be easily obeyed by him who adds to human sanctions the obligations of conscience; and he will not easily be disposed to censure his superiors, when religion has made acquainted with his own failings.¹

Government is an institution created for the happiness of the people who originated it. It can function properly only when governors and subjects perform the respective duties of their station: the use of authority for protection and security; the obedience and respect of authority for the sake of peace and order. These duties, particularly of the subjects, will be more easily performed when each individual recognizes his own and, by extension, all other men's human failings and limitations and the concomitant need for some established authority to correct those imperfections and supply those deficiencies. Finally, religion will make man aware of his true condition and sanction the obedience which civil society asks of him.

¹Sermon IX, 516.

CHAPTER VII

RASSELAS

i

Of all the imaginative works of Johnson, Rasselas is most fully concerned with the attainment of happiness. It has been called a prose Vanity of Human Wishes, but this description is an oversimplification. That both works have much in common cannot be denied, but the somberness and gravity which is seldom, if ever, lightened in the latter is not consistently maintained in the former. Two recent studies of Rasselas, for example, discuss the comic elements in the tale. The first article finds Prince Rasselas "the antithesis of the man of common sense of the eighteenth century, and a stubborn rationalist who makes himself ridiculous by refusing to comply with the modus vivendi that has been worked out by the men of good sense of his age. . . . Thus Johnson views his dilemma as comic."¹ The second article depicts Rasselas as "novel of moral ideas, and Johnson . . . concerned with contrasting two views of life, explicitly

¹C. R. Tracy, "Democritus, Arise! A Study of Dr. Johnson's Humor," The Yale Review, XXXIX (Winter, 1950), p. 309.

condemning the one by means of dramatic irony and implicitly upholding the other. His quiet vantage point is common sense, reason tempered by an awareness of what is practical and possible in the real world."¹ It is debatable whether Rasselas can be considered a comic work as these two writers have argued, but their insistence on finding a variety of tones and a positive assertion about the possibility of leading a sane and sometimes even happy life in it balances the too heavy weight that has been placed upon the dark moral of the tale. A particularly valuable observation both men make concerns the implicit manner in which Johnson makes his positive statement. Johnson is, in other words, presenting and clarifying certain truths about life, by exploring and exploding some of the more commonly accepted falsehoods. Tracy and Whitley, the authors of these articles, arrive at certain generalizations about human conduct and destiny by analyzing the implications of the episodes of Rasselas; this kind of technique can also be used in discovering more than ethical generalizations. The implications of Rasselas set up many reverberations in the political world, to the discovery and analysis of which this chapter will be devoted.

My first division of the political theory dealt with Johnson's beliefs about the relative value of a political and non-political state of man. In Rasselas the political state

¹Alvin Whitley, "The Comedy of Rasselas," Journal of English Literary History, XXIII (March, 1956), p. 51.

is more or less taken for granted as the best way for man to live. The second division of the political theory presented Johnson's concept of the proper and improper manner for man--ruler and ruled, governors and governed--to live under government. Its concern was with specific political duties and rights. The "choice of life" receives most of the attention in Rasselas, not the manner in which to live.

Division three of the political thought presented the beneficial results of living in the political state of part one and of following the rules of conduct laid down in part two, while indicating at the same time the dangers to these benefits by the inevitable imperfections of man and government. The corresponding features of Rasselas are embodied in the possible benefits in life for the individual and the dangers in believing or trusting too much to any one thing to provide those benefits.

Rasselas could be used to illustrate in concrete form many of the political beliefs found in all three divisions, but the proportions are not equal. It is the last major division of the political thought that receives the most thorough embodiment in Rasselas. If one believes that the tale is not merely an exercise in Johnsonian pessimism but is a moral novel containing both positive and negative assertions about man's chances and abilities to attain happiness on this earth, then there is a logical basis for the deeper relationship of Rasselas and the last division of

the political theory.

In the novel, the search for happiness through the proper choice of life leads Rasselas and Nekayah into many levels and different conditions that exist in society. Some happiness is found in almost all but the lowest levels and occupations, but both Rasselas and Nekayah are constantly disappointed that it is not perfect, that is, enduring, stable, and consistent. Part of the lesson Imlac provides for them is an unveiling of this instability, and the resulting necessity for accepting this condition of instability in order to enjoy what happiness there is. The third division of the political thought which corresponds to Rasselas follows a similar pattern. Part one and two indicate the necessity and difficulties of establishing and maintaining a political state, while part three deals with the benefits--imperfect as they are--that are created in political union and promote the belief that all must accept, along with these benefits, the necessary imperfections that accompany them.

One of the arguments that claim Rasselas is a prose Vanity of Human Wishes and therefore contains little more than somber and grave reflections on the misery of life is based upon the manner in which the tale concludes. After many levels and stations in life have been investigated and found wanting, so the criticism goes, Johnson simply stops, since to go on would be a repetition of what is already a monotonous occurrence in Rasselas. The last chapter of the

tale, "The Conclusion In Which Nothing Is Concluded," closes the work ineffectually, because Johnson has not created any climax to his story, but has only repeated the same moral over and over again in various guises. If this criticism is accurate, it seriously invalidates the important connections presented in this chapter between Rasselas and the political theory, especially as I find in both works a positive statement about the happiness to be found in life.

Part of this kind of criticism comes, I believe, from placing too much emphasis on the dissatisfaction found in life by the major characters of Rasselas, and from not seeing clearly the implicit and explicit affirmation that are there. In a later part of this chapter I deal with the positive assertion of Johnson, while the articles listed above provide some persuasive arguments for the implicit affirmations that are presented by Johnson. But there is a third point to be made, I think, that will in part nullify this criticism. It concerns the structure of Rasselas, particularly the significance of the ending.

This novel possesses, it appears to me, a kind of mythic or archetypal pattern underlying the more logical arrangement of its episodes, illustrating as they do man's inevitable failure in his constant search for permanent happiness.¹ As the tale opens, Rasselas is living in a valley that he is unable to leave. It is called the Happy

¹Cf. Gwin Kolb, "The Structure of Rasselas," PMLA, LXVI (September, 1951), pp. 698-717, for a structural analysis.

Valley, for in it all desires are granted, and all pain and discomfort avoided or banished. But in this "womb" Rasselas becomes at last dissatisfied and wishes to leave. His opportunity for doing so comes through the torrential rains which flow down the mountains of the valley and fill the lake to overflowing. The rising waters force Rasselas to stay inside the palace and to spend much time with Imlac, who greatly arouses his curiosity about life outside. Through his intelligence about the outer world, Imlac is finally responsible for Rasselas's being "born" into it. After the water subsides, Rasselas and Imlac walk on the side of one of the mountains and there find rabbits who had fled the rising water. These animals had burrowed into the mountain "tending upward in an oblique line."¹ Following their example, Rasselas, with Imlac's help, burrows out of the Happy Valley through a "fissure" he has discovered.

The rest of the tale concerns the "growing up," the education of Rasselas and Nekayah into the ways of the world. First they have to learn how to act.

Imlac was forced to observe them with great vigilance, lest they should betray their rank by their unusual behaviour, and detained them several weeks in the first village, to accustom them to the sight of common mortals. (p. 234.)

Next they have to learn to speak the language.

His [Imlac's] companions (Rasselas and Nekayah), not being able to mix in the conversation, could make no

¹I, 230-31. All further references to Rasselas will be given in parenthesis after the quotation.

discovery of their ignorance or surprise, and were gradually initiated in the world, as they gained knowledge of the language.

(p. 236.)

After they have learned how to act and to speak-- after they have "grown up"--they begin their search for the best possible choice of life, for all life is motivated by a desire for happiness. They are, then, archetypes of man searching for happiness in life, everyman pursuing his common destiny. After numerous and various investigations, the novel proceeds to its close. As the now sane "mad astronomer" tells them,

Your curiosity . . . has been so general, and your pursuit of knowledge so vigorous, that novelties are not now very easily to be found; but what you can no longer procure from the living, may be given by the dead. Among the wonders of this country are the catacombs.

(pp. 304-05.)

The end of the journey of life is, naturally enough, the tomb.

In the catacombs, the soul and its prospects after death are the logical subjects. The final attitude expressed is typically Johnsonian.

That it [the soul] will not perish by any inherent cause of decay, or principle of corruption, may be shown by philosophy; but philosophy can tell no more. That it will not be annihilated by him that made it, we must humbly learn from higher authority.

(p. 308.)

Thus after the journey of life lies only conjecture, which religion alone can support. The proper attitude to take is voiced through Nekayah.

To me, said the princess, the choice of life is become less important; I hope, hereafter, to think only on the choice of eternity.

(p. 308.)

This doctrine, closely related to Johnson's distinction between politics and religion as outlined in Chapter One, distinguishes what is truly essential in life and what is not. But it should also be noted that the journey which leads to this conclusion takes the form of a search for temporal happiness. Temporal happiness is not completely depreciated here; it is "become less important."

This incident occurs in the second-to-last chapter and not in what one might expect to be the last chapter. For if there is a pattern underlying Rasselas of birth, maturity, death, and the life thereafter, then the tomb should logically be the end. But there is one more chapter which seems to end the tale upon a note of anti-climax, which makes Rasselas apparently just stop rather than coherently end. The answer to this puzzle lies, I think, in the nature of the pattern.

In the last chapter, the Nile begins its annual rise (this overflow of "water," after the "death" of the tombs in the preceding chapter, signalizes the "rebirth" that inevitably recurs in the cycle of life) and confines Rasselas, Nekayah, Pekuah, Imlac, and the astronomer to their house. After each has announced his future intentions, Johnson concludes the tale with this last paragraph.

Of these wishes, that they had formed, they well knew that none could be obtained. They deliberated awhile what was to be done, and resolved, when the inundation should cease, to return to Abissinia.

(p. 310.)

They are going to return to Abyssinia, to the place of their birth, to the "womb." A cycle has been completed; a circle has been formed, or rather, joined. The pattern is of archetypal man: birth, growth, death followed by birth and the pattern of life begins anew. Like the annual rise and fall of the Nile, man too repeats in his individual life in specific detail the general pattern of all men's lives. Thus nothing is concluded at the end of Rasselas because a circle has no end, a pattern of birth, death, and birth has no conclusion. The life of archetypal man is a constant and uninterrupted repetition of the life of individual man and the experience of one is the recurring experience of all.

If the pattern described above does exist in Rasselas, then it makes the relationship between the politics and the events in the tale a close and important one. For the political life of man, his search for happiness within a civil union, has its outline traced in more general form in the archetypal life of man. Political life is one among the many rays reflected through the prism of the general life of mankind in Rasselas.

ii

As far as the benefits of civil society were concerned, Johnson considered the security of property and freedom of the individual the greatest of political blessings, the sine qua non of happiness. Any government which could provide these things had performed one of its most

important functions and in Johnson's eyes was successful. The failure to do so was in effect the destruction of almost any chance at happiness. Man cannot be happy, according to Johnson, unless his person and property is secure, and he possesses the knowledge that it is.

Johnson embodies this idea in two separate episodes in Rasselas. In Chapter XX, "The Danger of Prosperity," Rasselas and his party, on their way into the country to visit a hermit, come upon a thick woods in which they take shelter from the heat of the sun. The woods turns out to be a cultivated forest and garden surrounding a "stately palace." The master of this pastoral paradise entertains them and makes them his guest for several days. Rasselas wonders if the master has perhaps found perfect happiness in the beauty and peace of this forest retreat.

The prince [Rasselas] now saw all the domesticks chearfull, and all the face of nature smiling round the place, and could not forbear to hope that he should find here what he was seeking; but when he was congratulating the master upon his possessions, he answered, with a sigh: "My condition has, indeed, the appearance of happiness, but appearances are delusive. My prosperity puts my life in danger; the bassa of Egypt is my enemy, incensed only by my wealth and popularity. I have been, hitherto, protected against him by the princes of the country; but, as the favor of the great is uncertain, I know not, how soon my defenders may be persuaded to share the plunder with the bassa. I have sent my treasures into a distant country, and, upon the first alarm, am prepared to follow them. Then will my enemies riot in my mansion, and enjoy the gardens which I have planted."

(p. 244)

The anxiety of his position spoils the peace of mind that Johnson often equates with happiness. The master here, for

all the appearances of happiness, unable to enjoy the "blessings" of his life, because one of the essential conditions for happiness, the security of property, or what is to Johnson almost the same thing, the assurance of the safety of property, has been violated. Thus, the political axiom that government must secure and protect the property of the individual if he is to attain any happiness finds a concrete embodiment in the anxiety and lack of happiness of the master.

An earlier episode that takes place in the Happy Valley is related more to the freedom of the individual in his pursuit of happiness than to the security of his property. In Chapter XII, "The Story of Imlac Continued," Imlac finishes telling Rasselas the story of his life; how, disgusted with society, he "resolved to hide . . . for ever from the world, and depend no longer on the opinion or caprice of others" (p. 228.) by entering the Happy Valley. Rasselas asks if he has "here found happiness at last? . . . Tell me, without reserve; art thou content with they condition? . . . All the inhabitants of this valley celebrate their lot, and, at the annual visit of the emperour, invite others to partake of their felicity." (p. 228.)

Great prince, said Imlac, I shall speak the truth; I know not one of all your attendants who does not lament the hour when he entered this retreat. . . . [They] are either corroded by malignant passions, or sit stupid in the gloom of perpetual vacancy. . . . They are weary of themselves, and of each other, and expect to find relief in new companions. They envy the liberty which their

folly has forfeited, and would gladly see all mankind
imprisoned like themselves. (*Italics mine.*)
 (p. 228.)

Johnson's belief in the necessity of government to promote its subjects' freedom is here concretely embedded in the unhappiness of those who are imprisoned in the Happy Valley. By implication, Johnson is saying that one needs personal freedom--the one blessing not enjoyed by the inhabitants of the Valley--in order to achieve happiness. One might add that freedom is not only necessary to happiness, but also necessary to growth and maturity as well. When Rasselas and his sister leave the enforced paradise of the Happy Valley and commence their intercourse with mankind in the great cities of the East, they begin to lose their ignorance and their naivete by learning some of the unpleasant truths that are essential to a mature understanding of the world. Johnson's lack of relish for the retired life ("No, Sir, when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life."¹) and Imlac's attraction to the crowded concourses of the great cities are lines leading to the same source.

In both this instance and the one cited before it, Johnson is presenting through the actions of particular men the basis of his political doctrine stated in the beginning of Chapter Six. Without property and freedom, happiness is impossible. But, as was further stated, Johnson did not believe that the granting of these conditions by government

¹Life of Johnson, III, 178.

would lead to inevitable happiness. For property and freedom were external to man, and must be used properly if they are to be of any value to him. In the political theory, the riches Spain got from the new world illustrated this belief. In Rasselas, Johnson presents the same idea in Chapter XVII, "The Prince Associates with Young Men of Spirit and Gaiety," only this time he embodies it in Rasselas's first attempt to find happiness.

In this chapter, Rasselas decides to associate with youth, since youth is the time of gladness. "I will join myself to the young men, whose only business is to gratify their desires, and whose time is all spent in a succession of enjoyments." (p. 238.) Rasselas is soon disillusioned with the life of the hedonist.

To such societies he was readily admitted, but a few days brought him back, weary and disgusted. Their mirth was without images; their laughter without motive; their pleasures were gross and sensual, in which the mind had no part; their conduct was, at once, wild and mean; they laughed at order and law, but the frown of power dejected, and the eye of wisdom abashed them. (p. 238.)

The freedom and wealth of these young men failed to bring them happiness, because neither is capable of providing it itself. Happiness is a state which cannot come from external agents, such as wealth, freedom or power, but must come from within. Certain conditions outside of man, however, must prevail before happiness can exist. As Nekayah tells Rasselas a little later, when she relates what discoveries she made in her investigation of private family life, "I did

not seek ease among the poor, because I concluded that, there, it could not be found." (p. 252.) Johnson attacks Jenyns and Pope, in his review of Jenyn's Free Inquiry, for so glibly passing over the destructive power of poverty on the human spirit.

Poverty is very gently paraphrased by want of riches [by Jenyns]. In that sense, almost every man may, in his own opinion, be poor. But there is another poverty, which is want of competence of all that can soften the miseries of life, of all that can diversify attention, or delight imagination. . . . The milder degrees of poverty are, sometimes, supported by hope; but the more severe often sink down in motionless despondence.¹

Liberty and property are necessary but not sufficient means to happiness.

The pyramids provide the clearest example of the inability of either wealth or power, property or freedom by themselves to secure happiness. In Chapter XXXII, "They Enter the Pyramid," Imlac leads Nekayah and Rasselas into the pyramids and while inside explains why he thinks they were built.

. . . no reason has ever been given adequate to the cost and labour of the work. . . . It seems to have been erected only in compliance with that hunger of the imagination, which preys incessantly upon life, and must be always appeased by some employment. Those who have already all that they can enjoy, must enlarge their desires. . . . I consider this mighty structure, as a monument of the insufficiency of human enjoyments. A king, whose power is unlimited, and whose treasures surmount all real and imaginary wants, is compelled to solace, by the erection of a pyramid, the satiety of dominion and tastelessness of pleasures, and to amuse the tediousness of declining life, by seeing thousands

¹Review of A Free Inquiry, VI, 54.

labouring without end, and one stone, for no purpose, laid upon another. Whoever thou art, that, not content with a moderate condition, imaginest happiness in royal magnificence, and dreamest that command or riches can feed the appetite of novelty, with perpetual gratifications, survey the pyramids, and confess thy folly! (Italics mine.) (p. 269.)

Liberty and property are essential but no amount of them provided by any government can promise happiness. But it must be remembered that while Johnson embodied a part of a political principle in the pyramid, it was only a part. The whole principle involved a positive assertion of the value of freedom and property, implied more than stated in the episodes of the unhappy "master" and the inhabitants of the Happy Valley. By examining Rasselas with the political theory in mind, one can avoid this kind of distortion, just as one can see more clearly other parts of Johnson's political beliefs by examining the allegories, Irene, and the poetry.

iii

If government is undeniably necessary to man in his constant labor to achieve happiness, then it must be accepted with its accompanying disadvantages. These disadvantages arise from the inevitable imperfections of government. The protection of the property and the freedom of the individual are the paramount functions of the state. But government can only be as good as the men who are invested with its power, make and carry out its law, and support its principles. Hence government is susceptible to the same imperfections

that cripple man; it is limited, as man is, by ignorance or by wickedness. Ignorance can never be completely eradicated, but wickedness can be effectually fought by morality and must be if government is to advance in effectiveness and thereby provide a greater amount of fundamental security. The quality of government will improve with the quality of men. When Johnson says that virtue is the only means to permanent happiness, he is referring not only to life after death, but to the increased effectiveness of government as more and more virtuous men assume it. Government can never achieve perfection, of course, just as man cannot: "human judgment, though it be gradually gaining upon certainty, never becomes infallible."¹

This political belief is expressed through both Imlac and Rasselas as they discourse at different times, is embodied in a particular situation, and is even given a humorous expression at one place in the tale. Imlac is the first one to present this belief.

In Chapter VIII, "The History of Imlac," Imlac begins his story by describing his father (who sounds, as one commentator puts it, suspiciously like a Whig) as a "wealthy merchant" who was "honest, frugal, and diligent, but of mean sentiments, and narrow comprehension; he desired only to be rich, and to conceal his riches, lest he should be spoiled by the governours of the province." (p. 215.) Rasselas is indignant that "merchants durst not enjoy his honest gains,

¹Preface To Shakespeare, V, 105.

for fear of losing them by the rapacity of power. Name the governour, who robbed the people, that I may declare his crimes to the emperour." (p. 215.) Imlac's answer restates the political principle discussed above.

Sir, said Imlac, your ardour is the natural effect of virtue animated by youth: the time will come when you will acquit your father, and perhaps, hear with less impatience of the governour. Oppression is, in the Abissinian dominions, neither frequent nor tolerated; but no form of government has been yet discovered, by which cruelty can be wholly prevented. Subordination supposes power on one part, and subjection on the other; and if power be in the hands of men, it will, sometimes, be abused. The vigilance of the supreme magistrate may do much, but much will still remain undone. He can never know all the crimes that are committed, and can seldom punish all that he knows.
(pp. 215-16.)

The ignorance of man, his inability simply to know enough, is an inevitable limitation of government. Significantly, Rasselas, at this point in the tale still a novice who has not left the Happy Valley, says, "This . . . I do not understand, but I had rather hear thee than dispute." (p. 216.) After he has lived in the outside world and has investigated "High Stations" in his search for happiness, Rasselas begins to understand, or least Johnson allows him to repeat Imlac's sentiments for Nekayah's benefit.

In Chapter XXVII, "Disquisition Upon Greatness," Rasselas has just heard Nekayah tell of the many discords and various kinds of unhappiness in domestic life and is convinced that she is mistaken. Happiness must reside in "seats of humble privacy, and placid obscurity," because the more power a man exercises, the more discontent he will arouse in

those who are not favored by this power. Nekayah answers that this discontent "which is thus unreasonable, I hope, that I shall always have spirit to despise, and you power to repress." (p. 256.)

Discontent, answered Rasselas, will not always be without reason under the most just and vigilant administration of publick affairs. None, however attentive, can always discover that merit, which indigence or faction may happen to obscure; and none, however powerful, can always reward it. Yet, he that sees inferiour desert advanced above him, will naturally impute that preference to partiality or caprice; and, indeed, it can scarcely be hoped that any man, however magnanimous by nature, or exalted by condition, will be able to persist, for ever, in fixed and inexorable justice of distribution; he will sometimes indulge his own affections, and sometimes those of his favourites; he will permit some to please him who can never serve him; he will discover in those whom he loves, qualities which, in reality, they do not possess; and to those, from whom he receives pleasure, he will, in his turn, endeavour to give it. . . . He that has much to do will do something wrong, and, of that wrong must suffer the consequences; and, if it were possible that he should always act rightly, yet, when such numbers are to judge of his conduct, the bad will censure and obstruct him by malevolence, and the good sometimes by mistake.

(p. 256.)

The nature of man must be considered in any discussion of government, since government is the power of a few men over the many. These few are bound to be sometimes weak, sometimes unjust, sometimes ignorant, and sometimes misguided. The power that they wield in the name of government must by these imperfections be sometimes exercised unfairly. All government is consequently imperfect. Rasselas has apparently learned from experience what Imlac told him earlier.

This belief about the inevitable inadequacies of

government is embodied in a particular episode in Chapter XXIV, "The Prince Examines The Happiness of High Stations," and may be considered one of the experiences which validated for Rasselas Imlac's earlier statement of the same doctrine. In this chapter, Rasselas began his investigation of "High Stations" to discover whether true happiness lived there. He thought, before he started his inspection, that some kind of satisfaction or happiness probably resided in high employment, but he soon found himself mistaken.

. . . he found that almost every man, who stood high in employment, hated all the rest, and was hated by them, and that their lives were a continual succession of plots and detections, stratagems and escapes, faction and treachery. Many of those, who surrounded the bassa, were sent only to watch and report his conduct; every tongue was muttering censure, and every eye was searching for a fault.

(p. 250.)

Allowing for certain "oriental" excesses, this presentation of life at court embodies the difficulties even a good governor, much less a bad one, would have in maintaining order and administering justice. All men to a certain degree, in Johnson's view often a high rather than a low one, were driven to this kind of activity in political life as well as in any other. One had to expect it and if possible, allow for it, by not expecting government to provide permanent or enduring security. Government simply must fail at some time.

Johnson expresses this belief in a humorous context during the episode of the "mad astronomer." Near the end of Rasselas, Imlac introduces the story of the brilliant

astronomer who has become so deranged that he thinks he controls the weather and seasons. He is getting old and Imlac is the first friend he has found who he thinks is capable of discharging this great duty after his death. He instructs Imlac in the proper methods of the task.

I [the astronomer] have diligently considered the position of the earth and sun, and formed innumerable schemes, in which I changed their situation. I have sometimes turned aside the axis of the earth, and sometimes varied the ecliptick of the sun: but I have found it impossible to make a disposition, by which the world may be advantaged; what one region gains, another loses by any imaginable alteration, even without considering the distant parts of the solar system, with which we are unacquainted. Do not, therefore, in thy administration of the year, indulge thy pride by innovation; do not please thyself with thinking, that thou canst make thyself renowned to all future ages, by disordering the seasons. The memory of mischief is no desirable fame. Much less will it become thee to let kindness or interest prevail. Never rob other countries of rain to pour it on thine own. For us the Nile is sufficient. (pp. 291-92.)

Even with magic, there is no hope for perfection. Not all can be satisfied; the best that can be done is to preserve the good that has already been gained. The madness of the astronomer has not stopped him from testing his theory--his magic in this case--by experience, and his conclusion is therefore sane though madly expressed.

In Imlac and Rasselas's speeches, in the actual government of the province, in the episode of the mad astronomer, Johnson has presented or embodied his conviction that all government is imperfect and that from this imperfection must arise discontent and the possible destruction of any enduring happiness. Thus one should not and cannot expect enduring

happiness through government on this earth.

The possibilities of securing protection, then, are limited, but they are not necessarily bound to any fixed limit. For the imperfection of government is the imperfection of man, and man's imperfection arises from his ignorance and his wickedness. Education might do much for ignorance, but the really vital problem was the moral regeneration of man. If this could be accomplished, then government and the blessings it secures, would become more stable and enduring. Were men good, then the government which they created would likewise be good, and the achievement of happiness would be much easier.

Johnson embodies this idea in one of Nekayah's adventures as she investigates "private life" to see if happiness resides there. She tells Rasselas that "if a kingdom be, as Imlac tells us, a great family, a family, likewise, is a little kingdom, torn with factions, and exposed to revolutions." (p. 253.) With this happy beginning, Nekayah goes on to catalogue the varied miseries that accompany family life. She ends thus:

Thus parents and children, for the greatest part, live on to love less and less; and, if those whom nature has thus closely united are the torments of each other, where shall we look for tenderness and consolation.

(p. 254.)

Rasselas is not unexpectedly shaken at Nekayah's recitation and asks her if discord is a "natural necessity" in the most tender of all relations.

Domestic discord, answered she, is not inevitably and fatally necessary; but yet is not easily avoided. We seldom see that a whole family is virtuous: the good and evil cannot well agree; and the evil can yet less agree with one another; even the virtuous fall, sometimes to variance, when their virtues are of different kinds, and tending to extremes.

(p. 254.)

Nekayah's point here is that only where each individual in the family fulfills his responsibilities and acts according to a proper and just code can there exist peace and concord. The analogous political situation occurs where the same kind of proper conduct in government is necessary if it is to function correctly by providing the harmony and order within the state that happiness needs to live. The only perpetual cause of public happiness is public virtue, Johnson believes. He embodies that belief through Nekayah's description of the family, where the only perpetual cause of private happiness is private virtue.¹

iv

Imperfect as government is, it is still a prerequisite to the achievement of any happiness: man's reason--inner government as opposed to outer--is simply incapable of controlling him. Johnson's analysis of the mind at the beginning of Chapter XLIV, "The Dangerous Prevalence of

¹Johnson constantly returns to the family for analogies when he discusses problems of government, which method guarantees a certain practical, matter-of-fact validity to his beliefs, but which at the same time limits their value when the children in the analogy, e.g., the American colonies, grow up and demand their adult privileges. See pp. 162-63 of Chapter Five for a further discussion of this point.

Imagination," is a prelude to his description of the manner in which the astronomer has become mad, but it is applicable to all mankind and, consequently, is important in a consideration of his political beliefs.

Disorders of intellect . . . happen much more often than superficial observers will easily believe. Perhaps, if we speak with rigorous exactness, no human mind is in its right state. There is no man, whose imagination does not, sometimes, predominate over his reason, who can regulate his attention wholly by his will, and whose ideas will come and go at his command. No man will be found in whose mind airy notions do not, sometimes, tyrannize, and force him to hope or fear beyond the limits of sober probability. All power of fancy over reason, is a degree of insanity; but, while this power is such as we can controul and repress, it is not visible to others, nor considered as any depravation of the mental faculties: it is not pronounced madness, but when it comes ungovernable, and apparently influences speech or action.

(pp. 292-93.)

This belief about man's nature made Johnson certain that government and law would always be necessary, since man would never be completely morally regenerated. There would always be some who would refuse to abide by the settled rules of society and attempt to "grow rich" by fraud or violence. To control these men, government was instituted in the first place, and to maintain that control, government and law would always be necessary. Even among just and honest men, this need would still exist, since man's limited knowledge and reason could give him only limited vision and opinions. A man might honestly believe himself in the right therefore through ignorance or misguidance. Law, instead of force, would be the rule of conduct to settle this kind of dispute. Finally, wise or unwise, just or unjust, men simply were not

consistent and therefore would not be depended upon to do any one thing all the time. Since society was a group of people banded together to preserve themselves from attacks by others or by themselves, all must contribute, either liberty, time, or money, or all three, to the good of the whole. Reason might tell a man a sacrifice was necessary, but through ignorance, wickedness, or inconsistency in virtue, he might not be willing to make it. Thus government and law were necessary to enforce the sacrifice, to make all contribute their share.

The example of the mad astronomer that Imlac uses in his analysis of the nature of man is only one example of the frailty of human nature and the necessity for objective rules and regulations, established by the civil institutions of society in order to control man. Involved in this belief about man's nature and the political consequences of that belief is Johnson's relation to several of the intellectual movements of his day, movements which spring from different attitudes and ideas about the nature of man. Some of these will be pointed out in this section and Johnson's relation to them illustrated through episodes in Rasselas and the political beliefs there embodied.

The first incident that embraces the political principles outlined above occurs in Chapter XVIII, "The Prince Finds a Wise and Happy Man." One day Rasselas enters a school "of declamation" where "professors read lectures to

their auditory." One particular sage attracts his attention as he "discoursed, with great energy, on the government of passions."

He showed, with great strength of sentiment, and variety of illustration, that human nature is degraded and debased, when the lower faculties predominate over the higher; that when fancy, the parent of passions, usurps dominion of the mind, nothing ensues but the natural effect of unlawful government, perturbation and confusion; that she betrays the fortress of the intellect to rebels, and excites her children to sedition against reason, their lawful sovereign.

(pp. 239-40.)

After this warning of the dangers to man if he lets reason succumb to passion, the sage lists the benefits of the rule of reason.

He then communicated the various precepts given, from time to time, for the conquest of passion, and displayed the happiness of those who had obtained the important victory, after which man is no longer the slave of fear, nor the fool of hope; is no more emaciated by envy, inflamed by anger, emasculated by tenderness, or depressed by grief; but walks on calmly through the tumults, or privacies of life, as the sun pursues alike his course through the calm or the stormy sky.

(p. 240.)

The sage's final counsel is for all his listeners to adhere as closely as possible to this ideal.

He exhorted his hearers to lay aside their prejudices, and arm themselves against the shafts of malice or misfortune, by invulnerable patience; concluding, that this state only was happiness, and that this happiness was in every one's power.

(p. 240.)

This denigration of the passions and elevation of the reason is a form of stoicism, a theory of conduct current in Johnson's age. Johnson was familiar with the writings of the Stoics, for example, Rambler, No. 2 and No. 17 for

citations of Epictetus; No. 28 for Seneca; and No. 52 for Lipsius, the "great modern master of stoick philosophy."¹ He even "approaches Christian stoicism" in his "praise of resolution and patience"² but he found the stoic ideal of indifference inefficacious in life. He says in Rambler, No. 32, the "sect of ancient philosophers, . . . the scholars of Zeno,"

removed pain, poverty, loss of friends, exile, and violent death, from the catalogue of evils; and passed, in their haughty style, a kind of irreversible decree, by which they forbade them to be counted any longer among the objects of terrour or anxiety, or to give any disturbance to the tranquillity of a wise man. This edict was, I think, not universally observed.³

For Johnson the truth was this:

The controversy about the reality of external evils is now at an end. That life has many miseries, and that those miseries are, sometimes at least, equal to all the powers of fortitude, is now universally confessed.⁴

The pain of life is not to be resisted or lightened by declaring it non-existent, a method by which the stoics "endeavour to grow eminent by singularity, and employ their strength in establishing opinions opposite to nature."⁵ One should rather recognize that

The great remedy which heaven has put in our hands is patience, by which, though we cannot lessen the torments of the body, we can, in a great measure, preserve the peace of the mind, and shall suffer only the natural and genuine force of an evil, without heightening its acrimony,

¹II, 250.

²A. D. McKillop, English Literature From Dryden To Burns (Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1948), p. 330.

³II, 156.

⁴Ibid., p. 157.

⁵Ibid.

or prolonging its effect.¹

The popularity of the stoical position has been shown by Gwin Kolb. As he says,

. . . the effectiveness of the whole series [the conversion, the doubt, and then the disillusionment of Rasselas in his experience with the sage] is enhanced by many reflections, in thought and diction, of positions set forth in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English translations and adaptations of classical stoic philosophy.²

Kolb instances many examples of parallel phrasing and close resemblances in diction and metaphor between the sage's comments and stoical publications preceding Rasselas.

Now similar views of human nature, utilizing the same 'government' metaphor as that employed by Johnson's sage, appear in at least eight stoical and neo-stoical works published between 1594 and 1745.³

Johnson exposes the vitiating error in this current philosophical stoicism through Imlac's warning to Rasselas,

Be not too hasty . . . to trust, or to admire, the teachers of morality: they discourse like angels, but they live like men.

(pp. 240-41.)

Rasselas does not approve of Imlac's skeptical attitude, but its truth is soon forced upon him. On his next visit to the sage, Rasselas finds him "in a room half-darkened, with his eyes misty, and his face pale."

Sir, said he, your arrival comes at a time when all human friendship is useless; what I suffer cannot be remedied, what I have lost cannot be supplied. My daughter, my

¹Ibid.

²"The Use of Stoical Doctrine In Rasselas, Chapter XVIII," Modern Language Notes, LXVIII (November, 1953), 440.

³Ibid.

only daughter, from whose tenderness I expected all the comforts of my age, died last night of a fever. My views, my purpose, my hopes are at an end: I am now a lonely being, disunited from society.¹

(p. 241.)

Rasselas wonders that the sage does not practice the theory that he had preached so cogently in the hall. He tells the sage that "mortality is an event by which a wise man can never be surprised: we know that death is always near, and it should, therefore, always be expected. . . . Has wisdom no strength to arm the heart against calamity? Consider, that external things are naturally variable, but truth and reason are always the same." (p. 241.) The answer Rasselas receives destroys the stoic doctrine he has so completely embraced.

What comfort, said the mourner, can truth and reason afford me? Of what effect are they now, but to tell me, that my daughter will not be restored?

(p. 241.)

The sage's dejection and misery illustrate the belief that Johnson made the basis of this important political principle. Man cannot live by reason alone. He is imperfect, subject to passion's force and appetite's sway. His reason can guide him, but it cannot compel him nor enable him to do what he knows is proper or right. The sage's inability to control his passions is only an analogue to the

¹Kolb remarks that death, of a "friend or relative," or even of "the philosopher himself" was a "subject close to the hearts of earlier stoics . . . in that it affords possibly the supreme test of fidelity to stoical principles." (Kolb, MLN, p. 446.)

infinite number of ways men are forced from the path of reason. In the political world, Johnson utilized this observation by setting up government and law as a necessity to control man, because man cannot always control himself. In terms of historical relevance, this episode places Johnson in opposition to the stoical doctrine which Kolb pointed out as prominent in his age. This episode also makes clear why Johnson rejected this doctrine: he saw that on the practical level of human affairs this theory would not work; it did not fit the facts of experience as they presented themselves to the eye of man.

Arthur Lovejoy in an article entitled "'Pride' in Eighteenth Century Thought" discusses what is in effect the sin of the sage in this episode: pride. The invective against this sin by so many eighteenth century writers stems in part from certain ideas which Lovejoy shows to be current in the age. The single most important idea he finds, "the most characteristic and influential of all eighteenth century ideas," is the "so-called 'principle of continuity,' lex continui, one of the components of the concept of the Great Chain of Being."¹

According to this conception, the world is necessarily a plenum formarum, a system

Where all must full or not coherent be,
And all that rises, rise in due degree.

¹Arthur Lovejoy, Essays in the History of Ideas (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1948), p. 64.

In other words, every logically possible kind of being, through all the infinite graded scale of conceivable "natures" between Deity and nonentity, must necessarily exist; and between any two adjacent links in the chain there can be only infinitesimal differences.¹

In ethics "the tradition of ethical naturalism which had been handed down especially through Erasmus and Montaigne readily combined with the idea of the graded scale of being i.e., the principle of continuity."² Man should recognize the limitations of his nature and stay within them; he should not try to rise above his "nature," since he cannot and his failure is compounded by the sin of breaking the chain by leaving his appointed place in it.

"Pride," then, in an especially important sense, meant a sort of moral overstrain, the attempt to be unnaturally good and immoderately virtuous, to live by reason alone. Erasmus and Montaigne had come to have an antipathy to this lofty and strenuous moral temper through a direct revulsion against the revived Stoicism in fashion in the late Renaissance; and the Stoics passed in the eighteenth century for the proverbial embodiments of "pride" in this sense.³

Johnson is indicting the sage for the sin of "pride" through the sage's inability to practice his superior stoical theory in his own life. An interesting point here is that Johnson had two years earlier in 1757 rejected the chain of being concept in his review of Jenyns's Free Enquiry. Hence, he differs from Pope and Jenyns (Johnson notes particularly

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 67.

³Ibid., pp. 67-68.

Jenyns's closeness to Pope's reasoning in the Essay on Man and calls Jenyns merely a "paraphrase" in one place) in his reasoning and his grounds for criticism of the stoic position. It would seem that Johnson substituted experiential observation and testing for the theory of continuity in this, and other, instances.

To quote Lovejoy again:

Man must not attempt to transcend the limitations of his "nature"; and his nature, though not the same as that of the animals below him in the scale, is close to it. "Reason" has a part in the conduct of human life, but it is an ancillary part. Pope devotes many lines of versified argumentation to showing that the motive-power and the principal directive force in man's life is--and should be--not reason, but the complex of instincts and passions which make up our "natural" constitution.¹

Johnson, I think, would reject the subordinate role assigned to reason here, although he would agree to its inherent limitations. But his agreement would arise from his observations of this weakness as it showed itself in the day to day lives of men, as it showed itself in a sage who lost his daughter and found his reason incapable of comprehending or consoling him for the loss. Both Pope and Johnson are classicists, or neo-classicists to be more accurate, but this label seems to be hiding some significant differences (Swift could be coupled with Pope here, also, I think). A major one, if this instance is any indication, would be their approach to reason, its significance and role, and its limitations in life. There is perhaps a need for an "On the Discriminations of

¹Ibid., p. 67.

Neo-Classicisms," just as there was for Lovejoy's "On the Discriminations of Romanticisms."

Johnson gave his solution to the problem of man's misery on this earth its final form in the concluding lines of The Vanity of Human Wishes, a solution he only hints at in Rasselas. It takes the form, as all "final" solutions do in this life for Johnson, of a "religious" as opposed to a "rational" stoicism. The lines are:

Where then shall Hope and Fear their objects find?
Must dull Suspence corrupt the stagnant mind?
Must helpless man, in ignorance sedate,
Roll darkling down the torrent of his fate?
Must no dislike alarm, no wishes rise,
No cries attempt the mercies of the skies?
Enquirer, cease, petitions yet remain,
Which heav'n may hear, nor deem religion vain.
Still raise for good the supplicating voice,
But leave to heav'n the measure and the choice,
Safe in his pow'r, whose eyes discern afar
The secret ambush of a specious pray'r.
Implore his aid, in his decisions rest,
Secure whate'er he gives, he gives the best.
Yet when the sense of sacred presence fires,
And strong devotion to the skies aspires
Pour forth thy fervours for a healthful mind,
Obedient passions, and a will resign'd;
For love, which scarce collective man can fill;
For patience sov'reign o'er transmuted ill;
For faith, that panting for a happier seat,
Counts death kind Nature's signal of retreat:
These goods for man the laws of heav'n ordain,
These goods he grants, who grants the pow'r to gain;
With these celestial wisdom calms the mind,
And makes the happiness she does not find.

(ll. 343-368.)

v

One other episode is clearly related to Johnson's concept of the limitations of reason and the corollary political principle drawn from it. This incident occurs in

Chapter XXII, "The Happiness of a Life Led According to Nature." In this chapter, Rasselas goes to an "assembly of learned men" where he relates the story of the hermit whom he and his party visited in the country. They found that the hermit not only was not happy, but rejected solitude and returned to the city with them. One of the "learned men" commented:

. . . [he] thought it likely, that the hermit would, in a few years, go back to his retreat, and, perhaps, if shame did not restrain, or death intercept him, return once more from his retreat into the world: "For the hope of happiness," said he, "is so strongly impressed, that the longest experience is not able to efface it. Of the present state, whatever it be, we feel, and are forced to confess, the misery; yet, when the same state is again at a distance, imagination paints it as desirable. But the time will come, when desire will be no longer our torment, and no man shall be wretched, but by his own fault."

(pp. 247-48.)

This passage states concisely two of Johnson's fundamental beliefs about life. One, the dream and desire of happiness never leave the minds of men; two, this longing will never be completely gratified on earth, but must await its perfect fulfillment in a later life. The reaction of another learned man to the above quoted statement expresses in a different form Johnson's awareness of reason's weakness by ridiculing the growing popular belief in the innate goodness of man.

This [the condition of happiness after death], said a philosopher, who had heard him with tokens of great impatience, is the present condition of a wise man. The time is already come, when none are wretched, but by their own fault. Nothing is more idle, than to inquire

after happiness, which nature has kindly placed within our reach. The way to be happy is to live according to nature, in obedience to that universal and unalterable law, with which every heart is originally impressed; which is not written on it by precept, but engraven by destiny, not instilled by education, but infused at our nativity. He that lives according to nature will suffer nothing from the delusions of hope, or importunities of desire; he will receive and reject with equability of temper; and act or suffer, as the reason of things shall alternately prescribe. Other men may amuse themselves with subtle definitions, or intricate ratiocinations. Let them observe the hind of the forest, and the linnet of the grove; let them consider the life of animals, whose motions are regulated by instinct; they obey their guide and are happy. Let us therefore, at length, cease to dispute, and learn to live; throw away the incumbrance of precepts, which they, who utter them, with so much pride and pomp, do not understand, and carry with us this simple and intelligible maxim: That deviation from nature is deviation from happiness.

(p. 248.)

There are actually two doctrines being expressed in this speech, which stem from the movements in literary history called sentimentalism and primitivism. Since I intend to discuss the rise of sentimentalism and Johnson's position in relation to it in the last chapter of this dissertation and since the primitivistic qualities are strongly expressed in this speech, I shall discuss here only the latter belief and its relation to Johnson's attitude in his political theory.

Primitivism can be defined as "the exaltation of a state of life in which man depends upon his natural powers exerted in a simple society and an uncomplicated environment greatly modified by civilization."¹ The desire to

¹McKillop, p. 361.

live according to "Nature's Simple Plan,"¹ "the idealization of primitive life" was not of course new; "The Greeks and Romans had conceived of human history as beginning with a Golden Age and then progressively declining."² In the eighteenth century, one of the "slightly over-ripe stages of cultures . . . in which one yearns for simplicity; away from the corruptions of civilization to an imaginary primeval innocence,"³ there were various reasons for the upsurge of this idea.

The classically oriented education and training of the age kept alive many of the primitivistic notions of antiquity, which in turn served to sanction their application in the eighteenth century. As one well known student of the period remarks,

Even in the works of learned authors it is sometimes still possible to find indications of the supposition that primitivism was essentially a novelty in the seventeenth or eighteenth century; . . . The texts [of Greek and Roman classics] in the following pages will at least suffice to show that most of the various aspects of primitivistic thought conspicuous in those centuries had their counterparts in classical antiquity; and since most modern writers before the present century had more or less classical education, it may frequently be presumed--and is in numerous cases fairly evident

¹The phrase "is from an anonymous poem on Otaheite, published in 1774." (C. B. Tinker, Nature's Simple Plan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1922), p. vi.

²Louis Bredvold, The Literature of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 107.

³Hoxie Fairchild, The Noble Savage (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928), p. 2.

from similarities in particular expressions or turns of thought--that these counterparts were also the originals.¹

Another force which encouraged and often quite erroneously heightened the bliss of primitive people was the great amount of travel literature that arose from the many voyages and discoveries of Johnson's age.² These voyages were expected to find

Man in a state of nature, the Indian with untutored mind, [who] was . . . a noble creature--indeed, the noblest work of God. Take him untouched by the finger of civilisation, and you find in him a potential perfection.³

In the realm of politics, the social contract theory which Locke, among others, used as the basis of the state led sometimes to the praise of the earlier phases of man's political union as opposed to the present corruption and injustice to which society had degenerated. Rousseau has been described as advocating a complete dissolution of the state and return to the state of nature in which man was most happy. Lovejoy has shown in an article entitled "The Supposed Primitivism of Rousseau's Discourse on Inequality"⁴

¹A. O. Lovejoy and George Boas, A Documentary History of Primitivism and Related Ideas (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1935), p. xi.

²As C. B. Tinker points out, the 1760's alone saw the "expeditions of Commodore Byron, Captain Cartwright, James Bruce, Captain Tobias Furneaux, Captain Wallis, and Lieutenant (later Captain) Cook." (Tinker, pp. 5-6.)

³Tinker, p. 89.

⁴In Essays in the History of Ideas, pp. 14-37.

that Rousseau was not advocating a complete return to the "state of nature," in effect the state of an animal or a brute, but a partial return to the "patriarchial stage of human society . . . [where] the only government was that of the family."

Men lived in loose, unorganized village groups, gaining their subsistence by hunting or fishing and from the natural fruits of the earth, and finding their amusement in spontaneous gatherings for song and dance.¹

Even so, Rousseau's formula was for a return to an earlier, less sophisticated, less "learned" and "educated" state, which is an integral element in primitivism, particularly of a variety that has been termed "cultural."

Lovejoy and Boas distinguish between two kinds of primitivism--cultural and chronological. The latter is

a kind of philosophy of history, a theory, or a customary assumption, as to the time--past or present or future--at which the most excellent condition of human life, or the best state of the world in general, must be supposed to occur.²

Cultural primitivism, on the other hand, is

the discontent of the civilized with civilization, or with some conspicuous and characteristic feature of it. It is the belief of men living in a relatively highly evolved and complex cultural condition that a life far simpler and less sophisticated in some or in all respects is a more desirable life.³

The procedure for happiness prescribed by the con-

¹Ibid., p. 29.

²Boas and Lovejoy, p. 1.

³Ibid., p. 7.

fidest sage is a variant of "cultural" primitivism. He sniffs at "precept" and "education"; he sneers at "subtle ratiocination" and the "incumbrance" of maxims. His prescription is the essentially primitivistic one of returning to the "simplicity" of the "natural" man or animal, by shedding the cramping and deadening garments of civilized education. At the bottom of this reasoning rests a belief in the innate goodness of man, for if a man can assure happiness and contentment for himself by living according to the "universal and unalterable law, with which every heart is originally impressed," in accordance with his impulses and instincts ungoverned by civilized restrictions, then these same instincts and impulses must be inherently good. All man must do to achieve happiness is to live as his own nature dictates.

Johnson has thus juxtaposed two interpretations of the nature of man, the former served up in a few concise statements drawn from experience about the inaccessibility of permanent happiness, the unremitting desire for it, and the final resolution only after death, while the latter is expressed in vague terms and nebulous generalities about "following nature" and discarding "precept." The first philosopher's statement about man's insatiable desire receives political expression in Johnson's insistence that man must be ruled by government and law, because reason is not able to discern the true nature of reality. Imagination

deludes reason and misguides man. His nature is variable, changeable. He always wants to change to something which experience has already proved to be no better than the present state (the "Lust for Innovation" that Johnson cited as a dangerous attitude if held by the people because it led to attacks on government, which led in turn to instability and disorder).¹

Rasselas is naturally convinced that the second philosopher has the answer to his search for "felicity." Through his further examination of this philosopher's theory of man, Johnson makes explicit his attitude toward cultural primitivism and its basis in a theory of innate goodness. Rasselas, already a believer, asks only one question of the sage: "Let me only know, what it is to live according to nature."

When I find young men so humble and so docile, said the philosopher, I can deny them no information which my studies have enabled me to afford. To live according to nature, is to act always with due regard to the fitness arising from the relations and qualities of causes and effects; to concur with the great and unchangeable scheme of universal felicity; to cooperate with the general disposition and tendency of the present systems of things.

(pp. 248-49.)

The only intelligible thing said, or rather implied, here resides in the parody of the great chain of being concept and the "optimism" that was based on it especially in such

¹"Of the present state whatever it be, we feel, and are forced to confess, the misery, yet, when the same state is again at a distance, imagination paints it as desirable." Rasselas, I, 247.

phrases as "unchangeable scheme of universal felicity" and "general disposition and tendency of the present system of things."¹ The most that can be deduced from the explanation of the philosopher is something like this: things are as they are and this is the way they should be. Johnson probably had in mind when he wrote this chapter a criticism of Jenyns he made in his review:

The shame [of a work like Jenyns's] is, to impose words, for ideas, upon ourselves or others. To imagine, that there is any difference between him that gives no reason, and him that gives a reason, which, by his own confession, cannot be conceived.²

The failure of labels to discriminate accurately occurs here again in this discussion. Johnson rejected the second philosopher's analysis of man and his route to happiness because the mistrust of emotions as a basis for ethical conduct and the insistence on reason, aided by religion, as a guide from them were essential beliefs in Johnson's interpretation of life. As one historian of sensibility says, "He would not trust the conduct of either himself or of others to the guidance of mere inclinations of benevolence or mere feelings of sympathy for other people. Dr. Johnson, like Bishop Butler, insisted that the inclination to goodness needs the support of the idea of obligation involved in the

¹See A. O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being, Chapter VII: "The Principle of Plenitude and Eighteenth-Century Optimism," and "Optimism and Romanticism," PMLA, XXXXII, 921-45, for his scholarly exposition of this belief.

moral judgment."¹ In this sense, he is a rationalist, a believer in the use of reason to find the truth. Pope would also reject the philosopher's analysis, or at least a part of it, but in his case, the rejection would be based on the interpretation of the word "nature." Rasselas's philosopher uses "nature" to refer to that part of the world outside of man: the animals, birds, and by implication, primitive, uneducated man. Nature for Pope would primarily mean the immutable order of the universe, which was at all times and in all places the same, and was discoverable by any man through the use of reason, which is also the same in all men. Lovejoy describes this kind of "nature" under the heading of "Uniformitarianism."

The reason, it is assumed to be evident, is identical in all men; and the life of reason therefore, it is tacitly or explicitly inferred, must admit of no diversity. Differences in opinion or in taste are evidence of error, and universality of appeal, or of acceptance tends to be taken, not merely as an effect, but as in itself a mark or criterion, of truth. . . . That which is "according to nature" meant, first and foremost, that which corresponds to this assumption of uniformity; it is perhaps still necessary to repeat that in the most frequent of the normative uses of the term "nature" in the Enlightenment, the principal element in the signification of the word is uniformity.²

Thus for Pope, to look to nature for correct principles of conduct did not at all mean "to observe the kind of

¹Louis Bredvold, The Natural History of Sensibility (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962), p. 72.

²Lovejoy, Essays . . . , pp. 79-80

the forest." It meant to look at man and his works through the ages to find what has endured, that is, what is universal.

Now both Pope and Johnson are rationalistic in their rejection, since each uses the faculty of reason to achieve the objective--happiness, knowledge, ethical principles--which the philosopher believes to be reached through intuition and emotion. But between Pope and Johnson there exists a gulf almost as wide as between them and the philosopher. For Johnson insisted that even if some doctrine, principle, or belief had endured, its validity was still to be tested in the realm of practical experience. Pope, on the other hand, does not demand empirical validation of a theory, at least in the Essay on Man, so long as it is rational--logically symmetrical and coherent. There are two kinds of rationalism involved in this case and a distinction between them is necessary.

Johnson's final rejection of the philosopher is presented through Rasselas's reaction to the hopeless directions for living according to nature.

The prince soon found that this was one of the sages whom he should understand less, as he heard him longer, He, therefore, bowed, and was silent, and the philosopher, supposing him satisfied, and the rest vanquished, rose up and departed, with the air of a man that cooperated with the present system.

(p. 249.)

Rasselas could not understand the sage's theory when it was forced down into the world of experience and fact.

Like many speculative theories--an earlier example is that of the would-be flier in the Happy Valley--this one sounds persuasive, but specific application proves it to be impossible of fulfillment. Rasselas's inability to comprehend the instructions of the sage is Johnson's way of indicating what he considers the basic failure of this theory: it is meaningless because it is not based on reality, on the facts of life perceptible to all observers. Johnson's rejection of this theory, and his implicit affirmation of the first sage's analysis, by extension logically rejects any belief that the civil institutions of society have corrupted man, and that he need only free himself from them to attain complete happiness.

The converse is rather the more true. Whatever happiness man has attained has come about through government and through law, and only an ignorant, a naive, or misguided man could think otherwise. For only these kinds of people would not be able to discern the true nature of man, its inconsistency, its unruliness, its unstable mixture of passion and reason. Considering this evidence, Johnson insists on the necessity of law and government.

vi

The basic weakness of government lies in the ability of deceitful and sinful men to destroy it. Since this weakness has already been partially revealed in the discussion of the duties of the subjects of a state,¹ one

¹Supra, Chapter Five, pp. 160-64.

incident which occurs in Chapter XLVI, "The Princess and Pekuah Visit the Astronomer," will adequately illustrate this concept. Nekayah and Pekuah desire to visit the mad astronomer, whose story as told by Imlac has aroused their interest. Because the astronomer had never received women before, some stratagem was necessary for them to become acquainted with him.

It was proposed to introduce them as strangers in distress, to whom the sage was always accessible; but, after some deliberation, it appeared, that by this artifice, no acquaintance could be formed, for their conversation would be short, and they could not decently importune him often. "This," said Rasselas, "is true; but I have yet a stronger objection against the misrepresentation of your state. I have always considered it as treason against the great republic of human nature, to make any man's virtues the means of deceiving him, whether on great or little occasions. All imposture weakens confidence, and chills benevolence. When the sage finds that you are not what you seemed, he will feel the resentment natural to a man who, conscious of great abilities, discovers that he has been tricked by understandings meaner than his own, and, perhaps, the distrust, which he can never afterwards wholly lay aside, may stop the voice of counsel, and close the hand of charity; and where will you find the power of restoring his benefactions to mankind, or his peace to himself?" (*Italics mine.*)

(p. 298.)

In the preceding chapter, Johnson's rough treatment of critics of government was explained through his analysis of the relationship of ruler and subject. Power, Johnson says, rests upon opinion. By that he means that only a few men are invested with the offices of government, but their orders and commands will affect many times their own number. Now the only reason those orders will be obeyed is that they respect government--the ordinary citizens-- and

obey it out of what Johnson calls "reverence." If, then, they mistrust their governors, if they feel that they are not being ruled properly, their security, property, and freedom are not being cared for adequately, they will become recalcitrant and unruly. If the unjust abuse of governmental power continues, the people will either rebel or simply ignore the commands of government. Thus, those who criticize government tend to weaken it by undermining the reverence and confidence of the people in that government. Any man who disregards the law, or encourages the same attitudes in others, is consequently a great enemy to the public peace and general good. The easy adaptability of this course by unscrupulous men constitutes a continuing and incurable weakness of all good government.

Rasselas's warning to Nekayah and Pekuah and the reason for that warning is an embodiment in miniature of the above general principle. The sage trusts mankind; he has "confidence" in it, and practices "benevolence" towards it. Under a lawful government, the people have the same "confidence" and practice obedience and submission to official authority, the equivalent of "benevolence" in private life. If they are tricked by false criticism and unjust contentions against government, however--as Nekayah and Pekuah think of deceiving the astronomer--they will lose some of their reverence for government. And as Johnson points out, once it is lost, it is difficult, if not impossible, to

regain it completely ever again. The final consequence of weakening the sage's belief in men would be the destruction of his charitable feelings towards them and the resultant misery for him of isolation and selfishness. In the state, the analogous process is the destruction of the people's faith in government, and when government fails, order, stability, and harmony--the greatest benefits of government's protection--are destroyed.

The benefits of society require that the imperfections of government be endured and its weakness allowed for in the conduct of the individual. Johnson illustrates these benefits through the misery of solitude and pastoral life and the pleasure of civilized society (especially in the city). In Chapter XXI of Rasselas, "The Happiness of Solitude," Imlac, Rasselas, Nekayah, and Pekuah arrive after a long journey to the hermit's cell. The purpose of their visit was to discover whether a man by voluntarily retiring from society to solitude could find enduring happiness. After the introductory social amenities, they ask the hermit for directions in the choice of life. The hermit answers:

To him that lives well . . . every form of life is good; nor can I give any other rule for choice, than to remove from all apparent evil.

(p. 245.)

Rasselas suggests that the hermit's solitude is a certain method for avoiding evil, but the hermit's reply contradicts him.

After becoming a successful officer, the hermit tells them, he grew tired of the military life, "having found the world full of snares, discord, and misery," and retired fifteen years from the present time to this cell.

For some time after my retreat, I rejoiced, like a tempest-beaten sailor at his entrance into the harbour, being delighted with the sudden change of the noise and hurry of war, to stillness and repose. . . . I have been, for some time [however], unsettled and distracted; my mind is disturbed with a thousand perplexities of doubt, and vanities of imagination, which hourly prevail upon me, because I have no opportunities of relaxation or diversion. . . . My fancy riots in scenes of folly, and I lament, that I have lost so much, and have gained so little. In solitude, if I escape the example of bad men, I want, likewise, the counsel and conversation of the good. I have been long comparing the evils with the advantages of society, and resolve to return into the world tomorrow. The life of a solitary man will be certainly miserable, but not certainly devout.

(p. 246.)

This hermit, like the solitary astronomer, finds that his happiness lies in society, in associating and communicating with his fellow man. Later in the tale, Imlac warns Nekayah that her desire to retire from the world because of the pain of her separation from the kidnapped Pekuah will not necessarily advance her in the state of "goodness."

How far solitude may admit goodness, or advance it, I shall not, replied Imlac, dispute at present. Remember the confessions of the pious hermit.

(p. 275.)

The idea advanced here is a tentative one, but it is also one Johnson probably accepted without too much qualification, for himself at least. Man needs society, needs to be raised, educated, trained, taught the patterns of

civilized living to be happy. The innocence of solitude and simplicity of pastoral life are, to a high degree, myths, vaporous effusions of weak minds. In cities like Cairo in Rasselas, or in London in reality, an individual can find pleasure and entertainment and lose for a while the misery of life. In solitude, the means for this escape are definitely not readily available.

Johnson's antipathy to pastoral poetry is notorious, and he tended to carry this attitude over into life. In Chapter XIX, "A Glimpse of Pastoral Life," he delivers a short ("glimpse") but telling blow to the life of the noble savage as it was supposedly passed in pastoral innocence and serenity. On the way to the hermit's cell, Rasselas and his party are forced to go through fields containing sheep guarded by shepherds. Imlac points out that this kind of life "had been often celebrated for its innocence and quiet," (p. 242.) and suggests they investigate "pastoral life" to see whether happiness is to be found there.

The proposal pleased them, and they induced the shepherds, by small presents and familiar questions, to tell their opinions of their own state: they were so rude and ignorant, so little able to compare the good with the evil of the occupation, and so indistinct in their narratives and descriptions, that very little could be learned from them. But it was evident that their hearts were cankered with discontent; that they considered themselves, as condemned to labour for the luxury of the rich, and looked up, with stupid malevolence, toward those that were placed above them.

(p. 242.)

These three separate incidents are implicitly and

explicitly positive about man's ability to achieve happiness. Solitude, retirement, isolation--each has very little to gratify man's insatiable desire for happiness. But the city, especially the larger ones like Cairo (or London), offers much in the way of diversity and novelty that can provide some happiness. Imlac makes this point during the reiteration of his history to Rasselas in the Happy Valley. After he roamed the world for a long time, he began to long for his home.

When this thought had taken possession of my mind, I considered every moment as wasted, which did not bring me nearer to Abissinia. I hastened into Egypt, and, notwithstanding my impatience, was detained ten months in contemplation of its ancient magnificence, and in enquiries after the remains of its ancient learning. I found in Cairo a mixture of all nations; some brought thither by the love of knowledge, some by the hope of gain, and many by the desire of living, after their own manner, without observation, and of lying hid in the obscurity of multitudes: for in a city, populous as Cairo, it is possible to obtain, at the same time, the gratifications of society, and the secrecy of solitude.

(p. 227.)

Imlac is not alone in finding happiness in cities. Both Rasselas and Nekayah find constant pleasure and enjoyment there and in company with the various levels of society. They are always disappointed at not finding enduring happiness, but they do experience some form of pleasure.

In this way, I believe, Johnson indicates or implies how a person can find that "little to be enjoyed" that Imlac tells Rasselas exists on earth. It is found in companionship, in novelty, in friendship, in variety--in

short, in a constant intercourse with the world, with civilized society specifically.

Thus government is not only essential to the protection of man and achievement and maintenance of order and peace within which man can search for happiness; it provides as well the frame, the foundation upon which society builds and through which it attains what happiness it can. Government is therefore extremely important and requires, if anyone is to partake of its benefits, patience and forbearance on the part of its members for the inevitable deficiencies, injustices, and failures that will occur as it functions.

Since the benefits of government are so great, it is imperative for the individual members of society to accept with patience its inevitable shortcomings. The complex task of controlling a country is beyond the capacity of any man or group of men to perform perfectly, so that government will inevitably incur some faults. The immense amount of detail and planning, the conflicting interests, the constant struggle over recalcitrant or even rebellious subjects, the ubiquitous demands of many for what can be granted to a few, all inevitably lead to shortcomings and errors in government.

Johnson makes this particular point through Rasselas first and then through Nekayah. In Chapter XXVII, "Disquisition Upon Greatness," Rasselas rejects Nekayah's description of the miseries of domestic life, since he has come to the

conclusion that happiness must be there because "quiet is not the daughter of grandeur, or of power." (p. 560.) He is sure happiness does not reside in high places and his refusal to accept Nekayah's similar account of unhappiness in domestic places stems from his need to find it somewhere. At least he is sure it is not in the seats of power.

It is evident, that as any man acts in a wider compass, he must be more exposed to opposition from enmity, or miscarriage from chance; whoever has many to please or to govern, must use the ministry of many agents, some of whom will be wicked, and some ignorant; by some he will be misled, and by others betrayed. If he gratifies one he will offend another: those that are not favoured will think themselves injured; and, since favours can be conferred but upon a few, the greater number will be always discontented.

(p. 256.)

This description, based upon Rasselas's investigations of "High Stations," corresponds to Johnson's statement that government is such a complex operation that some faults, as well as some discontent, are inevitable. In Rasselas's statement, the complex nature of government he describes embodies this belief. When it occurs in Nekayah's speech, the focus is upon the limitations of the individual. This limitation is the complement of the complexity of government, and together they are both an explanation and apology for the faults of government.

In Chapter XXVIII, "Rasselas and Nekayah Continue Their Conversation," Nekayah has just told Rasselas she is not sure "whether marriage be more than one of the innumerable modes of human misery." (p. 258.)

Rasselas accuses her of a contradiction in logic.

You seem to forget . . . that you have, even now, represented celibacy, as less happy than marriage. Both conditions may be bad, but they cannot both be worst.

(p. 259.)

Nekayah's answer to this accusation is a restatement of Johnson's political theory which concerns the complexity of government.

To the mind, as to the eye, it is difficult to compare, with exactness, objects, vast in their extent, and various in their parts. Where we see, or conceive, the whole at once, we readily note the discriminations, and decide the preference: but of two systems, of which neither can be surveyed, by any human being, in its full compass of magnitude, and multiplicity of complications, where is the wonder, that, judging of the whole by parts, I am alternately affected by one and the other, as either presses on my memory or fancy? We differ from ourselves, just as we differ from each other, when we see only part of the question, as in multifarious relations of politicks and morality; but when we perceive the whole at once, as in numerical computations, all agree in one judgment, and none ever varies his opinion.

(p. 259.)

The question in dispute is the relative superiority of the married and single state, but it embodies in small compass large political consequences. For no one, as Nekayah notes, is capable of seeing a complex political question or problem in its entirety. Each member of society can only see so much of his government in operation and judges from what he sees. Johnson's point, made through Nekayah and Rasselas in the preceding chapter, is that each individual must recognize his limitations and the complicated nature of government, and further reserve both his judgment and his criticism until the evidence becomes overwhelming.

If a man recognizes the problems involved in government, he is well on his way to recognizing the last statement in Johnson's political philosophy: happiness is achieved through the mutual cooperation of ruler and subject. Each group must recognize its duties and responsibilities--its privileges and rights did not seem to be in any danger of being forgotten, or so it seemed to Johnson--and fulfill them to the best of its ability. By proceeding in this fashion, society will not, it is true, attain permanent or immutable happiness, but it will achieve some happiness, some peace and order. The price is high, since it involves for many the giving up of individual liberty, individual desires, personal hopes and wishes, wealth and property, but it is the only way.

This belief of Johnson's should not be considered a negative assertion about society's chances for happiness. It is a positive utterance, qualified as all complex things must be, but still a positive statement. Its corollary in Rasselas is equally positive and should serve to balance the too heavy weight that has been put upon Imlac's famous dictum, "Life is everywhere a state in which there is much to endure and little to enjoy."

Johnson uses Nekayah to express his positive beliefs about man and happiness. In Chapter XXIX, "The Debate on Marriage Continued," Nekayah has just finished

describing the discontent that arises between parents and children. She says,

I believe it will be found, that those who marry late, are best pleased with their children, and those who marry early with their partners.

(p. 262.)

Rasselas wonders if "the union of these two affections" might not produce "all that could be wished. Perhaps there is a time, when marriage might unite them, a time neither too early for the father, nor too late for the husband."

(p. 262.) Nekayah's answer embodies Johnson's observation concerning man's ability to secure happiness for himself.

Every hour, answered the princess, confirms my prejudice in favor of the position, so often uttered by the mouth of Imlac, "That nature sets her gifts on the right hand and on the left." Those conditions, which flatter hope and attract desire, are so constituted, that, as we approach one, we recede from another. There are goods so opposed, that we cannot seize both, but, by too much prudence, may pass between them, at too great a distance to reach either. This is often the fate of long considerations; he does nothing, who endeavours to do more than is allowed to humanity. Flatter not yourself with contrarieties of pleasure. Of the blessings set before you make your choice, and be content. No man can taste the fruits of autumn, while he is delighting his scent with the flowers of the spring; no man can, at the same time, fill his cup from the source and from the mouth of the Nile.

(p. 263.)

To translate Nekayah's speech into political realities, one might say that no man can enjoy complete liberty and freedom and, at the same time, enjoy the security of government which requires the sacrifice of some liberty and freedom. The pain of deprivation and frustration that man must suffer to live in civilized society are the lost fruits

on the right hand which he must forgo, if he is to taste the fruits on the left--the security and protection, the peace and order of a civilized community.

Rasselas thus embodies through many of its characters and incidents the political principles discussed in the third division of Johnson's theory. Government's duty to secure property and individual freedom--the necessary conditions for happiness although not sufficient in themselves--was the first of these. The unhappy "master" of the "stately palace," the equally unhappy prisoners of the Happy Valley and the rich young men who disappointed Rasselas illustrate this principle.

No government, however, can promise complete security and freedom, since it must partake of the weaknesses and faults of the men who comprise it. Imlac relates this fact to Rasselas, who passes it on later in the tale to his sister, Nekayah. It is also embodied in the incident of the "mad astronomer," who informs Imlac that he cannot expect to govern the seasons perfectly. It is Nekayah, speaking about the family, who reveals the best available solution for this problem. The family, like the state, runs smoothest when each individual acts for the interest of both himself and the group of which he is a part.

The imperfections of man which lead to corresponding imperfections in government can be traced to reason's inability to control the appetites and passions. The "mad

astronomer," the "wise and happy" man whose reasonable theory proves untenable, the sage who prescribes a primitive "life according to nature" which defies comprehension--all are examples of the limitations of reason. They further illustrate the dangers in ignoring those limitations and the importance of institutions which will provide some objective rule to maintain order among men.

The weakness of government lies in the ease with which unjust men can disable it by undermining the "reverence" men have for it. Nekayah and Pekuah's plan for deceiving the astronomer and Rasselas's criticism of that plan embody this point. This danger to government must be recognized, otherwise the benefits of government are endangered. For within a civilized state, man can live with his fellow man in large numbers and avoid the misery of solitude and loneliness. The unhappiness of the hermit and the discontent of the shepherds make this point in Rasselas.

Since these benefits are so great, each man must accept the inevitable shortcomings of government, which arise in part from the vast complexity of its task. Johnson used this particular idea when he had Rasselas explain to Nekayah that a governor cannot please everyone because his decisions must affect such large numbers of men at every level of society. Nekayah touches upon the converse of this belief when she explains to Rasselas, in another conversation, that the mind is so limited that it cannot

take in a large, complex object. The operations and effects of government are, of course, just such objects.

If all men recognize these difficulties in government, then they will understand the last principle of Johnson's politics: all happiness is dependent on the mutual cooperation of governors and governed. Pekuah translates this political principle into the life of the individual when she tells Rasselas that one cannot taste all the fruits of life, but must choose some and give up the others.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

i

Having arrived at a basic formulation of Johnson's theory of human nature as he expressed it through his political writings and his imaginative productions, I think it would be desirable and profitable to try to define Johnson's place in the main stream of intellectual thought of his day. The value of such an attempt was described by Louis Bredvold when he said,

The history of thought since 1700 can be written in many ways, as the history of metaphysics, of logic, of political theory, of ethical theory, or of scientific discovery. But it can also be written as the history of theories of human nature, and to that central theme all these other modes of theoretical and practical intellection can be related.¹

He adds further,

Such an orientation offers this great advantage to us ordinary laymen in philosophy, untrained as we are in dialectic of the professional students, in that we can test and validate philosophical propositions by our own experience and our knowledge of the experience of mankind.²

¹The Brave New World of the Enlightenment (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1961), p. 149.

²Ibid., pp. 149-50.

By following this method, one can test Johnson's theory of human nature for its intrinsic validity and can, at the same time, discover his relationship--more often than not his opposition--to what were the basic theories of human nature in his day.

Probably the best place to begin a survey of the popular or prevailing theories of human nature in Johnson's ages is with Thomas Hobbes. As Leslie Stephens says,

Hobbes's writings . . . were . . . the most potent stimulant to English thought in the last half of the seventeenth, and even during the first half of the eighteenth, century in England. He had, indeed, fewer disciples than antagonists; but the writer who provokes a reaction does as much in generating ideas as the writer who propagates his own ideas.¹

The antagonists of Hobbes were legion. Their efforts resulted in or helped create a belief about the nature of man which merged with several other forces to become the movement known as sentimentalism. The basic tenet of this movement and one which had tremendous effect on numerous thinkers and writers as the eighteenth century wore on was the belief in the natural goodness of man. Such a belief was antithetical to Hobbes's conclusion about man, but he and the sentimentalists were related closely, despite their conflicting principles, through their use of the scientific method. Each thought that man could be analyzed, understood, and, finally, controlled in Hobbes's case or made anew in

¹English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, II (New York: Peter Smith, 1949), 5.

the later sentimentalist theories of Godwin and Diderot. But it was the conclusion reached by Hobbes that came first and stimulated others of his time into emphasizing and expanding certain ideas which later blossomed more fully into sentimentalism. One authority describes the situation in this way:

British ethics of the period is a series of attempts to demolish Hobbism. He had reduced the moral laws to the jurisdiction of Leviathan; the Cambridge Platonists sought to show that moral laws are eternal and immutable, grounded in the very essence of human nature. He had pictured man as a natural insatiate egoist; his critics undertook to vindicate benevolence as a normal human attribute and once more to prove the truth of Aristotle's conception of the inherently social character of man. He had conceived of human life, whether anarchic or social, wholly in terms of passions and animal motions, satisfaction of desires; against this narrow hedonism, the demand is raised in British philosophy for a recognition of the morally sovereign sense of conscience and duty.¹

Hobbes was a thorough going materialist. Everything in existence "is corporeal, that is to say, body;

and hath the dimensions of magnitude, namely, length, breadth, and depth: also every part of body, is likewise body, and hath the like dimensions; and consequently every part of the universe, is body, and that which is not body, is no part of the universe: and because the universe is all, that which is no part of it, is nothing; and consequently nowhere."²

In his little treatise Human Nature, Hobbes argues this proposition in such a way as to avoid giving grounds to the dangerous charge of aethism. He says,

¹Radaslov A. Tsanoff, The Moral Ideals of Our Civilization (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1942), p. 162.

²Quoted by Tsanoff, p. 153.

Concerning other things [than the spirit of God], which some men call spirits incorporeal, and some corporeal, it is not possible by natural means only, to come to knowledge of so much, as that there are such things. We that are Christians acknowledge that there be angels good and evil, and that there are spirits, and that the soul of a man is a spirit, and that those spirits are immortal: but, to know it, that is to say, to have natural evidence of the same, it is impossible: for, all evidence is conception, . . . and all conception is imagination, and proceedeth from sense. . . .¹

Hobbes's dismissal of the "spiritual" as opposed to the "sensual" world is not made through an irreligious or skeptical rationale, but on the basis of faith, of belief in the existence of the supernatural. By granting its existence, he can then dismiss it as irrelevant to his discussion, since he is concerned only with "natural means" of knowledge.

What Hobbes finds left after the exclusion of the spiritual is simply "matter in motion." He had learned about Galileo's experiment with motion, and he thought by applying Galileo's method to the study of man and by presenting his results in as close a reproduction of the geometrical reasoning of Euclid as possible, he would solve forever the problems that had plagued man and society since their beginnings. The value of the geometric method, the "only science that it hath pleased God hitherto to bestow on mankind,"² Hobbes made clear in the "Epistle Dedicatory"

¹In The English Works of Thomas Hobbes, ed. Sir William Molesworth, IV (London: John Bohn, 1840), p. 61.

²Thomas Hobbes, The Leviathan, ed. Michael Oakeshott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960), p. 21.

to De Cive.

Truly the Geometricians have very admirably performed their part. . . . If the moral philosophers had as happily discharged their duty, I know not what could have been added by human industry to the completion of that happiness, which is consistent with human life.¹

In the long treatise, The Leviathan, Hobbes explicitly demonstrates his theory of man as "matter in motion." In the "Introduction," he writes,

Nature, the art whereby God hath made and governs the world, is the art of man, as in many other things, so in this also imitated, that it can make an artificial animal [that is, the Leviathan, the commonwealth]. For seeing life is but a motion of limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principal part within; why may we not say, that all automata (engines that move themselves by springs and wheels as doth a watch) have an artificial life? For what is the heart, but a spring; and the nerves, but so many strings; and the joints, but so many wheels, giving motions to the whole body, such as intended by the artificer.²

This machine operates under the impact of sensations received from the outside world. The origin of thought in man

is that which we call SENSE, for there is no conception in a man's mind, which hath not at first, totally, or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of sense. The rest are derived from that original.³

When a man reasons, "he does nothing else but conceive a sum total, from addition of parcels; or conceive a remainder, from subtraction of one sum from another. . . . in what matter soever there is place for addition and

¹De Cive, ed. Sterling P. Lamprecht (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1949), p. 3.

²Leviathan, ed. Oakeshott, p. 5.

³Ibid., p. 7.

subtraction, there is also place for reason; and where these have no place, there reason has nothing at all to do."¹ Reasoning is thus a mechanical process and all that men know by reasoning is causal knowledge, the knowledge of mathematical or geometrical certainty.

The emotions are equally generated by matter in motion. The "conceptions" or "apparitions," the ideas, which are "nothing really, but motion in some internal substance of the head," continue to the heart where they "must either help or hinder the motion which is called vital." If they help, it is called "delight"; if they hinder, it is called "pain."² Both reason and emotion, experience and behaviour, are mechanical and determined.

Man is a machine which turns away from pain and toward pleasure. But "felicity of this life, consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied. For there is not such finis ultimus, utmost aim, nor summum bonum, greatest good, as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers.

Felicity is a continual progress of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still the way to the latter. The cause whereof is, that the object's of man's desire, is not to enjoy once only, and for one instant of time; but to assure for ever the way of future desire. And therefore the voluntary actions, and inclinations of all men, tend, not only to the procuring, but also to the assuring of a contented life."³

¹Leviathan, ed. Oakeshott, pp. 25-26.

²Human Nature, ed. Molesworth, p. 31.

³Leviathan, ed. Oakeshott, p. 63.

There is thus in man a "perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death."¹ This restless craving in man that Hobbes saw led him to compare the life of man to a race which has "no other goal, nor other garland, but being foremost, and in it:

To endeavour, is appetite. To be remiss, is sensuality. To consider them behind, is glory. To consider them before, is humility. . . . Continually to out-go the next before, is felicity. And to forsake the course, is to die."²

Each of these machines is equal. Some men are stronger than others, but even the weakest can kill the strongest by "secret machinations" or by "confederacy" with others who suffer the same danger from the stronger. In the faculties of the mind the equality of aptitude is even greater among men than is strength. For though a man "acknowledge many others to be more witty, or more eloquent, or more learned; yet they will hardly believe there be many so wise as themselves."³ This belief in the superiority of self is a proof of intellectual equality, there not being "ordinarily a greater sign of the equal distribution of any thing, than that every man is contented with his share."⁴

Since men are equal, their hope of gain is equal

¹Ibid., p. 64.

²Human Nature, ed. Molesworth, p. 53.

³Leviathan, ed. Oakeshott, p. 80.

⁴Ibid., p. 81.

also: all men desire and believe they can attain the pleasures of this life. From this belief springs the natural state of man: war. Each man considers every other man an enemy who is competing with him, who is endeavouring to rob or kill him, and who refuses to acknowledge his inferiority.

So that in the nature of man, we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory.

The first, maketh men invade for gain; the second, for safety; and the third, for reputation.¹

In this state, where there is no common power to control men, there can be no order, no rest, no contentment.

In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; . . . no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger, of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.²

Since war is the natural condition of man and since he is governed by reason alone in this condition, every one has the right to everything and the right to use every possible means in pursuit of all things, there being no such thing as ethics or morality in the state of nature. No one, it is obvious, can have any security in this state of affairs in which all men's hands are raised against one another. The assurance of continuing satisfaction of present desires as

¹Ibid., p. 80.

²Ibid., p. 82.

they shall occur in the future--security in brief--is the essence of "felicity" and "felicity" is the end of life; consequently a general rule of reason is

that every man, ought to endeavour peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek, and use, all helps, and advantages of war.¹

From this precept can be drawn what Hobbes considered the "first, and fundamental law of nature; which is, to seek peace, and follow it."² This search after peace is therefore based on purely utilitarian, or selfish, grounds. "By reducing the range of their desires they increase their chances of assured gratifications."³

From this fundamental law of nature, Hobbes derived the second law:

that a man be willing, when others are so too, as far-forth, as for peace, and defence of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself.⁴

Hobbes not only justifies this approach to social life on Biblical grounds, but also identifies it with one of the great precepts of the Gospel, when he says that unless all men agree to lay down their right to all things, then the person who does is in effect "expos[ing] himself to prey, which no

¹Ibid., p. 85.

²Ibid.

³Tsanoff, p. 157.

⁴Leviathan, ed. Oakeshott, p. 85.

man is bound to; rather than to dispose himself to peace.

This is that law of the Gospel: whatsoever you require that others should do to you, that do ye to them."¹

It is not surprising that a host of divines and moralists arose to combat Hobbes, for he takes their favorite maxims and passages from the Bible and disconcertingly uses them to justify his own militantly materialistic approach to human nature.

Men have therefore joined together through a compact, agreeing to renounce their destructive struggles for power and to invest their rights in one authority, Leviathan, who shall have irrevocable power over them henceforth. Only then do law and order become a reality and with them, justice and injustice, good and evil, morality and immorality. Such words otherwise are what Hobbes calls an "absurdity," a word with no referent, a meaningless sound.

The final "cause, end, or destiny of men

who naturally love liberty, and dominion over others, in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves, in which we see them live in commonwealths, is the foresight of their preservation, and of a more contented life thereby."²

For such a design to succeed, there must be the erection of a common power, as may be able to defend them from the invasion of foreigners, and the injuries of one another.³ Such a power can be created if men agree

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 109.

³Ibid., p. 112.

to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will.¹

Sovereignty is thus placed in one man, or group of men, and once placed there, is absolute. Such were the final results of the application of the scientific method to the problems of man and society.

ii

Although Hobbes's theory was congenial to Charles II and his followers, perhaps as much for his cynical wit as for his justification of the absolute sovereignty of the king on scientific principles, it was not congenial to the majority of Englishmen. Hobbes carried to their logical end the basic premises he started with, and while his premises may have been acceptable, his procedure was not. A man who started with much the same method and even beliefs of Hobbes, but a man who stopped short of his rigorous application and thereby endeared himself to Englishmen for the next hundred years was John Locke.

Locke also thought that the new scientific methods developed in the preceding years could be applied to the difficult problems of man and society. In discussing the possible limits of man's knowledge, Locke says that,

it is a hard matter to tell when we are at an end of such discoveries [of new relations between ideas, that is, of new knowledge] ; and when reason has all the

¹Ibid.

helps it is capable of, for the finding of proofs, or examining the agreement or disagreement of remote ideas.¹

Hard as it is, however, "they that are ignorant of algebra cannot imagine the wonders in this kind that are to be done by it."² This attitude towards mathematics, the king of the sciences, is an example of the "expressions of a new temper of mind, of a new conception of the universe, and of a new approach to the problems of humanity. . . . The scientific spirit was beginning to permeate the mind of Europe. . . . what the world awaited was the Newton of the science of ethics and human society."³ In the eighteenth century Locke was sometimes assumed to be this phenomenon, and he himself thought the application of the Newtonian spirit offered great hope for mankind.

The idea of a supreme Being, infinite in power, goodness, and wisdom, whose workmanship we are, and on whom we depend; and the idea of ourselves, as understanding rational beings; being such as are clear in us, would, I suppose, if duly considered and pursued, afford such foundations of our duty and rules of action as might place morality amongst the sciences capable of demonstration: wherein I doubt not but from self-evident propositions by necessary consequences, as incontestable as those in mathematics, the measure of right and wrong might be made out to any one that will apply himself with the same indifferency and attention to the one as he does to the other of these sciences.⁴

¹An Essay on Human Understanding in The Philosophical Works of John Locke, ed. J. S. St. John, II (London: George Bell and Sons, Bohn Standard Library, 1892), p. 154.

²Ibid.

³Bredvold, Brave New World . . . , pp. 39-40.

⁴Locke, p. 154.

Locke does not explicitly maintain, like Hobbes, that man can be understood as "matter in motion," that he is determined in all his activities and emotions by the impact of motion on the head and heart. At the beginning of his Essay Concerning Human Understanding, he explicitly renounces any specific investigation into the nature of man.

This, therefore, [he says] being my purpose, to inquire into the original, certainty, and extent of human knowledge, together with the grounds and degrees of belief, opinion, and assent, I shall not at present meddle with the physical consideration of the mind, or trouble myself to examine wherein its essence consists.¹

But Locke does go on to intimate where he does think the answers to this kind of inquiry would be found, when he says that he will not speculate on

what motions of our spirits or alterations of our bodies we come to have any sensation by our organs, or any ideas in our understandings; and whether those ideas do in their formation, any or all of them, depend on matter or not.²

As the editor notes, Locke is here echoing Hobbes.

Locke, though he does not here name Hobbes, nevertheless refers to his speculations, almost making use of the very language of that philosopher in his treatise on Human Nature, where he says, "Image or colour is but an apparition unto us of the motion, agitation, or alteration which the object worketh in the brain, or spirits, or some internal substance of the head."³

Locke's general application of the scientific theory to man leads him, like Hobbes, to view human nature in strictly

¹Locke, I, 128.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

materialistic terms, although he refused to follow through completely the materialistic premises of this method. Both he and Hobbes admit the existence of God but Locke made His Existence a strong influence on the conduct of man, both in the state of nature and in civil society.

One commentator on Locke analyzes this distinction when he discusses the hedonistic basis of Locke's and Hobbes's ethicalism. Granting that both philosophers often identified good and evil with pleasure and pain, this critic points out that Locke's concept of pleasure and pain included more than just Hobbes's materialistic conception: it included the pleasure that comes from "reputation, from the possession of knowledge, from doing good to others, and from the expectation of future bliss. And these other sources of pleasure were not traced back by Locke to any necessary bodily conditions."¹ The "expectation of future bliss" which Locke made one source of pleasure signalizes a division between natural good and evil and moral good and evil which Hobbes did not recognize.

Locke agrees with Hobbes when he says,

Good and evil, as hath been shown . . . are nothing but pleasure or pain, or that which occasions or procures pleasure or pain to us.²

But he leaves Hobbes when he says,

¹Sterling Lamprecht, The Moral and Political Philosophy of John Locke (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1962), p. 90.

²Locke, I, 485.

Moral good and evil, then, is only the conformity or disagreement of our voluntary actions to some law, whereby good or evil is drawn on us by the will and power of the law-maker; which good and evil, pleasure or pain, attending our observance or break of the law by the decree of the law-maker, is that we call reward and punishment.¹

Locke recognized three standards or laws by which men judge of the morality of their actions: 1) the divine law; 2) the civil law; 3) the law of opinion and reputation.

By the relation they bear to the first of these, men judge whether their actions are sins or duties; by the second, whether they be criminal or innocent; and by the third, whether they be virtues or vices.²

The "rewards and punishments" for obeying or disobeying any of these three sets of law are necessary.

It would be in vain for one intelligent being to set a rule to the actions of another, if he had it not in his power to reward the compliance, and punish deviation from his rule, by some good and evil that is not the natural product and consequence of the action itself.³

The rewards and punishments that are conferred by the divine law make trivial all other pleasures and pains that the other two kinds of law can bestow. By enlarging the hedonistic ethics of Hobbes to include future rewards and punishments, Locke "remove[s] the emphasis from the present life to the next. Thus immortality becomes a fundamental necessity for morality."⁴

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 486.

³Ibid., pp. 485-86.

⁴Lamprecht, p. 92.

The divine law which is the measure of true morality existed prior to all civil society, for "we are under obligations antecedent to all human constitutions."¹ Thus it is that man did not exist in the same state of nature, that is, "the status of human individuals or groups who in their relations to one another are not subject to the authority of any government,"² for Locke as he did for Hobbes.

The state that "all men are naturally in" for Locke is characterized by a

perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man.³

Since all men live in a state of perfect freedom, they live in

a state also of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another; there being nothing more evident, than that creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another without subordination or subjection.⁴

All being equal, all therefore possess certain fundamental rights, the most fundamental of which is the preservation of life. Following closely upon this right are two others,

¹Locke, II, 256.

²Lovejoy, p. 15.

³John Locke, Second Treatise on Civil Government, in The World's Classics, Social Contract, Essays by Locke, Hume, and Rousseau, ed. Sir Ernest Barker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 5.

⁴Ibid.

usually called by Locke liberty and property. Liberty means the right to do as one pleases, so long as one does not infringe upon the rights of others, while property refers to man's right to his labor and to the fruits of his labor.

The possession of rights implies the existence of a law, in this case a law of nature. Hobbes recognized and defined the law of nature as a "precept or general rule, found out by reason, by which a man is forbidden to do that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to omit that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved."¹

From this law, he derived the sum of the right of nature; which is, "by all means we can, to defend ourselves."² Defined in this manner, the law of nature not only condones all vicious and savage actions of man to man, but actually commands their use for the preservation of self. But Locke constructed the law of nature quite differently.

Although men in nature are in a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of license: though man in that state have an uncontrollable liberty to dispose of his person or possessions, yet he has not liberty to destroy himself, or so much as any creature in his possession, but where some nobler use than its bare preservation calls for it. The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one, and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who

¹Leviathan, ed. Oakeshott, p. 84.

²Ibid., p. 85.

will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions.¹

The law of nature is a morally binding one upon men both before and after their entrance into a political union, even though men in both conditions sometimes fail to live up to their obligation under that law.

The state of nature is not a state of "war of all men against all men"² for Locke. There is "a plain difference between the state of nature and the state of war, which however some men have confounded [Hobbes in particular], are as far distant as a state of peace, goodwill, mutual assistance, and preservation; and a state of enmity, malice, violence and mutual destruction are one from another."³ The state of nature consists of the following:

Men living together according to reason without a common superior on earth, with authority to judge between them, are properly in the state of nature.⁴

The state of war, on the other hand, is composed of

force, or a declared design of force upon the person of another, where there is no common superior on earth to appeal to for relief.⁵

So long as men obey the law of nature, the state of nature remains peaceful and harmonious, but when man ignores or

¹Locke, Second Treatise, p. 6-7.

²Hobbes, De Cive, p. 29.

³Locke, Second Treatise, p. 17.

⁴Ibid., pp. 17-18.

⁵Ibid., p. 18.

violates that law, he brings into being the state of war and all its accompanying miseries.

The primary, although not the sole, motive for civil society is the desire of men to escape the wretchedness and pain of a state of war.

To avoid this state of war (wherein there is no appeal but to heaven, and wherein even the least difference is apt to end, where there is no authority to decide between the contenders) is one great reason of men's putting themselves into society, and quitting the state of nature.¹

Locke agrees with Hobbes here in finding the origin of society in man's desire to escape from the dangers of a state outside of society.

I easily grant [he says] that civil government is the remedy for the inconveniences of the state of nature, which must certainly be great where men may be judges in their own case.²

But he disagrees with Hobbes on the conditions upon which man leaves the state of nature and enters the state of society.

In Hobbes's theory, man entered society by giving up his power to attack others in order to gain security from the same kind of attack. His investment of this power in one sovereign was final and made that sovereign absolute. Otherwise, this sovereign would not be capable of permanently abolishing the state of war which naturally exists between men and which can always revive to overwhelm civil government, unless it be constantly kept down by the absolute power

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 13.

invested in the sovereign. Locke also believed that men must give up their "natural" power and right of making war in order to create and enter society.

But because no political society can be, nor subsist, without having in itself the power to preserve the property, and in order thereunto to punish the offences of all those of that society: there, and there only, is political society, where every one of the members hath quitted this natural power, resigned it up into the hands of the community in all cases that exclude him not from appealing for protection to the law established by it.¹

But if the power conferred upon the governing body by men entering civil society be abused, then these men are justified in rebelling.

In all states and conditions the true remedy of force without authority is to oppose force to it.²

Locke was able to justify revolution because he did not make the natural state, which is the opposite of a political society, a state of war as did Hobbes. Men, therefore, could dissolve their present form of government if it violated the contract upon which it was based. This contract was simply the agreement of the people who made up any given society to relinquish certain of their powers for the sake of security, of preserving "his property, that is, his life, liberty, and estate."³ When any of these "natural rights" were violated or unlawfully attacked, men had the right to defend them by revolution.

¹Ibid., p. 71.

²Ibid., p. 131.

³Ibid., p. 71.

But Locke did not make the desire to escape from the disorder of the state of nature turned war the only motive for the creation of civil society. He also believed that man had a social instinct which moved him toward alliance with other men.

God, having made such a creature that, in his own judgment, it was not good for him to be alone, put him under strong obligations of necessity, convenience, and inclination, to drive him into society, as well as fitted him with understanding and language to continue and enjoy it.¹

Locke had earlier in the same work quoted the "judicious Hooker" in support of such a position.

. . . but forasmuch as we are not by ourselves sufficient to furnish ourselves with competent store of things, needful for such a life as our nature doth desire, a life fit for the dignity of man; therefore to supply those defects and imperfections which are in us, as living singly and solely by ourselves, we are naturally induced to seek communion and fellowship with others: this was the cause of men uniting themselves at first in politic societies.²

Locke does not dwell on this feature of human nature, perhaps because it might be construed as an "innate idea," and all such entities Locke had, of course, banished from the mind of man. The mind is at first like a "white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas."³ It is furnished with ideas from experience: "Our observation employed either about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds, perceived and reflected on by

¹Ibid., p. 64.

²Ibid., p. 15.

³Locke, Essay, I, p. 205.

ourselves. . . . These are the two fountains of knowledge from whence all the ideas we have or can naturally have do spring."¹ These first "ideas" are "simple" but through the use of certain mental faculties can be turned into "complex" ideas, all of whose elements, however, can be broken up into the "simple" ideas from which they spring.

If the human mind is a "tabula rasa, a clean slate for experience to write on, . . . then as we grow up we become what our experience, our education, our environment, combine to make us. Our slates are written full as we live."² Locke did not go this far in his theorizing about human nature, but others--for example, La Mettrie in his Man a Machine, 1749, and David Hartley in Observations On Man, also published in 1749--were not so reticent. The advocates of sentimentalism utilized Locke's basic epistemological premise but joined with it a theory of natural goodness which became extremely popular during the eighteenth century.

iii

Locke neither affirmed nor denied the natural goodness of man.

Is man by nature good or bad? Locke's epistemology implies that he is neither. Although, as his own writing on the social contract shows, he had a rather optimistic view of human potentialities, his conception

¹Ibid., p. 202.

²Bredvold, Brave New World . . . , p. 44.

of the mind represents it as, intrinsically, neither moral nor immoral.¹

Locke hoped that man could be both good and rational, but in a state of nature there existed numberless possibilities for quarrel and conflicts. Such conflicts meant that man could be evil, just as Locke's interpretation of the social contract was also based upon the belief that the men granted power could use it unjustly and thereby justify revolution. Hence the distinct possibility of natural depravity in both a state of nature and a state of society is implied in Locke's writings.

The sentimental view, on the other hand, veered off from Locke after taking over his mechanical view of human nature. If man was naturally good and was also the sum, more or less, of his experiences, then man was evil only because his education and experiences had warped his naturally good and benevolent impulses.

The beginnings of the sentimentalist movement are complex. R. S. Crane has shown that certain Latitudinarian divines of the Restoration,

Without shutting their eyes to the great amount of actual selfishness and inhumanity in the world, . . . devoted much effort, nevertheless, to picturing the heart of man as "naturally" good in the sense that when left to its own native impulses it tends invariably to humane and sociable feelings--and this

¹Ernest Lee Tuveson, The Imagination as a Means of Grace, Locke and the Aesthetics of Romanticism (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1960), p. 44.

"without the Discipline of Reason, or the Precepts of Religion."¹

These Anglican ministers were opposing several enemies at once in preaching this gospel. They were attacking the belief in total depravity advocated by the Puritans, the deep distrust of the passions and the exaggerated trust in the reason embodied in stoic doctrine and preached by latter day Stoics, and the everpresent and what they believed malignant influence of Hobbes, who maintained that "without a government possessed of complete power the natural passions of man would lead to a state of constant social war."²

A sermon of Isaac Barrow provides a good example of the traits in man that these divines were emphasizing in their disputes with their opponents, both within and without the Anglican church.

We are indispensably obliged to these duties [of benevolence], because the best of our natural inclinations prompt us to the performance of them, especially those of pity and benignity, which are manifestly discernible in all, but most powerful and vigorous in the best natures; and which, questionless, by the most wise and good Author of our beings were implanted therein both as monitors to direct, and as spurs to incite us to the performance of our duty. . . . Antipathies may be natural to wild beasts; but to rational creatures they are wholly unnatural.³

¹"Suggestions Toward a Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling,'" ELH, I (December, 1934), 220. The quotation used by Crane is from A Sermon, 1739, by Thomas Herring, Bishop of Bangor.

²Ibid., p. 221.

³Quoted by Crane, p. 223.

Another early influence which shaped the sentimental interpretation of human nature was the Cambridge Platonists. These men--Benjamin Whichcote, Henry More, Ralph Cudworth and others--"wanted to moderate the Calvinistic doctrine of man's total depravity, in the English Puritanism of their time."¹ Their desire to temper the harsh Calvinistic doctrine led them to such statements as the following.

Nothing is more certainly true than that all Vice is unnatural, and contrary to the Nature of Man. All that we call Sin, which is nought and contrary to the Reason of Things, is destructive of Human Nature; and a Man forceth himself when he doth it.

The Good Man is an Instrument in Tune; Excite a good Man, give him an Occasion, you shall have from him savoury Speeches out of his Mouth, and good Actions in his Life.²

The Cambridge Platonists, as well as the Latitudinarian divines before them, did not believe that man was perfect, free from sin and corruption. But this part of their teaching was left generally unremarked while their insistence upon man's natural inclination to sociability and goodness was emphasized.

Sentimentalism received a new force and popularization that spread throughout the eighteenth century in the publication of the third Earl of Shaftesbury's Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, etc. (1711).

¹Louis Bredvold, The Natural History of Sensibility (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962), p. 8.

²Cited by Bredvold from The Cambridge Platonists, ed. E. T. Campagnac (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1901), pp. 25, 46.

Shaftesbury was tutored at home by John Locke, but he did not become a disciple of his tutor. On the contrary, he thought Locke's theory of human understanding reduced morality and virtue to a matter of custom and fashion, a proposition thoroughly distasteful to him. He believed and attempted to prove in his three volumes of essays that man has an innate disposition to virtue, a natural goodness that needs only cultivation to make him happy. This natural goodness could be corrupted by unnatural or evil customs and education, but if properly trained it could become a strong feeling, a powerful taste actually, for the good, the true, and the beautiful. "Be persuaded," he writes Michael Ainsworth,

that wisdom is more from the heart than from the head.
Feel goodness, and you will see all things fair and good.¹

Shaftesbury was an aristocrat with the education of an aristocrat. He tended to identify, naturally enough, morality and wisdom with aristocratic good breeding.

To philosophize, in a just Signification, is but to carry Good-breeding a step higher. For the Accomplishment of Breeding is, To learn whatever is decent in Company or Beautiful in Arts; and the Sum of Philosophy is, To learn what is just in society and beautiful in Nature, and the Order of the World.²

Wisdom is taste raised to higher degree, while virtue ceases

¹Quoted by Lois Whitney, Primitivism and the Idea of Progress (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1934), p. 32.

²Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, etc., 3rd edition, III (London, 1732), 161.

to be the goal of authoritarian conscience in conduct, but becomes the natural result of the proper cultivation of the same innate "taste," called by Shaftesbury's disciple Francis Hutcheson the "moral sense," and later described by Adam Smith as "moral sentiments." This taste, sense, or sentiment is actually a Lockean "innate idea" and is perhaps the basic issue which divides Locke and Shaftesbury. Aesthetic appreciation--a taste for the beautiful; philosophic sophistication--a taste for the true; moral conduct--a taste for the good; all three attributes, three functions of the same faculty in reality, are innate, inborn, inherent within the heart of man, and lay waiting for cultivation to unfold and blossom.

After all, . . . it is not merely what we call Principle, but a TASTE that governs men. They may think for certain, "This is right, or that wrong." They may believe "This a Crime, or that a Sin; This punishable by Man, or that by God:" yet if the SAVOUR of things lie cross to HONESTY; if the Fancy be florid, and the Appetite high towards the subaltern Beauties and lower order or worldly symmetries and proportions; the conduct will infallibly turn this latter way.

Shaftesbury explicitly affirms his belief in this inward taste as a constituent faculty in the creation of human nature when he says,

That in the very nature of Things there must of necessity be the Foundation of a right and wrong TASTE, as well in respect of inward Characters and Features, as of outward Person, Behaviour, and Action.²

¹Ibid., p. 177.

²Ibid., p. 336.

Thus the natural goodness of man inclines him to benevolence and goodness, while it also, properly conditioned by perusal of the best models in literature, philosophy and the arts, provides him with his most profound pleasure and happiness. The good man, then, is

A man of finely cultivated tastes, in morals as well as in art, whose personality is so harmoniously developed that the unfolding of it reveals the good that is naturally in his nature.¹

Shaftesbury was neither the originator of these ideas, nor the only promulgator. Addison and Steele advocated a similar cause and purpose in their periodical, The Spectator. Steele in his first important publication, The Christian Hero (1701), attempted to impress upon his own mind the superiority of Christianity over the stoical and pagan virtues taken from classical antiquity and held up as ideals of conduct. Rationalism as a guide to conduct, particularly as preached by the Stoics, needed to be transformed by an admixture of Christian feeling, piety, moral feeling, and regularity if a man was to live a life of moral integrity. In the Conscious Lovers (1723), Steele is openly sentimental, embodying there in dramatic form the principles which led him in The Tatler to censure the lewdness and cynicism of Restoration comedy. In this play, Bevil, Junior tells Indiana, an orphaned young girl who has been receiving aid from some unknown gentleman (actually

¹Bredvold, The Brave New World . . . , p. 91.

Bevil, Junior) and who is afraid that this gentleman perhaps has dishonorable intentions, that she is wrong to suspect such disinterested generosity.

Ind. But still I insist his having no private interest in the action, makes it prodigious, almost incredible.

Bev. Dear Madam, I never knew you more mistaken: why, who can be more an usurer, than he who lays out his money in such valuable purchases? If pleasure be worth purchasing, how great a pleasure is it to him, who has a true taste of life, to ease an aching heart, to see the human countenance lighted up into smiles of joy, on the receipt of a bit of ore, which is superfluous, and otherwise useless in a man's own pocket? What could a man do better with his cash?¹

The closeness to Shaftesbury's thought and even phrasing indicates how far sentimentalism had spread in the popular literature of the age.

The examples multiply as the century wears on. In the drama, Nicholas Rowe's The Fair Penitent (1703), Jane Shore (1714), and Lady Jane Grey (1715) are either sentimental in inspiration or contain strong sentimental incidents. George Lillo's bourgeois bragedy The London Merchant (1731) was intended to move the audience to tears by the pathos of the tragic situation in which George Barnwell, its hero, finds himself. He is more victim than sinner, more an honest merchant apprentice destroyed by a seductress than an intense Elizabethan hero creating his own tragic destiny; his story was intended to draw tears, not

¹Richard Steele, The Conscious Lovers in The Theatre, Tragic and Comic, IX (Edinburgh: J. Robertson, 1776), 49.

to inspire pity and fear.

In nature poetry, James Thomson in "Summer" of The Seasons acknowledges the influence of Shaftesbury, "generous Ashley," and his theory of the "moral sense" which could be awakened and cultivated by nature. Mark Akenside, the Warton brothers, and a variety of other poets could be cited as examples of the increasing popularity of this movement at mid-century, as could Richardson and Fielding in the novel. By the end of the century sentimentalism had achieved more or less of a complete victory and had paved the way for the arrival of the great Romantics.

iv

Johnson's basic affinities with certain elements in these conflicting and contradictory positions are generally clear. In the first division of the political theory, Johnson's closeness to Hobbes in the analysis of human nature and the necessity for civil society as opposed to the state of nature if man is to achieve any happiness is apparent. Both men believed that the only chance anyone had for avoiding misery and securing peace and order lay in civilized society, in a political union. Furthermore, both men thought that power and uthority must be granted to established government, which in turn meant that power was "the central fact of government."¹ If this power was not granted

¹Donald J. Greene, The Politics of Samuel Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 246.

then government would fail and man would revert to his natural state of war and misery.

If Johnson's analysis of human nature was similar to Hobbes, he made quite different inferences from it. Where Hobbes insisted that government must be absolute to be effective, Johnson knew that it was possible for any government to grow so corrupt that revolution would inevitably destroy it. He did not, however, justify revolution on the Lockean grounds of "inalienable rights," just as he did not justify the investment of great power in government through an indissoluble "contract" as did Hobbes. Both of these arguments were in essence "speculation," and therefore destined to be either nullified or impoverished by their first contact with experience. Johnson thought power necessary and revolution inevitable in some cases for the same practical reason. Without power, government could not enforce the obedience necessary for the effectual performance of its duties; people would rebel when government no longer exercised its power to provide a minimum of satisfactory protection and security. In each case, the utilitarian standard of performance decides how people and government will act, or survive, not any metaphysical theory of rights or contract.

Although Johnson took from Hobbes, or at least arrived at the same conclusions that Hobbes did, the natural state of war and the equally savage nature of man, he added

to these beliefs more humane ingredients found in Locke and in one of Locke's favorite sources, Thomas Hooker. Thus Johnson found in human nature a desire for sociability that pushed the individual toward society. This desire, as well as the pleasures and benefits conferred through government, were responsible for man's subduing the equally natural tendencies in his nature to wage war and to take by force that which he desired. Donald Greene points out that Johnson made this belief one of his basic principles in his theory of the state.

Where Johnson chiefly follows Hooker is in basing his scheme of society on the two postulates, that man is naturally a social animal, and that obedience to authority is the essence of society.¹

A student of Johnson's ethical position has pointed out also that this insistence upon the sociability of man can be used to make a "broad and fundamental division between the two schools [of Hobbes and of Cumberland, a member of the anti-Hobbbists].

No matter how deeply pessimistic Johnson, and those proponents of natural law to whom I am comparing him, may seem concerning man's selfishness . . . they also feel that man has some natural affinity for his fellows, an affinity which Hobbes believes to be nonexistent."²

Johnson refused, however, to allow these "social passions" or "affections" to become man's natural condition as did the sentimentalists. To believe that proposition

¹Ibid.

²Robert Voitle, Samuel Johnson The Moralists (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 65.

was to be blinded by a theory, and to base conduct on that theory, without positing a conscience in morality or strongly enforced law in society, was to follow the shortest path to moral degeneracy and political anarchy.

Johnson was thus on the side of Hobbes in the argument between Hobbes and his many opponents about the nature of humanity. But he left Hobbes when Hobbes left the empirical observations accessible to all men's judgments. Hobbes turned to a "contract" as the basis of society, and from that basis he deduced the nature and function of government. Johnson turned to religion for his final judgment of all institutions, acts, and customs, but he did this not in terms of practical consequences but in terms of eternal happiness for the individual. He agreed with Locke that the practical consequences of good government should generally be life, liberty, and property, for these things were essential in the pursuit of temporal happiness. But temporal happiness should not be confused with eternal happiness, which in turn meant that government, for all its importance, could not finally assume the primary place in the life of man. It was a tool for man, and like any tool, its shape and form were trivial matters if it did the job.

Since man was not naturally good, as was believed by the followers of the sentimental movement, he could not hope to create a perfect government by correcting all faults and irregularities in his present one. Such tampering in

accordance with a mere speculative scheme was, at best, irresponsibility. Government would always be imperfect, just as man would always be imperfect. Government depended, therefore, upon each person's willingness to suffer the inevitable weaknesses and insufficiencies of government for the sake of the undeniable benefits it provided. Such a compromise was never completely satisfactory, as the perfection hoped for by the sentimentalists would be, but such a compromise had this great advantage over its opponent, it had already proved itself capable of maintaining public order and peace--the prime requirements of all governments.

These ideas and beliefs about man and society have been examined in several literary pieces studied in this work. The value of observing them in Rasselas, in Irene, in the allegories, and The Vanity of Human Wishes lies in the concreteness, in the specific examples of human conduct which give substance and depth to what in the political philosophy might seem obscure, arbitrary, or untenable. Johnson's purpose was to analyze human conduct so as to deduce from it generalized inferences which could stand as ethical laws. The generalization, the aphorism, or apothegm which were the end results of this process depended upon the cogency of consolidation for their effectiveness. The application of Johnson's ethical insights have generally been approved and gained for him in the eighteenth century the title of "Moralist." The political principles are

a result of the same kind of empirical process, only they refer not to moral conduct but to political. In a larger sense, of course, political conduct must finally be seen as moral, but this necessity did not cancel the obligation to investigate political behavior as political behavior first, before turning to these larger considerations. In the political world, the validity of application cannot be tested so easily or so completely as it can in the individual life. One way of avoiding this difficulty is to find or to trace these political generalizations to their source in specific human conduct. The clarification of this relationship has been the intention of this dissertation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Age of Johnson. Edited by W. S. Lewis. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949.

Balderston, Katherine. "Dr. Johnson and William Law," Publication of the Modern Language Association, LXXV (September, 1960), pp. 382-94.

Boswell, James. The Life Of Johnson. 6 vols. Edited by G. B. Hill, revised by L. F. Powell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934-50.

Bredvold, Louis. The Brave New World of the Enlightenment. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1961.

_____. The Literature of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century. New York: Collier Books, 1962.

_____. The Natural History of Sensibility. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962.

Brinton, Crane. Ideas and Men, The Story of Western Thought. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1950.

Bronson, Bertrand, "The Double Tradition of Dr. Johnson," in Eighteenth Century English Literature, Modern Essays In Criticism. Edited by James Clifford. Cf. infra.

_____. Johnson Agonistes and Other Essays. Cambridge: The University Press, 1946.

The Cambridge Platonists. Edited by E. T. Campagnac. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1901.

Clifford, James and Donald J. Greene. A Bibliography of Johnsonian Studies: 1950-1960 in Johnsonian Studies. Edited by Magdi Wahba. Cairo, 1961.

Clifford, James. Young Sam Johnson. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955.

- Cooper, Anthony Ashley, Third Earl of Shaftesbury. Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, etc. 3 vols. 3rd edition. London, 1723.
- Courtney, William Prideaux and David Nichol Smith. A Bibliography of Samuel Johnson. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1925.
- Crane, R. S. "Suggestions Toward a Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling,'" A Journal of English Literary History, I (December, 1934), pp. 205-30.
- Debates in the Senate of Lilliput in The Gentleman's Magazine. Vols. XI, XII, XIII, XIV. London, 1741-44.
- Eighteenth Century English Literature, Modern Essays In Criticism. Edited by James Clifford. New York: Oxford University Press, A Galaxy Book, 1959.
- Fairchild, Hoxie. The Noble Savage. New York: Columbia University Press, 1928.
- Greene, Donald J. The Politics of Samuel Johnson. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960.
- Hobbes, Thomas. De Cive. Edited by Sterling P. Lamprecht. New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, Inc., 1949.
- _____. Human Nature. Vol. IV of The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury. Edited by Sir William Molesworth, Bart. London: John Bohn, 1840.
- _____. The Leviathan. Edited by Michael Oakeshott. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960.
- Hoover, Benjamin. Samuel Johnson's Parliamentary Reporting. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1953.
- Johnson, Samuel. Works. 9 vols. London: Oxford University Press, 1825.
- Kolb, Gwin. "The Structure of Rasselas," Publication of the Modern Language Association, LXVI (September, 1951), pp. 698-717.
- _____. "The Use of Stoical Doctrine In Rasselas," Modern Language Notes, LXVIII (November, 1953), pp. 439-47.
- Lamprecht, Sterling P. The Moral and Political Philosophy of John Locke. New York: Russell and Russell, 1962.

The Letters of Samuel Johnson. 3 vols. Edited by R. W. Chapman. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1952.

Locke, John. An Essay on Human Understanding in The Philosophical Works of John Locke. 2 vols. Edited by J. S. St. John. London: George Bell and Sons, Bohn Standard Library, 1892.

_____. Second Treatise on Civil Government in Social Contract, Essays by Locke, Hume, and Rousseau. Edited by Sir Ernest Barker. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948.

Lovejoy, Arthur O. The Great Chain of Being. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960.

_____. "The Parallel of Deism and Classicism," in Essays in the History of Ideas. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1948, pp. 79-98.

Lovejoy, Arthur O. and George Boas. A Documentary History of Primitivism and Related Ideas. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1935.

McAdam, Jr., E. L. Dr. Johnson and the English Law. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1951.

Macaulay, Thomas. Works. 8 vols. Edited by Lady Trevelyan. New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1897.

McKillop, A. D. English Literature From Dryden To Burns. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1948.

Milton, John. Aeropagitica in John Milton, Complete Poems and Major Prose. Edited by Merritt Y. Hughes. New York: The Odyssey Press, 1957.

_____. Paradise Lost in John Milton, Complete Poems and Major Prose. Edited by Merritt Y. Hughes. New York: The Odyssey Press, 1957.

Orlovich, Robert. "Samuel Johnson's Political Ideas and Their Influence on His Work." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1941.

The Poems of Samuel Johnson. Edited by David Nichol Smith and E. L. McAdam. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1941.

Samuel Johnson's Prefaces and Dedications. Edited by Allen T. Hazen. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937.

Selected Writings of Edmund Burke. Edited by Walter Jackson Bate. New York: The Modern Library, 1960.

Sewell, Richard B. "Dr. Johnson, Rousseau, and Reform," in The Age of Johnson. Edited by W. S. Lewis. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949, pp. 307-17.

Sherburn, George. The Restoration and Eighteenth Century in A Literary History of England. Edited by Albert C. Baugh. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1948.

Sidney, Joseph. "The Political Thought of Samuel Johnson." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1957.

Steele, Richard. The Conscious Lovers. Vol. IX of The Theatre, Tragic and Comic. Edinburgh: J. Robertson, 1776.

Tinker, C. B. Nature's Simple Plan. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1922.

Tracy, C. B. "Democritus, Arise! A Study of Dr. Johnson's Humor," The Yale Review, XXXIX (Winter, 1950), pp. 294-310.

Tsanoff, Radaslov A. The Moral Ideals of Our Civilization. New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1942.

Tuveson, Ernest Lee. The Imagination as a Means of Grace, Locke and the Aesthetics of Romanticism. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1960.

Voitle, Robert. Samuel Johnson The Moralist. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961.

Whitley, Alvin. "The Comedy of Rasselas," A Journal of English Literary History, XXIII (March, 1956), pp. 48-70.

Whitney, Lois. Primitivism and the Idea of Progress. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1934.