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GINSBERG, Elaine Kaner, 1936-
THE RHETORIC OF REVOLUTION: AN ANALYSIS
OF THOMAS PAINE'S COMMON SENSE.

The University of Oklahoma, Ph.D., 1971
Language and Literature, general

University Microfilms, A XEROX Company, Ann Arbor, Michigan

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE RHETORIC OF REVOLUTION:
AN ANALYSIS OF THOMAS PAINE'S COMMON SENSE

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
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Norman, Oklahoma

1971

THE RHETORIC OF REVOLUTION:
AN ANALYSIS OF THOMAS PAINE'S COMMON SENSE

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Bruce Granger, not only for his invaluable guidance in the preparation of this dissertation, but also for his continued interest throughout long months of correspondence. I also owe a debt of thanks to my friend and colleague at West Virginia University, Dr. Judith Stitzel, for the many stimulating discussions which helped to clarify my ideas. Most of all, I must acknowledge the patience, understanding, and encouragement of my husband and children, without which this study could never have been completed. To them, my thanks and my love.

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INTRODUCTION

In every impassioned popular discussion there is likely to spring up a leader, who with pen or voice strikes in, at just the right moment, with just the right word, so skillfully, so powerfully, that thenceforward the intellectual battle seems to be raging and surging around him and the fiery word which he has sent shrilling through the air. So far as the popular discussion of American Independence is concerned, precisely this was the case, between January and July, 1776, with Thomas Paine and his pamphlet "Common Sense."¹

Although Thomas Paine was not the first advocate of American independence and his argument was not the most original presented in the long struggle between England and the colonies, Common Sense was undoubtedly the most powerful presentation of the doctrine of independence in America and its author the most effective propagandist of the Revolutionary era.

Many historians have pointed out that in the months prior to the publication of Common Sense in January, 1776, a number of influential colonial leaders, including "generals

¹Moses Coit Tyler, The Literary History of the American Revolution (2 vols.; New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1941), I, 469.

Washington, Greene and Charles Lee at Cambridge, and Franklin, Benjamin Rush, Samuel Adams and Richard Henry Lee at Philadelphia," were talking and working for independence.² John Adams had presented the idea of independence earlier than 1776, and that future President said that there was nothing in Common Sense that had not been frequently proposed in the Continental Congress. No one of these leaders, however, had publicly proposed independence in print, and, more important, in the long Anglo-American struggle no one had designed and written an argument which would appeal to both the common man--the farmer, the artisan, and the tradesman--and to the colonial aristocracy--the wealthy landowners and merchants. In Paine's pamphlet the argument was designed to appeal to all segments of the colonial population, and the language, unlike that of many legalistically styled pamphlets in the period 1763-1776, was adapted to and flavored with the idiom of the common man.

That the pamphlet was a best-seller overnight is evidence of its popularity. Paine reported that 120,000 copies were sold in three months, and later estimates reach half a million.³ In addition, newspapers reprinted the text in whole or part and extravagantly praised the pamphlet.

²Alfred Owen Aldridge, Man of Reason: The Life of Thomas Paine (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1959),

³"Introduction," The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine, ed. by Philip S. Foner (2 vols.; New York: The Citadel Press, 1945) I, xiv.

Arthur M. Schlesinger quotes some contemporary newspaper panegyrics of Common Sense. One writer declares that "this animated work dispels, with irresistible energy, the prejudices of the mind against the doctrine of independence," another that it is "like a ray of revelation." One reports that it has "worked miracles, made TORIES WHIGS, and washed Blackamores white," and another that it is "of more worth than its weight in gold."⁴

Soon after its publication, sections of the pamphlet were being quoted by people of all stations of life. To the common man, especially the new immigrant, Paine's denunciations of hereditary monarchy, aristocracy, and the myth of England as a protective mother were particularly appealing. The argument that an independent America would profit from free trade with all of Europe was influential among both the farmers and the merchants. All classes approved and quoted the principle that the American people had a natural right to independence. Most important, though, everyone who considered himself a man of feeling and "common sense" felt compelled by the force of Paine's argument and language to assent to his conclusions.

The power of Common Sense was recognized by patriot leaders and delegates to the Continental Congress meeting

⁴Arthur M. Schlesinger, Prelude to Independence: The Newspaper War on Britain 1764-1776 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), p. 253.

in Philadelphia who sent numbers of copies back home. Some asked their constituents to distribute the pamphlet, while others, more timid, requested only that the citizens of their home colonies inform the delegates of their opinion of the sentiments therein expressed, thereby making Common Sense a barometer of public opinion.⁵

Testimonies to Paine's brilliant performance came, in addition, from influential colonial leaders. On January 24, 1776, General Charles Lee wrote to Washington that he "never saw such a masterly irresistible performance."⁶ And Washington himself, reading Common Sense soon after learning that Norfolk, Virginia had been burned by Lord Dunmore on January 1, wrote to Joseph Reed, "A few more of such flaming arguments as were exhibited at Falmouth and Norfolk, added to the sound doctrine and unanswerable reasoning contained in the pamphlet Common Sense, will not leave numbers at a loss to decide upon the propriety of separation."⁷ Two months later Washington again wrote to Reed, this time saying that in his own colony of Virginia the pamphlet was working "a powerful change . . . in the minds of men."⁸

⁵Philip Davidson, Propaganda and the American Revolution 1763-1783 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1941), p. 215.

⁶Quoted in Schlesinger, Prelude, p. 253.

⁷Quoted in Moncure Daniel Conway, The Life of Thomas Paine (2 vols.; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1892) I, 62.

⁸Quoted in Schlesinger, Prelude, p. 253.

A final testimony to the effectiveness of Common Sense is quoted by Alfred Owen Aldridge, reprinted from The American Annual Register . . . for the Year 1796.

When the first copies arrived in the American camp at Cambridge, they were perused with transport. An officer then in that army observed lately that a reinforcement of five thousand troops would not have inspired the troops with equal confidence as this pamphlet did, in the justice of their cause and the probability of their ultimate success Before the plain arguments of an obscure individual, . . . the pensioned and titled advocates of royalty sunk into forgetfulness. The greatest orators of antiquity did not more tyrannically command the conviction of their hearers than the writer of Common Sense. . . . [It] irresistibly seized the helm of public opinion, and tore up resistance by the roots. The summons to liberty and to vengeance resounded from New Hampshire to Georgia. From the degraded appendage of a foreign monarchy, the thirteen United States rose to an independent existence. Thomas Paine was the Tyrtaeus of that revolution.⁹

As Aldridge points out, however, one cannot assume that independence would not have occurred without Common Sense or even that such a pamphlet was a "necessary antecedent" to that event.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the power of Paine's rhetoric cannot be denied and should not be underestimated. He did work a powerful change in the minds of men, and it behooves the student of the literature of the Revolution to inquire why, to investigate what lay behind the power of Common Sense. Yet there has never been a complete analysis of Common Sense to determine the source or sources of its powerful appeal. It is the intent of this study, therefore, to do just that,

⁹Aldridge, Man of Reason, pp. 42-43.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 43.

to analyze Common Sense as a specific rhetorical attempt to influence the minds and actions of men.

The first four chapters will consider the reference points which interact to affect the pamphlet: the author, the occasion, the audience, and the climate of opinion. Chapter I will discuss the circumstances of Paine's life up to the publication of Common Sense and the social and intellectual milieu which undoubtedly had an effect upon his ideas and his attitudes. Chapter II will provide the background of the situation which encouraged the publication of Common Sense, outlining the events of the period 1763-1776, but especially 1774-1775, and the growing controversy concerning the question of American independence. Chapter III will describe the various segments of the audience for whom Paine was writing, their interests, their conflicts, and the reasons for their opposition to the idea of independence. Chapter IV will look briefly at the philosophical climate of opinion in the colonies, the background of ideas against which Paine was writing and the beliefs and attitudes of his audience.

From the reference points of author, occasion, audience, and climate of opinion, the study will move to a rhetorical analysis of Common Sense itself. Basing the analysis upon Kenneth Burke's key concept of "identification" as the chief means of persuasion, Chapters V and VI will focus on Paine's strategy of identifying himself as author with his audience--

their values, their attitudes, and their interests. Chapter V will deal with the form of the argument as a strategy of identification and also with the argument itself. Chapter VI will consider the persona which Paine creates in Common Sense through both argument and style and then will look closely at certain aspects of Paine's style and its role in the process of persuasion through identification. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn concerning the source or sources of the powerful persuasive appeal of Common Sense.

CHAPTER I

THE AUTHOR

On November 30, 1774, Thomas Paine, a rather obscure thirty-seven year old Englishman, arrived in Philadelphia bearing a letter of introduction from Benjamin Franklin to his son-in-law Richard Bache. Franklin wrote that Paine had been "well recommended . . . as an ingenious worthy young man," and requested that Bache help Paine find employment "as a clerk, or assistant tutor in a school, or assistant surveyor."¹ Through the influence of Bache, Paine obtained tutoring and editorial work. Soon, however, he turned completely to a literary career and was engaged by Robert Aitkin, a printer and bookseller, to edit the Pennsylvania Magazine.

At the same time, Paine inevitably became caught up in the political, social, and economic controversy of the time. Through his patron he became acquainted with the intellectual and political leaders of Philadelphia, from whom, according to John Adams, he picked up what information he could about American affairs and, "finding the great question

¹Quoted in Conway, Life of Thomas Paine, I, 40.

was independence, he gleaned from those he saw the commonplace arguments, such as the necessity of independence at some time or other; the peculiar fitness at this time; the justice of it; the provocation to it; our ability to maintain it etc., etc."² On January 9, 1776, responding to the temper of the times, Paine published Common Sense, the most influential pamphlet of the American Revolution.

Several years after his arrival in America Paine wrote to Franklin: "I thought it very hard to have the country set on fire about my ears almost the moment I got into it."³ Paine, however, was by nature a rebel and an agitator, and despite his own words it is difficult to believe that he did not relish the "fire" of controversy raging around him. Later, in 1783, he admitted that it was the cause of America which made him an author:

The force with which it struck my mind, and the dangerous condition the country appeared to be in, by courting an impossible and an unnatural reconciliation with those who were determined to reduce her, instead of striking out into the only line that could cement and save her, A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, made it impossible for me, feeling as I did, to be silent. (I, 235)

But what in this obscure Englishman's background contributed

²The Works of John Adams, ed. by Charles Francis Adams, (10 vols.; Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1850-56), II, 507.

³Letter to Franklin, May 16, 1778, in The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine, ed. by Philip S. Foner (2 vols.; New York: The Citadel Press, 1945), II, 1150-51. Subsequent references to this edition of Paine's writings will be cited by volume and page number in the body of the text.

to his phenomenal success as a political writer is a matter for considerable conjecture, for not much is known of the first thirty-seven years of his life.

Born into what might be called a lower middle class family in Thetford, England, on January 29, 1737, Thomas Paine received what he termed an "exceedingly good moral education, and a tolerable stock of useful learning." (I, 496) His father, Joseph Paine, was a staymaker by trade and one of a small group of Quakers who met in Thetford. Thomas, however, was baptized in the Established (Anglican) Church to which his mother belonged. In The Age of Reason he writes of his early dislike for this orthodox theology. Recalling a sermon he had heard as a child on "Redemption by the Death of the Son of God," he remembered being revolted and thinking "that it was making God Almighty act like a passionate man who killed His son when He could not revenge Himself in any other way." (I, 497) Though it is doubtful that he was ever intensely exposed to Quakerism, he was evidently more favorably influenced by his father's religion. Quite possibly his rebelliousness and his willingness to flout the traditional ways of doing things were a Quaker inheritance. His humanitarianism, too, and his belief in innate benevolence might also be attributed to his early exposure to Quaker attitudes and theology.

Of his formal education, Paine wrote that he went to grammar school in Thetford, but "did not learn Latin, not

only because [he] had no inclination to learn languages, but because of the objection the Quakers have against the books in which the language is taught." This did not, however, prevent him "from being acquainted with the subjects of all the Latin books used in the school." During his early years he felt that the "natural bent" of his mind was to science. He also believed that he had "some turn" and "some talent" for poetry, but this he suppressed "as leading too much into the field of imagination." (I, 496) Clearly, at even an early age his interests and ambitions were turned toward things of a practical nature. He did however pursue both of these interests--science and poetry--in later life, and both have a great degree of importance in relation to this study of Common Sense, for Paine's interest in science probably led him to the natural law and natural rights philosophy which underlies the argument of Common Sense, and it was his "turn" or "talent" for poetry which considerably affected the style of that work.

At the age of thirteen Thomas Paine left grammar school to learn the trade of staymaking from his father. The end of his formal schooling, however, did not mean the end of his learning. In The Age of Reason he writes about his philosophy of education: "As to the learning that any person gains from school education, it serves only like a small capital to put him in the way of beginning learning for himself afterwards. Every person of learning is finally

his own teacher. (I, 497)

Apparently Paine pursued his father's trade in Thetford until he was twenty years old, whereupon he found employment as a staymaker in London. It was during this period in London that Paine became acquainted with Newtonian science. In The Age of Reason he writes: "As soon as I was able, I purchased a pair of globes, and attended the philosophical lectures of Martin and Ferguson and became afterward acquainted with Dr. Bevis, of the society called the Royal Society, then living in the Temple, and an excellent astronomer." (I, 496) The next year, though, he moved to Dover, and then in April, 1759 to Sandwich, Kent, where he opened shop as a master staymaker. Within a few months he was married and a widower. Perhaps because his wife's father had once been an exciseman, Paine decided to prepare himself for that profession, poorly paid though it was. He was admitted to the service on December 1, 1762 as a supernumerary, and on August 8, 1764 was appointed to the Alford Out-Ride, Grantham Collection, a rural station. Only one year later he was dismissed from his post for "stamping," the common but illegal practice of approving a whole shipment of merchandise without inspecting it.

After this dismissal, Paine returned temporarily to staymaking, then turned to teaching, first in London, then in Kensington. In February, 1768 he took up a position in Lewes with the excise service, to which he had been reap-

pointed upon petition in 1766. At Lewes Paine associated with a group of citizens who gathered regularly for both fun and serious conversation. Thomas "Clio" Rickman, a companion of Paine's during this period and an early biographer, wrote that Paine

lived several years in habits of intimacy with a very respectable, sensible, and convivial set of acquaintance, who were entertained with his witty sallies and informed by his more serious conversations. In politics he was at this time a Whig, and notorious for that quality which has been defined as perseverance in a good cause and obstinacy in a bad one. He was tenacious of his opinions, which were bold, acute, and independent, and which⁴ he maintained with ardour, elegance, and argument.

In March, 1771, Paine remarried, but evidently his financial situation grew steadily worse, as did that of his fellow excisemen. Seriously underpaid and overworked, the excisemen requested that Paine serve as spokesman for them in an appeal to Parliament for a raise in their wages. Early in 1772 he prepared a pamphlet, The Case of the Officers of the Excise, a copy of which was delivered to every member of Parliament. The argument and style of the pamphlet clearly anticipate his future efforts in behalf of humanitarian causes. He examines the situation of the officers, their expenses as compared to their salaries, the necessity of moving frequently, and the distress caused by living on a fixed salary in times of inflation. In addition to pleading for a salary increase for the officers on humani-

⁴Quoted in Conway, Life, I, 25.

tarian grounds, he argues in a lucid and legal fashion that the state of poverty in which the officers live only leads to temptations to defraud.

The commissioners of excise strongly enjoin that no officer accept any treaty, gratuity or, in short, lay himself under any kind of obligation to the traders under their survey: the wisdom of such an injunction is evident; but the practice of it, to a person surrounded with children and poverty, is scarcely possible; and such obligations, wherever they exist, must operate, directly or indirectly, to the injury of the revenue. (II, 10)

Thus the deprived state of the excise officers result in "Corruption, Collusion and Neglect." Furthermore, Paine argues, the low salaries paid to excise officers will not attract the kind of honest, sober, diligent, skillful men who should be in this service, "for where is the mechanic, or even the laborer, who cannot earn at least 1s.9 1/4d. per day?" As a result, the service will be filled with "the dregs of every calling" and will become "the common receptacle for the indigent, the ignorant and the calamitous." (II, 13)

Paine summarizes The Case of the Officers of the Excise in lucid, vigorous prose which anticipates his best revolutionary writings:

With an addition of salary the excise would wear a new aspect, and recover its former constitution. Languor and neglect would give place to care and cheerfulness. Men of reputation and abilities would seek after it, and finding a comfortable maintenance, would stick to it. The unworthy and the incapable would be rejected; the power of superiors be re-established, and laws and instructions receive new force. The officers would be secured from the

temptations of poverty, and the revenue from the evils of it; the cure would be as extensive as the complaint, and new health out-root the present corruptions. (II, 15)

The pamphlet was ignored by Parliament, as was the situation of the excise officers. Apparently the only result of Paine's effort was to attract the attention of his superiors, and in April, 1774, he was dismissed from the excise service again, this time for "having quitted his Business without obtaining the Board's Leave for so doing."⁵ Shortly thereafter Paine's possessions were sold at auction and, nearly penniless, he and his wife were formally separated. Thus, at the age of thirty-seven, Thomas Paine was, in effect, a complete failure--in business, in his profession, and in his personal life. In October he left for America bearing the letter of introduction from Franklin, whom he had evidently met while in London. Nothing in Paine's life or career to this point at all indicated that here was a man who would excite controversy in three countries and influence revolutions in two of them.

In order to understand what elements contributed to both the argument and the style of Common Sense we have to draw some conclusions about Paine's ideas based upon what is known of his background and experience, what his writings tell us about his ideas and their formation, and what we know of the intellectual milieu in which he lived. Many

⁵Conway, Life, I, 29.

critics have speculated about the source of the political ideas expressed in Common Sense. Although Paine disclaimed any influence of other writers or theorists, this disclaimer is difficult to accept unquestioningly. He declared in the New York Public Advertiser on August 22, 1807:

So far from taking any ideas from Locke or from anybody else, it was the absurd expression of a mere John Bull in England, about the year 1773, that first caused me to turn my mind to systems of government. In speaking of the then King of Prussia, called the Great Frederick, he said, 'He is the right sort of man for a king for he has a deal of the devil in him.' This set me to think if a system of government could not exist that did not require the devil, and I succeeded without any help from anybody.⁶

In The Age of Reason Paine writes that for a long time he had "no disposition for what was called politics," and that when, therefore, he turned his thoughts toward matters of government, he had to form a system that "accorded with the moral and philosophic principles" in which he had been educated. (I, 496) His education in these moral and philosophic principles, as we have seen, probably began with the influence of his father's Quakerism. In his defense of deism in The Age of Reason Paine remarks that "the religion that approaches the nearest of all others to true Deism, in the moral and benign part thereof, is that professed by the Quakers." (I, 498) His early rejection of the stricter theology of Anglicanism suggests that Paine

⁶Quoted in Aldridge, Man of Reason, p. 40.

preferred the Quaker doctrine of benevolent, loving deity who had infused all of his creatures with his benevolence and love. In recalling the sermon that he had disliked as a child, he wrote that his idea was that God was "too good to do such an action, and also too almighty to be under any necessity of doing it." (I, 497) Teaching that this benevolent, almighty deity, was the father to all, the Quakers taught also the doctrine of the universal brotherhood of man, which probably led Paine to the obvious corollary of this doctrine, the "illuminating and divine principle of the equal rights of man." (I, 274) Too, the Quakers taught that men, as children of a loving God, are not totally depraved, but share in the love and benevolence which infuse the universe. As Paine expressed the idea in The Rights of Man, man, uncorrupted by civilization, "is naturally the friend of man, and . . . human nature is not of itself vicious." (I, 397)⁷

Paine also respected the humanitarianism and philanthropy of the Quakers. He considered them "remarkable for their care of the poor of their Society . . . [and] equally remarkable for the education of their children." (II, 759) The Quakers' role in such humanitarian causes as the abolition of slavery, prison reform and women's rights undoubtedly

⁷For further statements of Paine's view of God's benevolence and man's duty to imitate it, see also, for example Writings, I, 506 and 512.

attracted his sympathy and approval, for he too expended much energy in behalf of the poor, the oppressed, and the enslaved. As a testimony to his beliefs, Paine begins The Age of Reason with his profession of faith. Included in this profession is the basic premise of all his writings and all his efforts: "I believe in the equality of man; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow-creatures happy." (I, 464) Thus, although he was never actively associated with the Quaker religion, it can be assumed nevertheless that these basic beliefs had a considerable influence upon Paine's philosophical and political ideas, the final evidence of this being, perhaps, his expressed desire to be buried by the Quakers. (II, 1500)

Building upon the basic premises learned from the Quakers, a more pervasive influence upon Paine's philosophical and political ideas was probably Newtonian science. Not only his writings on government, but also his writings on economics and religion express the desirability of a parallel between the laws of nature and the laws of human society. Man's happiness, he maintained, was dependent upon the discovery of the laws of nature and their application to human institutions.

Paine may have read Newton's works himself, but this would not have been necessary. Newtonian science was familiar to the common man in the eighteenth century, not

only through Newton's Principia, but as Carl Becker indicates through conversation, popular lectures, and books by such men as Voltaire (available in translation in England), Colin Maclaurin, Benjamin Martin, and James Ferguson. Voltaire himself said that "very few people read Newton . . . [but] everybody talks about him."⁸ Following his natural interest in science, Thomas Paine reports that, while living in London at the age of twenty, he "purchased a pair of globes, and attended the philosophical lectures of Martin and Ferguson." From these lectures, and from the general climate of opinion in eighteenth century England, he drew his ideas of nature.

Seeing nature as of divine origin, the Newtonians interpreted it as the laws by which the universe is governed. Thus, the "magic words" for the eighteenth century were "nature" and "natural laws," and the supreme command was "Follow nature." Defining nature in "The Existence of God," Paine writes that "it is no other than the laws by which motion and action of every kind, with respect to unintelligible matter, are regulated." (II, 752) Nature meant harmony, law, and order. "When we survey the works of creation, the revolutions of the planetary system, and the whole economy of what is called nature, which is no other

⁸Quoted in Carl Becker, The Declaration of Independence (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), pp. 43-44.

than the laws the Creator has prescribed to matter, we see unerring order and universal harmony reigning throughout the whole." (II, 816)

Furthermore, nature is the standard to which everything must be brought and in conformity with which man finds his only happiness. "In the eighteenth century climate of opinion, whatever question you seek to answer, nature is the test, the standard: the ideas, the customs, the institutions of men, if they are to attain perfection, must obviously be in accord with those laws which 'nature reveals at all times, to all men.'"⁹

Thus Newtonian science encouraged all men to believe that they could easily discover truth by disinterestedly observing natural phenomena and applying their God-given reasoning powers. Isaac Newton was deified, but what impressed men most was that Newton's discoveries could have been made by anyone. For though nature was of divine origin, it was also, after all, "just the common things that common men observed and handled every day, and natural law only the uniform way these things behaved."

Here was nature all about . . . revealing, to the eyes of the common man, no less than to the learned, those laws that imposed on all things their reasonable and beneficent, even if curious and intricate, commands.¹⁰

⁹Carl Becker, The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932), p. 53.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 58.

The sensationalist philosophy of John Locke, as developed in his Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690), supported the attitudes which Newtonianism developed. Locke taught that there was no such thing as innate ideas, that everything man knows comes to him either from sensation or reflection. It is experience which furnishes the mind: "Our observation employed either about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds, perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understanding with all the materials of thinking."¹¹ Locke's Essay went through more than thirty editions in the eighteenth century and became the "psychological gospel" of that century.¹²

Locke, more perhaps than anyone else, made it possible for the eighteenth century to believe what it wanted to believe: namely, that in the world of human relations as well as in the physical world, it was possible for men to 'correspond with the general harmony of nature'; that since man, and the mind of man, were integral parts of the work of God, it was possible for man, by the use of his mind, to bring his thought and conduct, and hence the institutions by which he lived into perfect harmony with the Universal Natural Order.¹³

The premises of Newtonian science and Lockeian psychology led the eighteenth century to a number of conclusions about the nature of man. They accepted the notion

¹¹John Locke, Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book II, Ch. 1, sec. 2.

¹²Becker, Declaration of Independence, pp. 56, 55.

¹³Ibid., p. 57.

that man was essentially a good, sociable, educable creature.

They knew instinctively that "man in general" is natively good, easily enlightened, disposed to follow reason and common sense; generous and humane and tolerant, more easily led by persuasion than compelled by force; above all a good citizen and a man of virtue, being well aware that, since the rights claimed by himself are only the natural and imprescriptible rights of all men, it is necessary for him voluntarily to assume the obligations and to submit to the restraints imposed by a just government for the commonweal.¹⁴

Thus it was that the new science and the new psychology collaterally encouraged the new philosophy of government which was very much a part of the eighteenth century milieu. Emphasizing objective observation as a road to the discovery of truth and the ability of every man to discover truth through the use of his reason, Newtonianism and Lockeian psychology helped break down the barriers which blocked the way to an open society, giving men new confidence in their own abilities and virtues and in their own place in the political scheme of things.

It was John Locke, preparing a justification for the English "revolution" of 1688, who provided the answers for the eighteenth century's questions about the nature of the "political scheme of things" in his two Treatises on Civil Government. Searching for a formula for governmental authority, Locke concluded that, since the will of God was revealed in nature (human nature as well as external nature),

¹⁴Becker, Heavenly City, p. 103.

such authority could derive only from a compact that men, acting according to their nature, would enter into of their own free will. Men are naturally in a state of perfect freedom and perfect equality. This "state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges everyone; and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind who will but consult it, that, being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions." All men are naturally in this state of nature, "and remain so, till by their own consents they make themselves members of some politic society." Once entered into society, man's liberty consists in being "under no other legislative power but that established by consent in the commonwealth."¹⁵ Even then, the only laws by which men may be bound within this commonwealth are such as accord with the only law which originally binds men, that is, the law of reason.

Locke continued that the freedom of men under government consists in having "a standing rule to live by, common to every one of that society, and made by the legislative power erected in it . . . not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary will of another man."¹⁶ When men do compact with each other for the establishment

¹⁵John Locke, Second Treatise on Civil Government, ch. ii, secs. 6, 15; ch. iv, sec. 22.

¹⁶Ibid., iv, 22.

of a commonwealth, they do so "for the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties, and estates." The power which men compacting to establish a government place in the hands of others for the preservation of their properties must be used for that purpose; when it is not, when it "is applied to other ends, and made use of to impoverish, harass, or subdue them to the arbitrary irregular commands of those that have it," then the people may "dissolve the appointed government," resume their original liberty, and establish a new government in order to "provide for their own safety and security, which is the end for which they are in society."¹⁷ Thus, according to Locke, government has a specific utilitarian purpose--the welfare of the people of the commonwealth.

John Locke was not the only philosopher to express the ideas above summarized, nor was he the originator of these principles which he expounded. He was merely giving expression to beliefs which were products of a long period of political writings going all the way back to the classic Greek and Roman political treatises. Nevertheless, Locke gave clear and popular expression to these ideas and therefore became the greatest and most representative English exponent of the thought of the Enlightenment.

The Lockeian concepts of government, pervasive as

¹⁷Ibid., ix, 123; xviii, 201; xix, 222.

they were in the society Paine frequented in Lewes, in London, and in Philadelphia, undoubtedly had a strong influence upon him. He reflects this influence implicitly in Common Sense and in other writings where he discusses the natural rights of man, and the origins and ends of society and government. Paine, as we shall see, distinguishes between society and government whereas Locke does not. What is important is that Locke's expression of the natural rights of man, the social compact theory of the origin of government, and his statements concerning the ends of government are basic to the ideas set forth in all of Paine's political writings.

Another probable influence upon Paine's political ideas, closely related to that of Locke, is the political theory of the eighteenth century English radical Whigs, whose ideas also echo in Paine's writings. Rickman tells us that Paine was a staunch Whig, and it is likely therefore that the political discussions in which he participated in England exposed him to the tradition of ideas of that group which Caroline Robbins refers to as the "Real Whigs" or "Commonwealthmen."¹⁸ Though this group had only a minor influence upon English political practice, "their continued existence and activity, albeit of a limited kind, served

¹⁸See Caroline Robbins, The Eighteenth Century Commonwealthman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959).

to maintain a revolutionary tradition and to link the histories of English struggles against tyranny in one century with those of American efforts for independence in another."¹⁹ In fact, Miss Robbins points out, the greatest memorial to the ideas of these Real Whigs is the incorporation into the American constitution of many of the reforms they advocated. The eighteenth century Commonwealthmen carried forth the revolutionary traditions of such seventeenth century thinkers and writers as John Milton, Algernon Sidney, and, of course, John Locke. The Real Whigs included such men as James Harrington, Henry Neville, Bishop Hoadly, Robert Molesworth, Henry Bolingbroke, John Trenchard, and Thomas Gordon. They agitated for, among other things, the frequent rotation of office holders, the widening of the franchise, and the right of constituents to instruct their representatives. Most important, "the Real Whigs greatly extended the application of general statements of right so frequent in English constitutional pronouncements."

Two such principles were vigorously expressed in the works of Molyneux, Molesworth, Fletcher, and Trenchard, which were entirely denied by most contemporary politicians. One of these insisted that an Englishman was entitled to be ruled by laws to which he himself had consented, wherever he was, at home or abroad, and the other extended this right to all mankind.²⁰

The latter principle began to modify old assumptions about

¹⁹Ibid., p. 4.

²⁰Ibid., p. 9.

slavery, and it is therefore interesting to note that among the first pieces Paine published in the Pennsylvania Journal was an essay condemning slavery and the slave trade and calling for their abolition. (II, 16-19) Liberty of thought, particularly in the realm of religion, was also an important principle of the Real Whigs, many of whom were Dissenters, and it was an important principle to Paine too.

If Paine had not encountered the ideas of the Real Whigs in England, which seems unlikely, he surely would have met them through his American friends, for "however unrespected and unheeded this heritage of dissident thought was in England itself, it was eagerly received in the colonies across the Atlantic."²¹

Throughout the eighteenth century the Americans had published, republished, read, cited, and even plagiarized these radical writings in their search for arguments to counter royal authority, to explain American deviations, or to justify peculiar American freedoms. . . . What the Whig radicals were saying about English government and society had so long been a part of the American mind, had so often been reinforced by their own first-hand observations of London life, and had possessed such an affinity to their own provincial interests and experience that it always seemed to the colonists to be what they had been trying to say all along.²²

Bernard Bailyn identifies the most influential of the radical writers in America as John Trenchard and Thomas

²¹Gordon S. Wood, The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969), p. 16.

²²Ibid., p. 17.

Gordon, authors of the Independent Whig and Cato's Letters, whose writings were republished again and again in America, quoted everywhere, and "ranked with the treatises of Locke as the most authoritative statement of the nature of political liberty."²³ The Americans responded especially to Trenchard and Gordon's emphasis upon liberty as the unalienable right of all mankind. Stretching the meaning and content of the word "liberty," they maintained that the arts, science, education, commerce, and property could prosper only in a state of liberty. "Cato" also argued the natural equality of all men, stating that "none ever rose above the rest but by force or consent."²⁴ Among the ideas of Trenchard and Gordon that echo in Common Sense are those on hereditary right, representative government, and the relationship between colonies and their mother country. In Letter 132 Cato inquires into the doctrine of hereditary right and concludes that it has been the cause of much mischief and disaster. Trenchard and Gordon also advance the argument, in Letter 60, that it is necessary and highly desirable for the representatives to have the same interests as those they represent, "that the Persons entrusted

²³Bernard Bailyn, Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 36.

²⁴Letter 45, September 16, 1721, in The English Libertarian Heritage, ed. by David L. Jacobson (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965), p. 101.

and representing, shall . . . never have any Interest detached from the Persons entrusting and represented."²⁵ In Letter 106 Cato discusses colonies and protests that he "would not suggest so distant a Thought, as that any of our Colonies, when they grow stronger, should ever attempt to wean themselves from us." But, he continues, care must be taken to prevent such an instance, for it is natural that every man's thoughts will be his own best interest:

No Creatures suck the Teats of their Dams longer than they can draw Milk from thence, or can provide themselves with better Food: Nor will any Country continue their subjection to Another, only because their Great-Grandmothers were acquainted.²⁶

How the Americans made use of eighteenth century Enlightenment ideas in general and the political thought of the English radicals in particular will be discussed in more detail in Chapter III of this study. It is sufficient to re-emphasize here that, insofar as Paine is concerned, had he not become acquainted with the writers of the Real Whigs in England, he undoubtedly would have after his arrival in America.

The discussion of possible or probable influences upon Paine's thought could continue along other lines but would probably become less and less fruitful. One more

²⁵Ibid., p. 121.

²⁶Ibid., p. 245.

important point, however, needs to be made. Though Quakerism, Newtonian science, Locke, and radical Whig political thought all most likely had some influence upon Paine, the greatest influence upon his ideas, as indeed upon any man's, was life itself. Philip Foner makes this point when he writes that "during the first thirty-seven years of [Paine's] life he saw enough misery in England, enough of the contrast between the affluence of the upper classes and the poverty and suffering of the masses to influence his thinking for the remainder of his days."²⁷ Paine knew from both experience and observation the effects of corrupt governmental agencies burdened by hereditary influence and position and the inequalities of the Parliamentary system. He also knew poverty and its debilitating effects upon the working people, and saw the vicious results of the inhumane poor laws and criminal code. All of these experiences might have, as he himself said, set him to thinking of a system of government that "did not require the devil." It is certain that they made him a champion of humanitarian causes and a spokesman for the liberty and equality of all mankind. If Quaker theology, Newtonian science, and Enlightenment philosophy gave him the premises of his argument in Common Sense, it was life itself which provided him with the righteous indignation that gives such compelling force to that argument.

²⁷"Introduction" to Complete Writings of Thomas Paine, p. x.

CHAPTER II

THE OCCASION

Throughout the colonial period England and America had gradually been diverging in customs, institutions, language, and interests, but it was not until the early 1760's when Thomas Paine was serving as an exciseman in England, that the serious trouble between the colonies and the mother country which was to eventually occasion the writing of Common Sense began. Even then, probably few colonists conceived that an independent America might be the result of this initial disagreement.

The continent had thrived in a colonial condition, and, on the surface at least, it appeared that all segments of colonial society in 1763 were content with the existing relationship between Britain and the colonies, a relationship which has been described as one of "salutary neglect." The advancement of George Grenville to the head of the British ministry in that year signaled the beginning of a change in that relationship. Confronted by a multitude of problems, including a national debt that had risen to £ 147 million, Grenville determined to bring the

colonies more closely under the economic and political control of the mother country, requiring them to share the cost of defending the British Empire.

In the next ten years the English ministries would repeatedly move to strengthen the position of the appointed colonial governors, whose power had been greatly weakened by the elected colonial assemblies. The number of royal officials in the colonies was increased also, which further threatened the position of the colonial leaders. But even more ominous were the various parliamentary acts which were seen by almost all of the colonists as threats to their political freedom and their economic well-being.

The Grenville ministry began its program with stricter enforcement of the neglected Acts of Trade and Navigation. Other measures followed, including the Stamp Act of 1765, the most objectionable of the Grenville ministry. These measures brought into focus the first serious disagreement between the colonies and the mother country. Although the colonists generally agreed that America should contribute funds for her own defense, the majority of them insisted that the colonies be allowed to tax themselves through their own legislatures. Taxation by Parliament, they protested, was "taxation without consent," and therefore violated, in the words of the Virginia House of Burgesses, "all the liberties, privileges, and immunities of

denizens and natural subjects" of Great Britain.¹ Thomas Whately, speaking for the Grenville ministry, agreed that English custom forbade taxation without consent, but, he insisted, this was not the issue in the case of any act of Parliament which affected the colonists, for although they were not actually represented in Parliament, they, like many Englishmen living in Britain who were disenfranchised for reasons of property qualifications or residence, were virtually represented. Every member of Parliament represented the entire Empire, not just the borough which elected him.²

Despite evidence that the Americans strongly disapproved of the Stamp Act and the principle that it represented, apparently no one in England, not even the colonial agents, anticipated the strong reaction which would result from the actual passage of the act. The arrival of the stamps in America precipitated reactions ranging from determined resolutions by colonial assemblies to riots and effigy burnings. Even before it went into effect the Stamp Act was a dead letter, most of the stamp officers having been forced to resign by concerted mob action (an ominous

¹"Virginia Stamp Act Resolutions," May 30, 1765, Documents of American History, ed. by Henry Steele Commager (sixth edition; New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1958), p. 56.

²Pamphlets of the American Revolution, I, ed. by Bernard Bailyn (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965), pp. 601-02.

precedent in the eyes of some conservative American political leaders).

According to Merrill Jansen, the period between the passage of the Stamp Act and its repeal produced several important results. First, the campaign of opposition to this act "produced at least a surface unity among the colonies, for almost every political leader, whatever his political principles, was opposed."³ Second, the Stamp Act crisis awakened the average American, who had seldom before concerned himself with things political, to a new interest in government and in political philosophy. As John Adams observed in his diary at the end of 1765, "the people, even to the lowest ranks [became] more attentive to their liberties, more inquisitive about them, and more determined to defend them, than they were ever before or had occasion to be."⁴ The controversy over the Stamp Act also provided the average American with an opportunity to attend mass meetings and engage in political action, establishing a precedent for future participation in the governmental decision-making process. "In the course of this activity, traditional patterns of political behavior were profoundly altered . . . [and] a revolution was wrought in the minds and hearts of the people, not only in their attitude toward

³Merrill Jensen, The Founding of a Nation (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 99.

⁴Adams, Works, x. 283.

Britain, as John Adams said, but also in their conception of their own role in politics."⁵

Finally, the Stamp Act crisis caused both Americans and Britons to examine seriously the relationship of the colonies to the mother country. Both sides had taken firm stands which would be hard to retreat from, and on both sides of the Atlantic strong feelings had been aroused which would grow and spread. On the British side, the violent American reaction to the passage of the Stamp Act merely served to strengthen the determination of those in power to insist upon Parliament's right to legislate for the colonies "in all cases whatsoever" so as to insure the maintenance of conditions favorable to the political and economic welfare of the mother country. At the same time that it repealed the Stamp Act, the House of Commons approved the Declaratory Act which declared "that the said colonies and plantations in America have been, are, and of right ought to be, subordinate unto, and dependent upon the imperial crown and parliament of Great Britain."⁶

In America, the delegates from the nine colonies represented at the Stamp Act Congress had rejected the idea of either virtual or actual representation in the House of Commons and had denied therefore the right of

⁵Jensen, Founding, p. 375.

⁶Documents of American History, pp. 60-61.

Parliament to tax the colonies. The Congress did, however, affirm the allegiance of the colonies to the crown of Great Britain and accept the right of Parliament to legislate for the colonies.⁷ At the same time, though, some farsighted individuals began to see that the distinction between taxation and legislation was tenuous and began to question Parliament's right even to legislate for the colonies. In the next few years, a growing number of patriots would reach the position that the relationship between the colonies and the mother country must be relationship of equals; that the colonies should have dominion status within the Empire, autonomous except for the allegiance they owed the Crown.

Between 1765 and 1770 Parliament attempted on several occasions to raise money from the colonists. But, though reactions were not so violent as those against the Stamp Act, the revenue acts did not succeed in their purpose. The people of the colonies responded to the challenge by agreeing among themselves to neither import nor consume British goods and to encourage home manufactures. Continued harassment of customs officers in the Boston area, however, led to the quartering of troops in that city, and on March 5, 1770 soldiers fired on an unruly mob in front of the custom house. The patriot leaders made the most

⁷"Resolutions of the Stamp Act Congress," ibid., pp. 57-58.

of this excellent opportunity for anti-British propaganda and continued to celebrate the Boston Massacre until the end of the war.

Although the spirit of resistance did not completely disappear, the period 1770-1773 was one of comparative calm in the colonies. Then in May, 1773, Parliament itself unwittingly precipitated another colonial crisis and intensified the revolutionary movement. The Tea Act of 1773 withdrew all import duties on tea that the East India Company brought into England and allowed that company to sell its tea in America directly, rather than through American wholesale and retail merchants. The American merchants in the five principal port cities, concerned that this action might be a precedent for similar acts concerning other products, raised the cry of "monopoly" and joined with the Sons of Liberty (made up largely of workingmen) in resisting the sale of the East India Company's tea. Although the boycott of tea was universal, the dumping of a load of tea into Boston Harbor in December, 1773, was the most violent reaction in the colonies.

The ministry of Lord North, upon learning of the "Boston Tea Party," undertook retaliatory measures against that city. The Boston Port Bill, the first of the Coercive Acts, closed the port of Boston to all shipping until the East India Company was compensated for the tea destroyed. A new Quartering Act, an act to protect persons accused of

offenses committed in the performance of official duties, and an act altering the Massachusetts form of government were also passed.

Encouraged by communications between Committees of Correspondence in the various colonies, "everywhere along the Atlantic seaboard the liberty groups made the cause of Boston and Massachusetts Bay their own," not only from sympathy for the besieged Bostonians, but also from fear that their rights too might be curtailed by repressive acts of Parliament.⁸ The Virginia House of Burgesses resolved that June 1, 1774, the day the Boston Port Act was to go into effect, should be "a day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer" to ask God's help "for averting the heavy calamity which threatens destructions to our civil rights, and the evils of civil war."⁹ Dissolved by the governor for this rebellious resolution, the House reassembled and declared the attack on Boston an attack on all. In other colonies, official and unofficial meetings resolved to deliver aid to the Bostonians. And throughout the continent towns joined in mourning for Boston on June 1, flying flags at half mast, closing shops, and ringing church bells in sympathy for their beleaguered countrymen.

⁸Lawrence Henry Gipson, The Coming of the Revolution 1763-1775 (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), p. 175.

⁹The Spirit of Seventy-Six, ed. by Henry Steele Commager and Richard B. Morris (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 22.

The indignation of the colonists and their hostility to Parliament increased significantly when the Coercive Acts were followed by an act establishing a civil government with no representative assembly in the Canadian province of Quebec and extending its boundaries south into the Mississippi Valley as far as the Ohio River. Speculators in western lands felt themselves robbed by this act of a potential fortune, and Virginia in particular felt itself deprived of a huge portion of the land it claimed. To all of the colonies the prospect of a neighboring state governed entirely without consent of the people presented a distinct threat of what might happen if Parliament carried its present policies far enough. More significant, however, was the provision of the Quebec Act that "His Majesty's Subjects professing the Religion of the Church of Rome . . . may have, hold, and enjoy, the free Exercise of the Religion of the Church of Rome."¹⁰ In all of the colonies, but especially among the devout Protestants of New England, this last provision awakened old and deep-seated fears and hatreds. Furthermore, it reinforced the fears of Congregationalists and Presbyterians that an Anglican episcopate might be established in the American colonies.

On September 5, 1774, in response to a proposal by the Massachusetts legislature, delegates from all the colo-

¹⁰Documents of American History, p. 75.

nies except Georgia assembled in Philadelphia to discuss their mutual problems and mutual fears. Almost immediately the delegates appointed a committee composed of two representatives of each delegation "to state the rights of the colonies in general, the several instances in which these rights are violated or infringed, and the means most proper to be pursued for obtaining a restoration of them."¹¹

In the midst of the committee's heated debate over the foundation of American rights, Paul Revere arrived from Massachusetts carrying a series of resolutions from Suffolk county. These declared that the rights of Massachusetts were based on nature, the British constitution, and the charter; that George III was sovereign only by virtue of a compact; that no obedience need be paid to the illegal Coercive Acts; that the people of Massachusetts should take the government back into their own hands; and that this colony should prepare to defend itself.¹² Though the conservative members of the Congress were hesitant to approve the resolutions which, in effect, declared independence, they could not vote against them and imply approval of British policies. The Suffolk Resolves were therefore unanimously approved.

¹¹Journals of the Continental Congress, ed. by Worthington C. Ford (34 vols.; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1940) I, 26. All subsequent references to the Journals will be cited as JCC.

¹²JCC, I, 31-37.

On September 28 Joseph Galloway introduced a plan of union for the colonies which called for the creation of a legislative council, made up of representatives elected by the colonial assemblies, which would regulate all commercial, civil, criminal, and police affairs that concerned more than one colony. A President General appointed by the king would preside over this American Grand Council. The colonial assemblies themselves would have authority over their own internal affairs. The Galloway Plan, admittedly a compromise, was narrowly defeated. It proposed a solution short of what the radicals wanted: the autonomy of the colonies within the Empire.

After two more weeks of heated debate over a number of issues, the Congress approved the most important document of this session: the Declaration of Rights and Resolves. It proclaimed that the Americans, "by the immutable laws of nature, the principles of the English constitution, and the several charters or compacts," have certain rights. The ten resolutions which followed reiterated for the most part the principles which Americans had been stating for years. Included was the assertion that, since the colonists were not and could not be represented in Parliament, Parliament did not have the right to legislate for them except "for the purpose of securing the commercial advantages of the whole empire to the mother country, and the commercial

benefits of its respective members."¹³ The Declaration of Rights and Resolves was followed by a resolution that every colony establish a nonimportation, nonconsumption, and non-exportation association. The associations were to go into effect on December 1, 1774, and apply to all trade with Great Britain, Ireland, and the West Indies. Then, on October 26, the Congress dissolved itself and agreed to meet again on May 10, 1775, "unless the redress of grievances, which we have desired, be obtained before that time."¹⁴

A little more than a month after the adjournment of this first Congress, Thomas Paine arrived in Philadelphia bearing his letter of introduction from Benjamin Franklin. Paine was undoubtedly familiar, as all politically aware Englishmen were, with the nature of the controversy between America and Great Britain and of the principal complaints on both sides. Almost immediately he plunged into the debate. Writing an imaginary "Dialogue between General Wolfe and General Gage" in January, 1775, Paine has Wolfe condemn the policies of the ministry and Parliament. Wolfe especially attacks the Quebec Act: "Popery and French laws in Canada are but a part of that system of despotism, which has been prepared for the colonies." (II, 49) The last stanza of Paine's "Liberty Tree," published in March, extends his criticism to the king:

¹³JCC, I, 63-73.

¹⁴JCC, I, 102.

But hear, O ye swains ('tis a tale most profane),
 How all the tyrannical powers,
 King, Commons, and Lords, are uniting amain
 To cut down this guardian of ours. (II, 1092)

"A Dream Interpreted," published in May, also anticipates the attack in Common Sense upon the British monarch:

In our petition to Britain we asked but for peace; but the prayer was rejected. The cause is now before a higher court, the court of providence, before whom the arrogance of kings, the infidelity of ministers, the general corruption of government, and all the cobweb artifice of courts, will fall confounded and ashamed. (II, 52)

In the meantime, in the colonial press a "fundamental shift in the nature of the American debate" was taking place. Whereas before 1774 Americans for the most part had directed their attacks at Britain and its policies, after the convening of the Congress Americans began to attack one another as never before, pointing up a fundamental cleavage of opinion in the colonies. There were, on one side, those who believed that America ought to remain a dependent part of the British Empire under the supreme legislative authority of Parliament. These loyalists, as they have since been known, believed that "the policies of the Congress would lead to armed conflict and prevent reconciliation with Britain."¹⁵ Samuel Seabury, addressing the legislature of New York, asserted that "most, if not all, the measures that have been adopted, [by the Congress] have been illegal in their beginning, tyrannical

¹⁵Jensen, Founding , p. 510.

in their operation." He deplored the "wretched state" to which the colony had been reduced. "Mobs and riots," he wrote, are encouraged "in order to force submission to the tyranny of the Congress." He urged the legislature to deliver the people of New York from "the tyranny of Committees, from the fear of violence, and the dread of mobs."¹⁶ In New England, Daniel Leonard, writing as "Massachusettensis," charged that the crisis America and his colony faced was the direct result of the despotic actions of the popular party of Massachusetts. Furthermore, the resolutions of the Congress had made reconciliation an impossibility. Pennsylvania's Joseph Galloway also denounced the "American demagogues," and asserted that "nothing had been the product of their two months labour, but the ill-shapen, diminutive brat, INDEPENDENCY."¹⁷

On the other side of the debate the patriots declared that they were merely struggling to preserve for the American colonists the rights they were entitled to as English citizens. These rights however, such as the right to be taxed by no one but their own elected representatives, could be guaranteed only if the colonies

¹⁶Samuel Seabury, An Alarm to the Legislature of the Province of New York (New York: James Rivington, MDCCLXXV), pp. 4, 7, 12.

¹⁷Tracts of the American Revolution, ed. by Merrill Jensen (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1967), p. 374.

occupied an autonomous position within the British Empire. John Adams, replying to Leonard in February, 1775, denied the charge that the patriots were advocating independence. He wrote that "nothing can be more wicked or a greater slander . . . because . . . there is not a man in the province among the whigs, nor ever was, who harbors a wish of that sort."¹⁸

George III, however, believed otherwise. He was convinced of a conspiracy in America to declare the colonies independent of the British Empire. Accordingly, he made preparations for a full scale war. In the meantime, British troops under General Gage moved out of Boston toward Lexington and Concord with orders to confiscate the military stores held secretly in those towns. They were resisted by a much smaller number of American militia, and "the shot heard 'round the world" was fired that day. To many observers in both Britain and the colonies, the battles between British soldiers and American farmers at Lexington and Concord marked the beginning of a civil war. News of the "barbarous murders" of Americans in Massachusetts reached the other colonies swiftly. Dr. Joseph Warren sent out a circular letter designed to arouse popular sentiment:

The barbarous murders committed upon our innocent brethren, on Wednesday, the 19th instant, have made

¹⁸Ibid., p. 325.

it absolutely necessary, that we immediately raise an army to defend our wives and children from the butchering hands of an inhuman soldiery, who, incensed at the obstacles they meet with in their bloody progress, and enraged at being repulsed from the field of slaughter, will, without the least doubt, take the first opportunity in their power, to ravage this devoted country with fire and sword.¹⁹

Everywhere in the colonies newspapers rushed into print with greatly exaggerated stories of that day. The Massachusetts Spy of May 3, 1775, exhorted:

AMERICANS! forever bear in mind the BATTLE OF LEXINGTON! where British troops, unmolested and unprovoked, wantonly and in a most cruel manner fired upon and killed a number of our countrymen, then robbed them of their provisions, ransacked, plundered and burnt their houses! nor could the tears of defenceless women, some of whom were in the pains of childbirth, the cries of helpless babes, nor the prayers of old age, confined to beds of sickness, appease their thirst for blood!--or divert them from their DESIGN of MURDER and ROBBERY!²⁰

The New York Journal of May 25 wrote that "The kind intentions of our good mother--our tender, indulgent mother--are at last revealed to all the world." She has at last shown herself "a vile imposter--an old abandoned prostitute--crimsoned o'er with every abominable crime, shocking to humanity!"²¹

Within a few days after the battles, thousands of New England militia men had marched on Boston in response to the alarm. In the middle colonies the news was met with

¹⁹"Committee of Safety to the Several Towns in Massachusetts," April 28, 1775, Spirit of 'Seventy-Six, p. 92.

²⁰Quoted in Schlesinger, Prelude, p. 232.

²¹Ibid., pp. 232-33.

stepped up military preparations, mass meetings, and mob violence. South Carolina also organized her defenses, fearing not only attack upon her own colony but also slave rebellions and Indian uprisings on the frontier instigated by the British.

In the meantime, Boston was a city besieged. By July, 1775, its population had decreased by 10,000 citizens, and those who stayed suffered shortages of food and fuel and constant danger to their property from bombardment, fire, and overzealous British soldiers.

By the time the Second Continental Congress convened on May 10, 1775, "popular enthusiasm for fighting the British army was at a height it never again reached during the eight long years of war."²²

In June, 1775, while Congress was preparing to go to war, British and American troops fought a more furious battle than any that would be fought in the eight years of the war. The march of the British troops upon American emplacements at Breed's and Bunker's Hills on the Charleston peninsula near Boston cost General Gage's army 226 killed and 828 wounded. The Americans suffered 441 casualties. But, although the Americans won a victory of sorts, their hostility toward Britain increased.

One of the first acts of the Congress was the ap-

²²Jensen, Founding, p. 491.

pointment of George Washington as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army. The choice was expedient. He was a trained and experienced military man, but he was also an aristocrat and therefore a "safe" man to the conservatives in Congress. Too, he was a Southerner, and his appointment would insure that section's support for what was at the moment essentially a New England war. The Congress then proceeded to create a Continental Army, and in so doing took a major step toward independence. But that most pertinent question was still largely avoided as it continued its deliberations. The appointment of Washington was followed, on July 5, by the approval of the "Olive Branch Petition" begging the King to intercede with Parliament on behalf of the colonies. The next day, however, Congress approved a Declaration of the Causes of Taking-up Arms.

Like the people of the colonies, this second Congress was divided into two broad groups on the question of reconciliation or independence. The conservative group deplored the necessity for war but reluctantly agreed that, if they must, they would fight to maintain their rights, the rights which they felt they had begun to lose after 1763. Nevertheless, they insisted that theirs was a civil war, not a revolution, and that their goal was reconciliation with Britain and a return to the status the colonies had enjoyed before 1763. John Dickinson was the recognized leader of this group. Opposing these conservatives were most of those

who had become popular leaders in the period since 1763, including the Lees of Virginia and the Adamses of Massachusetts. They professed a desire for a return to the status the colonies enjoyed before 1763 but made it plain that they doubted such a return was possible. "Their policy was to urge Congress to adopt measures that were in fact if not in name the acts of an independent state."²³

In their deliberations through the late spring and early summer of 1775 the conservative members of Congress agreed reluctantly to some measures which pointed toward independence, but rejected others. A plan for articles of confederation presented to the Congress by Benjamin Franklin and his proposal to close the customs houses and open the ports of the colonies to trade with foreign powers were both defeated. The deep divisions within Congress were also revealed in the discussions which confronted the question of whether the colonies should establish new governments since most of the colonial assemblies had been dissolved. When in October New Hampshire and South Carolina asked for advice about government, the radical leaders rejoiced when the Congress voted to recommend that those colonies "call a full and free representation of the people, and that the representatives, if they think necessary, establish such a form of government as, in their judgment, will best produce

²³Ibid., p. 604.

the happiness of the people."²⁴

Not everyone, however, was pleased with this decision. Some of the New Hampshire towns protested that such an establishment of government would lead to independence, which they did not desire. John Dickinson and his supporters were also alarmed, and, shortly after the passage of the New Hampshire resolution, induced the Pennsylvania assembly to give the following instructions to its Congressional delegation: "We strictly enjoin you, that you, in behalf of this colony, dissent from and utterly reject any proposition, should such be made, that may cause or lead to a separation from our mother country, or a change of the form of this government."²⁵ These instructions were both attacked and defended in the press, with the opponents of the assembly's decision maintaining that only "the people" at a general election could instruct the delegates.²⁶

The New Jersey assembly similarly instructed its delegates to the Congress to reject any proposal "that may separate this colony from the mother country, or change the form of government thereof." Delaware, too, was opposed to independence, and had instructed its delegates upon their election to avoid "everything disrespectful or

²⁴JCC, III, 319.

²⁵Charles H. Lincoln, The Revolutionary Movement in Pennsylvania 1770-1776 (Philadelphia: Publications of the University of Pennsylvania, 1901), p. 226.

²⁶Ibid., p. 228.

offensive" to the King. The Maryland convention had also been adamant in its instructions, telling its delegates to report back to the convention should any move toward independence be made. At the same time it declared that "the people of this province . . . being thoroughly convinced that to be free subjects of the king of Great Britain, with all its consequences, is to be the freest members of any civil society in the known world, never did, nor do entertain any views or desires of independency."²⁷

It was clear to those who desired independence that what was needed to further the movement was a series of events so stirring that an open and heated public debate would ensue, resulting in a groundswell of grass roots sentiment in favor of independence so strong that the assemblies which had instructed their delegates to reject any move toward independence would be forced to change those instructions or release their delegates to vote according to their own consciences.

King George himself contributed to the growing sentiment in favor of independence. In the early fall of 1775 the colonies learned that he had rejected the Olive Branch Petition of the Congress and was ordering twenty thousand more troops to America to crush the colonies which, he declared, were in "open and avowed rebellion." He further

²⁷Jensen, Founding, pp. 642-43.

ordered all of his subjects to aid in bringing "to condign punishment the authors, perpetrators, and abettors of such traitorous designs."²⁸ In a speech to Parliament in October the king again asserted his belief that "the rebellious war" in the colonies was being carried on "for the purpose of establishing an independent empire."²⁹ On December 22, although warned that he was in effect declaring war, he signed the American Prohibitory Act which decreed that all American vessels and cargoes were to be treated as though they were the property of an enemy state.³⁰

Events in America also helped to convince many that a declaration of independence was the only possible course of action. One such event was the failure of the campaign in Canada. By the fall of 1775 George Washington, among others, had decided upon the advisability of attempting to bring the Canadians into the war on the American side. After preparing the way with propaganda directed at both English and French inhabitants of Quebec, he ordered a two-pronged offensive under the command of Richard Montgomery and Benedict Arnold. A Canadian historian observes:

There were at least three major reasons for such a decision. Firstly, Washington and the Continental Congress had been persuaded that a surprising number of French Canadians were sympathetic to the aims of

²⁸Documents of American History, pp. 95-96.

²⁹Spirit of 'Seventy Six', pp. 253-54.

³⁰Jensen, Founding, pp. 649-50.

Congress. Secondly, it was felt that Quebec had to be captured in order to prevent a powerful British expedition against the Americans in the spring of 1776, and also to discourage possible Indian raids. Thirdly, there was a strong "imperialistic" drive--a desire to absorb the considerable economic potential of the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes System.³¹

The initial assault on Montreal was successful, but in a New Year's Eve attack on Quebec, Montgomery was killed, Arnold wounded, and half the American force killed or captured.

In the meantime the governors of South Carolina and Virginia had dissolved the assemblies of those colonies. In addition, Lord Dunmore, the governor of Virginia, on November 7 issued a proclamation freeing all slaves who would desert their masters and join his forces. Then, on January 1, 1776, Dunmore shelled Norfolk, precipitating the virtual destruction of that town.

These events and others brought more and more Americans to the conclusion that any compromise with Britain was impossible. Having denied any right of Parliament to control American affairs, they had considered the colonies tied to the mother country only through allegiance to the crown. As late as December, 1775, the Congress had answered the king by protesting "What allegiance is it that we forget? Allegiance to our king? Our words have ever avowed it--our conduct has ever been consistent with it."³² The king,

³¹George A. Rawlyk, Revolution Rejected 1775-1776 (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice Hall, Ltd., 1968), p. 55.

³²JCC, III, 140.

however, was proving his intractability. His actions demonstrated that he and his advisors were convinced no middle ground existed between the absolute submission of the colonies to the legislative supremacy of Parliament and their absolute independence. He refused to believe the protestations of the Americans that they wanted neither. And with this refusal he was forcing the more conservative patriots to choose between independence and reconciliation on British terms.

Thus the American people were not taken completely by surprise when Thomas Paine's pamphlet Common Sense appeared on January 9, 1776. They were, it would seem, ready for such an argument. We might say, with Paine's biographer A. O. Aldridge, that Common Sense appeared "at just the psychological moment."³³ But, though the ideas in the pamphlet were not especially new, no American before Paine had so publicly and so boldly called for independence. The prevailing sentiment, as Paine himself admitted, was still on the side of reconciliation, and even the radicals hesitated to force the issue, preferring to work through more indirect means.³⁴

There are conflicting stories concerning the composition of Common Sense. John and Samuel Adams both later

³³Aldridge, Man of Reason, p. 35.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 34-35.

claimed that Franklin had suggested the project and had supplied Paine with materials for it. Dr. Benjamin Rush, whose attention Paine had attracted with an article opposing slavery, takes credit for suggesting the pamphlet to Paine but affirms that no one helped him with it:

I suggested to him that he had nothing to fear from the popular odium to which such a publication might expose him, for he could live anywhere, but that my connections and profession which tied me to Philadelphia, where a great majority of the citizens and some of my friends were hostile to a separation of our country from Great Britain, forbade me to come forward as a pioneer in that important controversy. He readily assented to the proposal, and from time to time he called at my house, and read to me every chapter of the proposed pamphlet as he composed it. . . . When Mr. Paine had finished his pamphlet, I advised him to show it to Dr. Franklin, Mr. Rittenhouse, and Mr. Samuel Adams, all of whom I knew were decided friends to American independence. I mentioned these facts to refute a report that Mr. Paine was assisted in composing his pamphlet by one or more of the above gentlemen. They never saw it until it was written and then only by my advice. I gave it at his request the title of "Common Sense."³⁵

Paine in a footnote to the third Crisis paper wrote:

In October, 1775, Dr. Franklin proposed giving me such materials as were in his hands, towards completing a history of the present transactions, and seemed desirous of having the first volume out the next Spring. I had then formed the outlines of Common Sense, and finished nearly the first part; and as I supposed the doctor's design in getting out a history, was to open the new year with a new system, I expected to surprise him with a production on that subject, much earlier than he thought of; and without informing him what I was doing, got it ready for the press as fast as I conveniently could, and sent him the first pamphlet that was printed off. (I, 88-89)

Indeed, it is possible that Paine carried the idea of

³⁵Ibid., pp. 35-36.

American independence with him from England. In the spring of 1774 John Cartwright in London had published a series of essays entitled "American Independence the Interest and Glory of Great Britain." Paine certainly was looking forward to American independence by October of 1775. In a short piece published in the Pennsylvania Journal he wrote: "I hesitate not for a moment to believe that the Almighty will finally separate America from Britain. Call it independence or what you will, if it is the cause of God and humanity it will go on." (II, 20)

His motives for writing Common Sense and the timing of its publication Paine explained in 1779 in a letter to Henry Laurens:

After the breakout of hostilities I was confident their [the king and his ministry] design was total conquest. . . . The reception which the last petition of Congress met with put it past a doubt that such was their design, on which I determined with myself to write the pamphlet (Common) Sense. As I knew the time of the Parliament meeting, and had no doubt what sort of King's speech it would produce, my contrivance was to have the pamphlet come out just at the time the speech might arrive in America, and so fortunate was I in this case of policy that both of them made their appearance in this city on the same day. (II, 1162)

One hundred twenty thousand copies of Common Sense were sold in three months, and Paine's convincing rhetoric set "a terribly wordy war waging on the subject of independence."³⁶ Within six months the needed groundswell of grass roots sentiment in favor of independence had developed, and

³⁶Joseph Reed to Charles Pettit, March 30, 1776; quoted in Jensen, Founding, p. 667.

the Continental Congress approved the "Declaration of Independence."

CHAPTER III

THE AUDIENCE

In designing his argument in Common Sense, Paine had to consider carefully the audience to whom the pamphlet would be directed. So far as he knew, although most Americans seemed willing enough to fight for their rights and liberties, the idea of fighting for independence was still not very popular in the colonies. Those reluctant to accept complete separation from Britain came from all classes of society and preferred reconciliation for many different reasons. For many this preference was rooted in a lingering emotional attachment to both Britain and the king; England was "home" even to those who had never seen that island. For some, especially those who had been prosperous under the colonial system, membership in the British Empire was seen as a guarantee of stability and order. Many American merchants were quite reluctant to accept the idea of independence under what might be a weak central government or no central government at all. Despite recent British actions which had stifled trade and commerce, the merchants knew that their financial prosperity was dependent upon a strong navy which would protect

and guide their ships as they engaged in intercolonial and intercontinental trade. Others opposed independence because of strong doubts that the colonies, with no army and no navy to speak of, could be successful in a war against the most powerful nation in the world.

Strong opposition came also from those who feared that independence might bring about war and upheaval on the American continent. This fear was born of past experience. Various segments of colonial society had for a long time been bitterly suspicious of one another and, despite Britain's recent harsh treatment of the colonies, trusted king and Parliament more than they did each other. An examination of these various sectional, social, economic, and religious segments of society will reveal just how real was the strong fear that independence would bring about either a civil war among the colonies or a political and social revolution throughout the American continent. More important to this study, though, such an examination will reveal the diverse audience to which Paine had to appeal in order to produce the needed groundswell of public sentiment in favor of independence.

There were first of all many sectional differences within the colonies. Before the troubles with Parliament began in 1763 the colonies felt closer to England than they did to one another. A southerner traveling north found New England a strange land and thought its people had strange

habits and customs. Even within sections, there was tension and disagreement. In the middle colonies for example Pennsylvanians were suspicious of New Yorkers and New Yorkers of their neighbors in New Jersey. Difficulties of travel were a significant barrier to close intercolonial ties, but, more important, boundary disputes fostered bitter and often-times explosive quarrels. To Andrew Burnaby, an Englishman who toured America in 1759-60, it seemed that "fire and water are not more heterogeneous than the different colonies in North America. Nothing can exceed the jealousy and emulation which they possess in regard to each other." Burnaby believed that civil war would rage "from one end of the continent to the other" if the colonies ever broke away from Britain.¹ Even forty years after the Revolution John Adams still felt that the union of the colonies was "a singular example in the history of mankind."

The colonies had grown up under constitutions of government so different, there was so great a variety of religions, they were composed of so many different nations, their customs, manners and habits had so little resemblance, and their intercourse had been so rare, and their knowledge of each other so imperfect, that to unite them in the same principles in theory and the same system of action, was certainly a very difficult enterprise.²

In 1776 New England, the home of John Adams, was the most nearly homogeneous section of the colonies. The majority

¹Quoted in Arthur M. Schlesinger, The Birth of the Nation (New York: Alfred A. Knopf and Company, 1968), p. 227.

²Adams, Works, x. 283.

of the people were self-sufficient farmers, and along the frontier the society was generally democratic. Land was cheap, property was fairly equally distributed, and class distinctions were few. Frontier towns were generally composed of a few real or potential landed aristocrats, some artisans and tradesmen, and perhaps one or two professional men. There might also be an occasional farm worker or laborer. The distance between the top and the bottom of the social scale was slight. Urban areas, on the other hand, tended to have a higher proportion of both upper and lower classes.³

Though most of the people of New England were farmers, no profitable staple crop had been found to support the economy. Commerce was the lifeblood of the area. Following the triangular trade lines to the West Indies, southern Europe, and England, the New England merchants sustained the economy of the region through three chief cash-producing exports: fish, rum, and ships. "Ship, wharf, distillery, and counting-house were the foundations of New England prosperity."⁴

The four New England colonies were also racially and religiously homogeneous. Except in Rhode Island,

³Jackson Turner Main, The Social Structure of Revolutionary America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 38.

⁴Clinton Rossiter, Seedtime of the Republic (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1953), p. 67.

Congregationalism was the established religion, and religious dissidents were discouraged from settling in most New England towns. The entire region saw only a trickle of non-English immigration.

The New England town was a highly developed unit of communal organization. Townspeople felt obliged to participate in the affairs of their community and were expected to contribute to the support of religion and education. By 1775 the spirit of equality was strong in New England. George Washington, inspecting the New England troops after his appointment as Commander-in-Chief, was appalled by the democracy which prevailed in the ranks. Joseph Reed, one of Washington's aides, wrote to his wife that military discipline could not be established among the New Englanders because "where the principles of democracy so universally prevail, where so great an equality and so thorough a levelling spirit predominates," either no discipline can be established or the one who tries to do so becomes odious and detestable.⁵ The Virginian Carter Braxton commented unhappily in 1776:

Two of the New England Colonies enjoy a Government purely democratical the Nature and Principle of which both civil and religious are so totally incompatible with Monarchy that they have ever lived in a restless state under it. The other two tho' not so popular in their frame bordered so near upon it that Monarchical Influence hung very heavy on them. The best opportunity in the World being

⁵Jensen, Founding, pp. 634-35.

now offered them to throw off all subjection and embrace their darling Democracy they are determined to accept it.⁶

Though it adjoined New England, New York was quite different. New York's Dutch ancestry had left that colony with a feudal land holding system, and as a result small farmers were discouraged from settling in the area. Unlike New England, New York's inhabitants were religiously and socially diverse, and factionalism dominated New York politics. Trying to compete economically with Boston and Philadelphia, New York lagged behind both.

Philadelphia was the hub of the Delaware Valley. In 1776 it was the second largest city in the British Empire and by far the richest on the American continent. Navigable rivers provided a "highway" for carrying farm products to the busy port at Philadelphia. The Delaware Valley also led the way in manufacturing, a result of the immigration of skilled craftsmen of several nationalities and the abundance of lumber and iron in the region. "Climate, soil, topography, and ingenuity combined to make the middle colonies, especially Pennsylvania, the soundest economic unit in the entire imperial structure."⁷

The economy of the southern colonies was almost

⁶Letter to Landon Carter, April 14, 1776, in Letters of Members of the Continental Congress, ed. by Edmund C. Burnett (Washington, D. C.: The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1921), I, 421.

⁷Rossiter, Seedtime, p. 69.

entirely agricultural. The entire region concentrated on a few staple crops for export: tobacco in Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina; rice and indigo in South Carolina and Georgia. In the eastern tidewater region extensive plantations employed large numbers of Negro slaves, who composed over one-third of the population of the South.⁸ In the backcountry of Virginia and the Carolinas, as on the New England frontier, smaller farms flourished, but many of these were commercial farms. In Virginia, typical of the entire South, the non-farm population numbered only about one percent.⁹ Only Charleston, South Carolina, with a population of about 12,000 in 1776, could be considered a city.

The economy of the South had a great effect on its social and political structure and, among other things, led to "the creation of a genuine landed aristocracy, the spread and consolidation of human slavery, soil exhaustion and abandonment, [and] land speculation."¹⁰ The legislatures of the southern colonies were controlled by the eastern landed aristocracy which also occupied most of the important appointive offices. In the South (as well as in some parts of the North) when and if the voters were

⁸David Hawke, The Colonial Experience (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1966), p. 487.

⁹Main, Social Structure, p. 46.

¹⁰Rossiter, Seedtime, p. 68.

offered a choice on election day, it was usually between men handpicked by the aristocracy from among the members of its own class.

The domination of the political structure of the colonies by wealthy landowners and merchants created a sectional division between east and west as well as north and south. Rapid territorial expansion had made of the "backcountry" a new region in which by 1775 probably twenty-five percent of all Americans lived.¹¹ This explosive expansion in population and area created "a multitude of internal problems. Indian relations, land granting, religion, finance, local government, and other matters produced internal tension, and in some colonies, outright rebellion."¹² Generally, the western counties of all the colonies, composed largely of small farmers, were kept underrepresented or unrepresented in the colonial assemblies. "The persistent petitions of frontier counties for more equitable representation and the persistent refusal of tide-water counties to pay heed added fuel to the fires of bitterness between sections and classes."¹³ The seacoast leaders looked upon the backcountry farmers as rabble who should be denied all political voice. Other causes of backcountry

¹¹Jensen, Founding, p. 9.

¹²Ibid., pp. 19-20.

¹³Rossiter, Seedtime, p. 114.

discontent included lack of adequate local government, the inaccessibility and corruption of county courts, heavy taxes, and lack of adequate roads, bridges, and fortifications. Too, the people of the backcountry often belonged to a variety of religious sects and, in colonies with an established church, objected to paying taxes for its support.

In the Revolutionary period the people of the Pennsylvania backcountry were the first to vociferously protest their disaffection. Consistently the eastern controlled legislature granted too little money for defense against the Indians, and as a result the frontier settlements, peopled mostly by Scotch-Irish and German Protestants, were regularly attacked. Denounced by the Governor for murdering some peaceful Indians, some six hundred settlers calling themselves the Paxton Boys marched on Philadelphia in January, 1764, to present their grievances. They protested the inequality of representation and the failure of Assembly to provide for defense.¹⁴ But the Assembly continued to ignore the plight of the frontiersmen.

South Carolina's backcountry had, by the 1760's, accumulated similar grievances--inadequate representation, lack of roads, heavy taxes. Most of all, they were bitter at the Assembly's refusal to provide for the establishment

¹⁴Documents of American History, pp. 50-52.

of law and order. Determined to protect themselves if the government would not, in 1767 they created "associations" for "regulating" backcountry affairs and proceeded to take matters into their own hands. The Regulator movement in South Carolina ended in 1775 when courts were finally established, but the result of the movements was a pervasive distrust of eastern political leaders. The Regulator movement in North Carolina imitated that of South Carolina in method, though not in result. In 1768 and 1771 Governor Tryon led armed forces against the North Carolina Regulators who had organized when constant petitioning to protest corrupt courts and officials failed to produce relief.

In New York, the dissension between sections was a result of the desire of tenant farmers to own the land they worked. In 1765 these farmers organized to prevent the eviction of tenants who refused to pay rent. The anti-rent, or "Leveller," movement was eventually crushed by force and its leaders jailed.

Thus, the discontented people of the backcountry throughout the colonies mistrusted, and indeed sometimes hated, the eastern political leaders who had refused them representation in their assemblies, ignored their grievances, and left them open to attack by Indians and outlaws. No wonder, then, that when some of these same colonial leaders began to talk of independence, many of the backcountry people felt that continued rule by British

appointees might be preferable to independence under the colonial political aristocracy.

Sectional antagonisms, however, were not the only ones which existed in the colonies. "In Pennsylvania, Virginia, the Carolinas, western New England, New York, and above all New Jersey, disputes flourished between settlers and proprietors, debtors and collectors, farmers and speculators, squatters and landlords, and between settlers armed with conflicting titles."¹⁵ In addition where various social classes lived alongside each other, as in the cities, ostentatious display by wealthy merchants and landowners was deeply resented by those in humbler circumstances. This situation was particularly true during the depressed times of the early and middle 1760's.

Though the most notable thing about colonial society was its fluidity, class distinctions did exist and were determined largely by economic factors. "Everyone pretended to exalt the farmers, giving to professional men and still more to merchants an inferior status, and to artisans no status at all."¹⁶ In practice, however, professional men, wealthy merchants and landowners, and crown officials comprised the aristocracy of colonial society. In the period before the Revolution this class included about three per cent of the population.¹⁷ It was not a closed class, though.

¹⁵Rossiter, Seedtime, p. 113.

¹⁶Main, Social Structure, p. 219.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 161.

In the urban areas especially, "admission to the . . . gentry was open to all who possessed wealth acquired by inheritance, by marriage, or in trade."¹⁸ In Philadelphia in particular, many of the "better sort" were children or grandchildren of self-made men. This fact, however, did not keep these newly rich from flaunting their affluence. Outside of the five major urban areas - Boston, Newport, New York, Philadelphia and Charleston - the gentry was less commercial in character and, especially in the South, derived its status mainly from large landholdings. In Virginia, for example, "cheap and exploitable land, a plentiful supply of slaves, and an easily grown staple were the economic supports of the . . . aristocracy."¹⁹

Below this class in the social structure was the middle class, the largest and most important segment of pre-revolutionary society.

The word "middling" was almost always used to designate that which today would be called the "middle" class. When used in contrast with "poor" it of course had an economic connotation and referred to people in "middling circumstances as to worldly estate"; when used as distinct from "lower" it might have either a precise economic or a general vague connotation.²⁰

Including over one half of the population, the members of the middle class were principally farmers and artisans.

¹⁸Carl Bridenbaugh, Cities in Revolt (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), p. 138.

¹⁹Rossiter, Seedtime, p. 114.

²⁰Main, Social Structure, p. 234.

"Some of them lived a little above subsistence level, spending nearly all of their incomes on necessities, or supplying their own needs from their own resources. A majority, however, earned enough to buy a few luxuries and accumulate some property."²¹ The middle class was more prevalent in the North than in the South, and comprised the largest portion of the urban population, where they served as tradesmen, craftsmen, and retail shopkeepers.

Lowest on the social and economic scale was a large class made up of poor but free whites, indentured servants, and Negro slaves. Outside of the cities this class included most tenant farmers and farm laborers. These landless workers were more numerous in the South than in the North. In addition, in every farming area in the colonies there were a number of small freeholders who swung between the middle and lower classes, depending upon whether times were good or bad. In the urban areas the distinctions between the classes were more sharply drawn and were based upon both income and occupation. Dependent artisans, free servants, sailors, laborers, and apprentices made up this portion of the urban lower class. At the lowest end of the scale were the indentured servants and the Negro slaves.

Houses, dress, and life style, as well as income and occupation, distinguished the three classes. The gentry attempted to emulate the British gentry, building fine town

²¹Ibid., p. 158.

houses and sometimes suburban estates as well.

The gentry further evidenced their status to the world by the elegance of their attire Subject to the season's vagaries on matters of detail, gentlemen wore cocked hats, white ruffled silk shirts, and embroidered broadcloth frock coats, with knee breeches of fine texture and gorgeous hues, silk hose fastened with ornamental garters, and pumps displaying gold or silver buckles.²²

The women were equally elegant. The upper class families drove around town in expensive carriages, occasionally accompanied by liveried drivers and footmen. Middle class homes, on the other hand, were often also the family's place of business in the cities. Both in the city and on the farm, every member of the family old enough to perform a task worked hard and long.

The dress of the simple folk similarly expressed their status. The men, their hair short-cropped, typically wore caps, coarse linen shirts, leather coats and aprons, homespun stockings, cowhide shoes, and either long or short buckskin breeches, while the women's garments were of equal cheapness and durability.²³

The distinctions between the classes extended even to the titles with which they were addressed. As in England, the gentry attached the honorific designations "Esquire" or "Master" to their names. The common man, on the other hand, answered to "Goodman" and his wife to "Goodwife."

There were several political and social consequences of this sharpening of the class distinctions in the colonies.

²²Schlesinger, Birth of the Nation, pp. 135-36.

²³Ibid., p. 137.

The acquisition of wealth and the ambition on the part of the upper class to live a genteel life led to the widening of the gulf between the classes, for as the upper class moved up, the lower classes were forced farther down on the social ladder. Ostentatious display created jobs for the two lower classes, but it also had "a disruptive effect on class relations. There is a great deal of evidence of simple antagonism between rich and poor in New York, Charleston and Philadelphia; and even in supposedly stable Boston, poor rioted in resentment of rich and rich despised poor."²⁴ The desire of the gentry to exhibit their wealth and sharpen class distinctions was most keenly felt by the largest segment of the colonial population, especially in the cities, which

discovered its capacities and began to suspect that athwart its future course to power stood the gentry. Change and unrest permeated American life as the democratic yearnings of the middle class, and of not a few of the aristocracy too, were translated into demands and occasionally into action.²⁵

As it turned out, the middle class formed the nucleus of the patriot party, and, in Boston at least, eventually took over a position of commanding political importance.

The depressed times of the '60's and '70's, caused at first by the normal contraction from a wartime to a peacetime economy and then by the economic and political

²⁴Rossiter, Seedtime, p. 115.

²⁵Bridenbaugh, Cities, p. 332.

policies of the ministry and Parliament, affected all three classes, but the hardest hit were the middle and lower classes. The credit structure was upset, currency was scarce, trade was off, and as a result many merchants failed. Unable to collect from their customers and pressed by their creditors, many tradesmen found themselves facing the prospect of debtor's prison. The stagnation of trade also put many seamen and laborers out of work, creating a large class of idle and hungry unemployed. "In several cities the long suppressed indignation against the ruling class welled up into an ominous hatred surpassing in intensity popular feelings against rulers across the sea."²⁶

The people of the lower and middle classes in the colonies had on several occasions before 1763 risen in response to deeply rooted popular grievances which they shared. Unfortunately, violence and destruction had often resulted.

When these outbreaks occurred, those who took the conservative position were usually inclined to speak of the people as "the mob," the "mobility," "the rabble," assuming, because the lower and middle classes used strongarm tactics and, like any other aroused groups, succumbed to mass hysteria, that they acted without thought and that their grievances had no legitimate basis.²⁷

But such forms of protest were sometimes the only means the people had for expressing their opinions as political

²⁶Ibid., p. 306.

²⁷Ibid., p. 305.

power in the colonies became more and more concentrated in the hands of those who held the economic and social power.

This concentration of political power in the hands of a few had, of course, its bad effects, setting west against east, poor and "middling" against rich. But it did have some positive effects, too. Many of the office holding aristocracy made great contributions to the rise of liberty and the cause of independence. These aristocratic office holders more often than not took the leading role in the struggle for power between the colonial assemblies and the royal governors. Whether or not it was to preserve the power and position of their own class in the colonies, the fact remains that these members of the gentry fought to preserve the rights and privileges of the colonial legislatures. "No assembly made a more resolute protest against the Stamp Act than that of South Carolina; yet eligibility for this body that spoke of the 'freedom of the people' was limited to men with five hundred acres of land, ten slaves, or property valued at £1,000!"²⁸ Andrew Burnaby wrote, "The public or political character of the Virginians, corresponds with their private one: they are haughty and jealous of their liberties, impatient of restraint, and can scarcely bear the thought of being controuled by any superior power."²⁹ In fact, as Philip

²⁸Rossiter, Seedtime, pp. 107-08.

²⁹Quoted in Rossiter, Seedtime, p. 109.

Davidson points out, the majority of the patriot propagandists also came from this aristocratic element of society which "dominated the internal economic and political life of the colonies."³⁰

Furthermore, in their attempt to gain the support of the lower and middle classes in their struggle against Great Britain, the colonial aristocrats employed in their arguments a liberal social and political philosophy which the lower classes could accept and adopt as their own. As we shall see, it was primarily upon the common agreement of all segments of society on this basic philosophy that Thomas Paine built the most significant portion of his argument for American independence.

While the upper class was leading the fight to preserve the prerogative of the colonial legislatures, the middle class was growing more and more vociferous at each successive stage of the conflict with Britain. The depressed times of the '60's and '70's had a greater effect on these small businessmen than upon the wealthier merchants. Following the lead of the merchants who had formed associations for mutual action in response to the legislation of 1764-65, the middle class used their trade and craft organizations to channel their political voice. They communicated with their fellows in other cities and

³⁰Davidson, Propaganda, p. 31.

towns through committees of correspondence, made non-consumption agreements, and encouraged the wearing and use of home-manufactured goods. The printers, the most influential of all because of the nature of their occupation, not only furthered communication but aroused sentiment and incited to action. They made their contributions to the revolutionary controversy through magazines, broadsides, newspapers, and pamphlets. By 1775 there were thirty-eight newspapers being published in the colonies, only a handful of which sided with the British.³¹ As the controversy grew, more and more of the common people began to subscribe to the newspapers, and many of those who did not subscribe read newspapers which taverns and clubs kept for their customers. As for pamphlets, more than 400 dealing with the British-American controversy were published between 1750 and 1776.³²

Formed in the late summer of 1765 for the purpose of preventing the enforcement of the Stamp Act, the Sons of Liberty was the first association of workingmen in the American colonies. Every local Sons of Liberty group had a committee of correspondence, and through this channel of communication ideas and propaganda were exchanged up and

³¹For a comprehensive discussion of the role of the newspaper in the revolutionary movement see Schlesinger, Prelude.

³²Bailyn, Ideological Origins, p. 8.

down the seacoast from city to city. After the Stamp Act crisis, efforts were made to subvert the Sons of Liberty groups and turn them into agencies for the dissemination of propaganda among the people of the lower classes, and as a result the influence and activities of the groups waned. The workers in turn formed new organizations "devoted primarily to obtaining political privileges for the lower classes. In those cities where the labor interest was strong, rudimentary political parties, called the Mechanics, the Mechanics' Party and the like appeared."³³ Thus the urban working class played an important role in the Revolutionary movement.

In New York it forced conservatives to accept measures about which they felt misgivings. In Charleston it turned the tide in favor of the non-importation agreement of 1769. A corresponding group was active in the Boston Tea Party, and in 1776 combined in Pennsylvania with backcountry farmers to overcome the conservatism of the legislature. In the larger capitals especially, urban radicalism could exert pressure on provincial assemblies and officials.³⁴

The only organizations of the backcountry or rural lower classes which existed during the period 1763-1776 were the small farmer and tenant organizations such as the Regulators in the Carolinas, the Paxton Boys in Pennsylvania, and the Levellers in New York. These groups were, as has already been mentioned, very antagonistic toward

³³Davidson, Propaganda, p. 74.

³⁴Evarts B. Green, The Revolutionary Generation, 1763-1790 (n.p.: The Macmillan Company, 1943), p. 194.

the eastern political leaders and consequently were among the most reluctant to accept the idea of independence when it was proposed by some of those leaders. These back-country people were, it seems, more willing to submit to a distant tyranny than to one with which they were already familiar in the person of their own colonial legislators.

Another kind of antagonism in the colonies existed between various religious groups; religion definitely had its effect upon politics. In New England which was predominantly Congregationalist, the ancestors of the revolutionary generation had fled to America because they dissented from the established Anglican church. There was, therefore, throughout that section a long tradition of hostility and suspicion toward Anglicans, feelings which were only reinforced when crown appointees who were almost always Anglican attempted to carry out the repressive measures of Parliament. The close connection between religion and politics in New England is shown in the list of grievances circulated by the Boston town meeting in November, 1772, which denounced the plan for an Anglican episcopate in America as a "design both against our civil and religious rights."³⁵ That the New England Congregationalists conceived of Anglicanism as a "half-way house" to Roman Catholicism is also shown in the reaction to the Quebec

³⁵Jensen, Tracts, pp. 250-251.

Act, which the Suffolk Resolves called a menace to Protestantism.

In New York, Presbyterians resented the Anglican establishment in that colony. "The designation in that province of conservative and radical parties as 'Church' and 'Presbyterian,' though not exact, indicates a real relation between political and ecclesiastical attitudes."³⁶ The Anglican church was most powerful in Virginia, where dissenters were taxed for its support. However, despite laws requiring registration and licensing of non-conformist ministers, "the dissenting churches steadily gained as a result of immigration, the revivalism of 'New Light' preachers and the anticlericalism of many Anglican laymen."³⁷ The Anglican church was also established in Maryland, the Carolinas, and Georgia though its members were in the minority. It was, however, the church of the wealthy and cultivated, of royal appointees and the politically prominent.

Many other religious sects also existed in the colonies. In western New Jersey and in Pennsylvania the Quakers were predominant in political life where their pacifism created a number of problems. There were also in Pennsylvania a number of pietistic German sects, some of which tended toward pacifism and therefore sided with the

³⁶Greene, Revolutionary Generation, p. 196.

³⁷Ibid., p. 99.

Quakers. In both the South and the North Baptists were gaining converts among the plain people, as were the Methodists. Catholics were a small minority in colonial America, although they supplied one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, Charles Carroll of Maryland.

There were also in the colonies in 1775 a variety of nationalities, although a clear majority of the colonists traced their origins to countries within the British Empire. As nearly as can be determined, probably about three-fifths of the white population in 1775 were of English stock. The largest concentrations of these were in New England and in the Chesapeake tidewater. Another fifth were of Welsh, Scotch, or Irish origin; these last were mostly Protestant, though probably about a third were Catholic. Between eight and ten percent of the colonial whites were of German origin. They settled mostly in Pennsylvania, where they numbered about a third of the total population; the rest lived in the other middle colonies or in the southern backcountry. Descendants of early French, Dutch, and Swedish settlers were also present in small numbers.³⁸

Considering the number and variety of factions--sectional, social, economic, political, religious, national--existing in America at the end of 1775, it seems obvious that it was no simple task to design an argument which

³⁸Ibid., pp. 70-72.

would appeal to all--or even almost all--of these segments of society. To further complicate the task, membership in any particular group did not necessarily prejudice an individual for or against the idea of independence. In writing Common Sense, then, Paine had to determine to what group or groups to direct his argument. That is, he had to identify those people who preferred reconciliation to independence and, at the same time, identify the reasons why they preferred reconciliation.

There were initially some groups which he probably knew he could write off as inaccessible to any argument in favor of a separation from Great Britain. As historians have since confirmed, those who held important royal or proprietary commissions were strongly loyal to the British. "Men who lived in ease, who enjoyed all the considerations and deference which rank and station invariably confer . . . and who, therefore, had nothing to gain, but much to lose, by a change," would resist any argument in favor of separation.³⁹ For similar reasons, Anglican clergymen, especially in the North, would remain loyal. The Anglican church had long espoused the doctrine of submission and obedience to authority, both civil and ecclesiastical. The great loyalist spokesman Jonathan Boucher, an Anglican

³⁹Lorenzo Sabine, A Historical Essay on the Loyalists of the American Revolution (Springfield, Mass.: The Walden Press, 1957), p. 36.

minister is typical. He wrote: " . . . man differs from man in everything that can be supposed to lead to supremacy and subjection Without government, there can be no society; nor without some relative inferiority and superiority, can there be any government."⁴⁰

Although no flat generalizations can be made, among those still reluctant at the end of 1775 to accept the idea of a separation from Britain were many members of the colonial merchant class. They opposed independence for several reasons. In 1770, "after six years of almost continuous agitation and bad business conditions," the colonial merchants, particularly in the North, had welcomed the end of non-importation and the reopening of trade. In the early controversy with Britain they had been satisfied to enlist the activities of the lower classes, especially the Sons of Liberty, in resisting the acts of Parliament which affected trade and commerce. But they had also been appalled by the extent of mob power. When they learned in December, 1773, that a band of radicals had dumped the East India Company's tea into Boston Harbor, they were "shocked into remorseful silence by the anarchy that had laid profane hands upon property belonging to a private trading company." In the ensuing controversy, though they deplored the severity of the Coercive Acts, "the merchants

⁴⁰Quoted in Davidson, Propaganda, p. 281.

found themselves instinctively siding with the home government." In addition to disapproving strongly of the actions of the radicals, the merchants could not see any particular advantage in their position.

The uncertain prospect which the radical plans held forth was not comparable with the tangible benefits which came from membership in the British empire under existing conditions; even absolute freedom of trade meant little in view of the restrictive trade systems of the leading nations of the world, the comparative ease with which the most objectionable parliamentary regulations continued to be evaded, and the insecure, if not dangerous character of any independent government which the radicals might establish. When all was said and done, the merchants knew that their welfare depended upon their connection with Great Britain--upon the protection afforded by the British navy, upon the acquisition of new markets by British arms, upon legislation which fostered their shipping, subsidized certain industries, and protected the merchants from foreign competition in British markets.⁴¹

Another kind of opposition to independence arose from doubts that the colonies could match the powerful British army and navy. Samuel Seabury warned his fellow New Yorkers in January, 1775, that Great Britain would "exert her utmost ability to retain [the colonies] under her dominion. She will send every man, and every ship that she can spare, rather than suffer them to be torn from her."⁴² Recognizing that Britain would not yield to American demands, many people preferred reconciliation, even

⁴¹Arthur M. Schlesinger, The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution (New York: Facsimile Library, 1939), pp. 241, 299, 308-09.

⁴²Seabury, An Alarm to the Legislature, p. 26.

on British terms, to years of bloodshed followed by the defeat which seemed inevitable.⁴³

In the backcountry, resistance to the idea of independence often had other roots. The people on the frontier, as has already been mentioned, resented and mistrusted members of the eastern political establishment, many of whom were leading the revolutionary movement as propagandists or delegates to the Continental Congress. Too, people in the backcountry had not been as affected by British legislation as those on the seaboard and therefore did not share all of their grievances. They were not, for example, affected very much by trade restrictions or by the Stamp Act, and, since they were poorly represented in the colonial legislatures anyway, British retaliatory measures against those bodies for revolutionary activities were not especially resented either. Furthermore, there were people in the backcountry who had good reasons for supporting the British government. Many newly arrived small farmers had received their land from the British government "and feared that to rebel meant to lose it."

Many of them had come over under the plan whereby they were given free passage, tax exemption for five years, and a grant of land and five pounds sterling as bounty. Many of the Irish who came over after 1763, as well as most of the Highland Scots, were thus indebted to what they conceived to be the bounty of the King. Many of the Germans

⁴³Sabine, Loyalists, p. 66.

in the southern backcountry, especially in South Carolina, were in the same position.⁴⁴

Fears of civil war should independence be declared was another source of opposition. There were numerous boundary disputes between colonies and battles had been fought on and off for years over rival land claims.

New Yorkers and the inhabitants of the New Hampshire grants, who declared themselves the independent state of Vermont in 1777, had been brawling for years. Sporadic fighting continued between the Connecticut settlers in the Wyoming Valley and the Pennsylvanians who were trying to get rid of them. The quarrel between Pennsylvania and Virginia over the region around Fort Pitt was erupting in violence from time to time.⁴⁵

In January, 1775, the loyalist Thomas Bradbury Chandler warned:

Even a final victory would effectually ruin us; as it would introduce civil wars among ourselves, and leave us open and exposed to the avarice and ambition of every maritime power in Europe or America. And till one part of this country shall have subdued the other, and conquered a considerable part of the world besides, this peaceful region must become, and continue to be, a theatre of inconceivable misery and horror.⁴⁶

And as late as April, 1776, Carter Braxton, delegate to the Congress from Virginia, wrote that if independence was soon declared "the Continent would be torn to pieces by Intestine Wars and Convulsions."

The Colonies of Massachusetts, and Connecticut . . . have claims on the Province of Pennsylvania in the

⁴⁴Davidson, Propaganda, p. 263.

⁴⁵Jensen, Founding, p. 661.

⁴⁶Thomas Bradbury Chandler, What Think Ye of the Congress Now (New York: James Rivington, MDCCLXXV), p. 25.

whole for near one third of the Land within their Provincial Bounds and indeed the claim extended to its full extent comes within four miles of this City [Philadelphia]... . The Province of New York is not without her Fears and apprehensions from the Temper of her neighbors, their great swarms and small Territory. Even Virginia is not free from Claim on Pennsylvania nor Maryland from those on Virginia. . . . And yet without any Adjustment of those disputes and a variety of other matters, some are for Lugging us into Independence.⁴⁷

Among the upper classes, fears of a possible social and political revolution were pervasive. From 1763 to 1775 there had been an uneasy alliance between American political leaders resisting the restrictive measures of Parliament and the mobs of workingmen in the cities which shouted their support in mass meetings and were even, on occasion, encouraged to riot in response to British actions. As the revolutionary movement progressed, aristocratic loyalists and patriots alike increasingly feared the consequences of the rise of the people.

When Elbridge Gerry told the Massachusetts delegates in Congress that 'the people are fully possessed of their dignity from the frequent delineation of their rights, which have been published to defeat the ministerial party' and that 'they now feel rather too much their own importance, and it requires great skill to produce such subordination as is necessary,' he was describing a process and a result that had taken place in every colony, and the problem facing those who feared that independence might mean a revolution at home.⁴⁸

In South Carolina as well as Massachusetts the gentry dis-

⁴⁷Letters to Landon Carter, April 14, 1776, in Burnett, Letters, I, 421.

⁴⁸Jensen, Founding, p. 628.

covered the power of the lower classes. "When a clergyman in South Carolina in 1774 denounced 'every silly clown and illiterate mechanic' who undertook to censure 'his prince or governor,' and told such men to keep their own rank, the mechanics demanded that he be fired and he was."⁴⁹ In New York, Gouverneur Morris observed that "The mob began to think and reason. Poor reptiles! It is with them a vernal morning . . . and ere noon they will bite, depend upon it."⁵⁰ Even John Adams, as late as July 3, 1776, wrote to his wife that "the people will have unbounded power. . . . I am not without apprehensions from this quarter."⁵¹

Adams, however, had committed himself to the idea of independence long before July, 1776. Others who were not so committed had to be convinced that reconciliation with Britain would bring about a greater danger of political and social upheaval than would independence. To persuade people of this was one of Paine's major objectives as he prepared Common Sense for publication in January, 1776.

Overall, the most difficult and the most important of Paine's tasks in Common Sense was to overcome the natural conservatism of the people, their preference for and loyalty

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 629.

⁵⁰Quoted in Jensen, Founding, p. 629.

⁵¹Quoted in Jensen, Founding, p. 664.

to the established order and the reigning monarch. As Claude Van Tyne points out, "Loyalty was the normal condition, the state that had existed, and did exist."⁵² Americans had always lived under a monarchical form of government, had always been dependent upon Britain, had always been taught that the English constitution was the best in the world and the perfect guarantee of the rights and liberties of men. This source of opposition to the idea of independence was most pervasive, and it was this conservatism in particular that Paine had to attack in Common Sense. He did this, as we shall see, by grounding his argument in premises which the majority of Americans, no matter what their special interests or their loyalties, already accepted, thereby overcoming this conservatism and compelling his audience to assent to his conclusions.

⁵²Claude H. Van Tyne, The Loyalists in the American Revolution (New York: Peter Smith, 1929), pp. 2-3.

CHAPTER IV

THE CLIMATE OF OPINION

When Thomas Paine, as a newly arrived immigrant from England in the fall of 1774, settled and began to work in Philadelphia, he found himself in the midst of the storm of political controversy which has already been described. In the next fourteen months, living in the city where the Continental Congress was meeting, serving as editor of the Pennsylvania Magazine, discussing science, philosophy, and politics with such men as Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, David Rittenhouse, and Samuel Adams, Paine was able to sense the conflicts between the various segments of colonial society and the strong feelings of those who opposed the idea of independence. He also became aware of the climate of opinion in the colonies, what Carl Becker calls "those instinctively held preconceptions in the broad sense, that Weltanschauung or world pattern,"¹ to which the majority of the American people assented in the year 1775.

As Paine discovered, the current of eighteenth century European thought to which he had been exposed had been

¹Becker, Heavenly City, p. 5.

transmitted to America and had undergone some specifically American mutations. "The ideas and writings of the leading secular thinkers of the European Enlightenment . . . were quoted everywhere in the colonies, by everyone who claimed a broad awareness."² Foremost among the ideas of the Enlightenment which the colonists adopted was the hypothetical state of nature, as described by Locke, in which man once lived and to which he might at any time return. Theoretical though this state might be, it was not far from the experience of many Americans who had lived on the edge of the frontier where often no formal government and no civil law existed.

In this state of nature as the Americans conceived of it, man is governed by natural law and possesses natural rights. Americans believed

That there is a "natural order" of things in the world, cleverly and expertly designed by God for the guidance of mankind; that the "laws" of this natural order may be discovered by human reason; that these laws so discovered furnish a reliable and immutable standard for testing the ideas, the conduct, and the institutions of men.³

Accepting the concept of natural law, the colonists also accepted its corollary, natural rights, which they believed were not only natural (i.e. "traceable to the great plan of nature"), but also absolute, eternal, essential and unalien-

²Bailyn, Ideological Origins, p. 27.

³Becker, Declaration of Independence, p. 26.

able.⁴ Most commonly mentioned in the writings of the Americans were the rights to life, liberty, property, conscience, and happiness.⁵ To better secure those rights, men who are free and equal compact with each other to institute a government amongst themselves. The government which is thus instituted must then, in the words of the Continental Congress, "promote the welfare of mankind."⁶ When any form of government fails to do so, then the compact may be dissolved and the people may return to the state of nature, free to form another government which will promote their welfare.

The colonists adopted other ideas of the Enlightenment, believing that man is basically a moral, benevolent, reasonable creature; that he is a social being, meant to live with his fellows; more important, that all men are free and equal and that no one man has a right to sovereignty over another without his consent.

Political thought in the colonies was more than anything an extension of English political thought. The colonists derived their ideas from such theorists as John Locke, Algernon Sidney, Bolingbroke, John Somers, Benjamin Hoadly, Henry Care, James Burgh, Joseph Addison, Alexander

⁴Rossiter, Seedtime, p. 375.

⁵Ibid., p. 377.

⁶JCC, II, 140.

Pope, and the authors of Cato's Letters, Thomas Gordon and John Trenchard. Borrowing freely from English thought, however, the Americans were highly selective in their borrowing. By 1776, "most Americans had absorbed Locke's works as a kind of political gospel."⁷ The ideas of other English writers were imported and quoted only if they answered the needs of the colonists. Those which did not were rejected. "Only the part of the whole English tradition that spoke of liberty got a warm welcome from this colonial people so intent upon liberty. And this part, too, was not accepted without changes in emphasis."⁸

Bringing Enlightenment political thought to the people of America were the educated men in the upper and upper-middle classes: the ministers, planters, lawyers, and merchants. Many of these men had been educated at British universities where Newton, Locke, and other Enlightenment thinkers were widely read and discussed. Other had read popularized versions of these theories. Through the sermons, pamphlets, and addresses of these leaders, the concepts of natural law and natural rights and the compact theory of government filtered down to the masses. And it was not only the radical wing of the Revolutionary movement which quoted the critical, reforming writings of

⁷Becker, Declaration of Independence, p. 27.

⁸Rossiter, Seedtime, p. 146.

the Enlightenment. "Everyone, whatever his position on Independence or Parliament's actions, cited them as authoritative; almost no one . . . disputed them or introduced them with apology."⁹

The church, most notably in New England, was an especially effective force in disseminating the concepts of natural law and natural rights. Even before the political controversy with Britain began, some of the ideas of the Enlightenment were being preached from New England pulpits, "thus making familiar to the church-going New Englander . . . the doctrines of natural right, the social contract, and the rights of resistance."¹⁰

The non-conformist ministers, from their political and ecclesiastical thought and experience, had developed a philosophy which was the perfect counterpart of the eighteenth century political philosophy. It was the *nature*recht of John Locke in its religious application: as men could form a government, so men could form a church; as men in society possessed certain inalienable rights, so men in religious societies possessed certain equally inalienable rights . . . ; as governments were instituted among men to protect their civil rights, so were they to protect religious rights. When governments became subversive of these privileges, it was the right, nay the duty, of Christians to resist.¹¹

Jonathan Mayhew's Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher Powers, delivered

⁹ Bailyn, Ideological Origins, p. 28.

¹⁰ Alice M. Baldwin, The New England Clergy and the American Revolution (Durham; N. C.: Duke University Press, 1928), p. xii.

¹¹ Davidson, Propaganda, p. 84.

on January 30, 1950, is "probably the most generally known of the political sermons of the New England clergy in the period preceding the Revolution."¹² "It circulated widely in the colonies, and was reprinted within a few months of its initial appearance."¹³ Mayhew begins with the premise that men are essentially good, moral, reasonable, and sociable. Men with these qualities constitute a free government, the sole end of which is "the common good and safety of society." By common consent lawful rulers receive their power from the people, and under ordinary circumstances men are obliged to obey this authority. But it is evident

that those in authority may abuse their trust and power to such a degree that neither the law of reason nor of religion requires that any obedience or submission should be paid to them but, on the contrary, that they should be totally discarded and the authority which they were before vested with transferred to others, who may exercise it more to those good purposes for which it is given.¹⁴

Election sermons provided some members of the clergy with an especially good opportunity to discourse on political principles. "They emphasized again and again the original equality and freedom of men in the state of nature, the inalienable rights which were superior to all authority, the formation of society and government by compact, and the

¹²Benjamin Fletcher Wright, Jr., American Interpretations of Natural Law (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), p. 49.

¹³Bailyn, Pamphlets, I, 209.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 237.

good of society as the end of all government."¹⁵ In 1775 Samuel Langdon, president of Harvard College, preached the Election Sermon at Watertown, Massachusetts, and reaffirmed that God "has given us, as men, natural rights, independent of all human laws whatever."

By the law of nature any body of people, destitute of order and government, may form themselves into a civil society according to their best prudence, and so provide for their common safety and advantage. When one form is found, by the majority, not to answer the grand purpose in any tolerable degree, they may be common consent put an end to it, and set up another.¹⁶

Other ministers joined Langdon in preaching Enlightenment political doctrine. In Hartford, Moses Mather, descendant of a long line of influential New England ministers, told his congregation that governments receive their authority through "the voice and consent of the people," and are erected "for the good of the people."¹⁷ Jacob Duché of Philadelphia, the Anglican minister who was to become Chaplain to the Congress in 1776, also spoke in 1775 of the social compact and the end of government and concluded that, though no particular mode of government is prescribed by the gospel, "yet the benevolent spirit of that gospel is directly opposed to every other form than such as has

¹⁵Baldwin, New England Clergy, pp. 105-06.

¹⁶Samuel Langdon, Government Corrupted by Vice (Watertown, Mass.: Benjamin Edes, MDCCLXXV), p. 23.

¹⁷Moses Mather, America's Appeal to the Impartial World (Hartford, Conn.: Ebenezer Watson, 1775), p. 6.

the common good of mankind for its end and aim." Furthermore, because "this common good is a matter of common feeling . . . hence it is that our best writers, moral and political, as well clergy as laity, have asserted that true government can have no other foundation than common consent."¹⁸

It was not only from the pulpit, of course, that the concepts of Enlightenment political thought were expounded. Even before the beginning of serious controversy with Britain, several minor controversies had produced statements by lawyers and politicians concerning the rights of the colonies which were based upon Enlightenment theory. An example of such a statement is the popular pamphlet published in 1762 by James Otis, A Vindication of the Conduct of the House of Representatives of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay, a pamphlet which John Adams later said contained "in solid substance" everything later included in the Declaration of Independence, Common Sense, The Rights of Man, and the French Constitution.¹⁹ Defending the position of the House against what it felt to be a usurpation of their prerogative by the Governor, Otis begins by begging leave "to premise two or three data." Among the ten points which follow are the statements that "God made all men naturally equal"; that "the ideas of earthly superi-

¹⁸Jacob Duché, The Duty of Standing Fast in Our Spiritual and Temporal Liberties (Philadelphia: James Humphreys, Jr., MDCCLXXV), p. 12.

¹⁹Adams, Works, x, 310-311.

ority, preheminance, grandeur are educational, at least acquired, not innate"; that "Kings were (and plantation governors should be) made for the good of the people."²⁰

The best known of Otis' pamphlets is the one published after the passage of the Revenue Act of 1764 entitled The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved.

As in the Vindication, Otis draws heavily upon the theories of Locke, but he also quotes or refers to other sources.

While Otis does not fully accept the compact theory of government, the basis for his conclusions is the same Enlightenment philosophy which the colonists were to use so often. Otis believes that governments are founded because of the nature of man and that the people always retain the absolute sovereignty in society, "nor can they rightfully make an absolute, unlimited renunciation of this divine right." The end of government is the good of mankind.

"It is above all things to provide for . . . the security, tranquility, and prosperity of the people." As for the form of government, it is "by nature and by right" left to the individuals of each society to make that decision.²¹

The Revenue Act of 1764, which occasioned Otis' pamphlet on The Rights of the British Colonies, was followed by the Stamp Act, the stick of dynamite which set off the explosion of political writings in America in the

²⁰Quoted in Wright, Natural Law, p. 65.

²¹Bailyn, Pamphlets, I, 424, 425, 426.

years 1765-1776. In the South the writings of Richard Bland, the influential longtime member of the House of Burgesses, were "an accurate representation of the dominant political and constitutional theory of eighteenth century Virginia."²² Bland's debt to Locke, in the following passage from An Inquiry into the Rights of the British Colonies (1766), is easily recognized:

Men in a State of Nature are absolutely free and independent of one another as to sovereign Jurisdiction, but when they enter into a Society, and by their own consent become Members of it, they must submit to the Laws of the Society. . . . But though they must submit to the laws, so long as they remain members of the Society, yet they retain so much of their natural Freedom as to have a Right to retire from the Society, and to settle in another Country; for their Engagements to the Society, and their submission to the publick Authority of the State, do not oblige them to continue in it longer than they find it will conduce to their Happiness, which they have a natural Right to promote. This natural Right remains with every Man, and he cannot justly be deprived of it by any civil Authority.²³

Resolutions, petitions, memorials, and addresses adopted by colonial assemblies and town and county meetings in the immediate pre-Revolutionary period were other important vehicles for inculcating Enlightenment political theory. The author of many of those which originated in Massachusetts and were copied by assemblies and meetings in other colonies was Samuel Adams. The principles Adams relied upon as the basis of his arguments are evidenced,

²²Rossiter, Seedtime, p. 266.

²³Jensen, Tracts, pp. 112-13.

for example, in the resolutions written by him and adopted by the Massachusetts House of Representatives in October, 1765. He begins with the assumption that the rights of the colonists are the rights of all men and have their basis in the law of nature.

1. Resolved, That there are certain essential rights of the British Constitution of Government, which are founded in the law of God and Nature, and are the common rights of mankind;--therefore

2. Resolved, That the inhabitants of this Province are unalienably entitled to those essential rights in common with all men; and that no law of society can, consistent with the law of God and nature, divest them of those rights.²⁴

Samuel Adams was probably also the author of A State of the Rights of the Colonists presented to the Boston town meeting on November 20, 1772. The first part of this statement concerns "the Rights of the Colonists and of this Province in particular." Among the natural rights of the colonists are "First, a Right to Life; Secondly to Liberty; thirdly to Property." Furthermore,

All Men have a right to remain in a State of Nature as long as they please; And in the case of intolerable Oppression, Civil or Religious, to leave the Society they belong to, and enter into another.

When men enter into Society, it is by voluntary consent; and they have a right to demand and insist upon the performance of such conditions, And previous limitations as form an equitable original compact.

Every natural Right not expressly given up or from the nature of a Social Compact necessarily ceded remains.

All positive and civil laws, should conform as far as possible, to the Law of natural reason and equity.

²⁴The Writings of Samuel Adams, ed. by Harry A. Cushing (4 vols.; New York: Octagon Books, 1968), I, 23-26.

When men enter into society, therefore, their natural liberty "is abridged or restrained so far only as is necessary for the Great end of Society the best good of the whole."²⁵

One final evidence of the broad acceptance of the Enlightenment political philosophy appears in the exchange of letters between Daniel Leonard ("Massachusettensis") and John Adams ("Novanglus") on the eve of the war. In his letters of December 26, 1774, Leonard criticizes the popular leaders in Massachusetts for "reminding the people of the elevated rank they hold in the universe, as men; that all men are by nature equal; that kings are but the ministers of the people; that their authority is delegated to them by the people for their good, and they have a right to resume and place it in other hands or keep it themselves." At the same time, however, Leonard admits the value of these principles in attempting to redress real grievances, but feels that "they have been much oftener perverted to the worst of purposes."²⁶ Adams in reply defends what he calls these "revolutions principles." "They are," he writes, "the principles of Aristotle and Plato, of Livy and Cicero, and Sydney, Harrington and Locke. The principles of nature and eternal reason. The principles on which the whole

²⁵Jensen, Tracts, pp. 235-236.

²⁶Ibid., p. 287.

government over us now stands." He therefore finds it "astonishing" that "writers who call themselves friends of government, should in this age and country, be so inconsistent with themselves, so indiscreet, so immodest, as to insinuate doubt concerning them."²⁷ Adams' astonishment that any writer could doubt these "principles of nature and eternal reason" suggests how widely accepted such principles were by 1775.

In addition to conveying the general principles of Enlightenment political thought to the people, patriot writers adapted some of these principles to the American situation. Three in particular deserve mention. First, the concept of agrarianism, the belief that the men who work the soil are the true backbone of a free state. Second, the idea that Clinton Rossiter calls "political pragmatism"; Rossiter notes "the peculiar American insistence that liberty was to be judged by its fruits rather than by its inherent rationality or conformity to nature, and that at least one of the fruits of liberty was economic prosperity."²⁸ Third, the concept of America as the example and beacon for peoples everywhere who would be free. This last concept, what Daniel J. Boorstin calls "the American sense of destiny,"²⁹ was articulated by John Adams, among many others.

²⁷Ibid., p. 301.

²⁸Rossiter, Seedtime, p. 146.

²⁹Daniel J. Boorstin, The Americans: The Colonial Experience (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), pp. 3-4.

In 1765 he wrote, "I always consider the settlement of America with reverence and wonder, as the opening of a grand scheme and design in Providence for the illumination and emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the world."³⁰ By 1775 the idea of America's destiny as the asylum of freedom was quite common.

Patriots and loyalists alike identified the cause of America with the cause of freedom throughout the world. In a sermon preached at Christ Church, Philadelphia, in June of that year Dr. William Smith expressed the idea quite eloquently. He affirmed his belief "that Heaven has great and gracious purposes toward this continent. . . . This country will be free--nay, for ages to come a chosen seat of freedom, arts, and heavenly knowledge, which are now either drooping or dead in most countries of the old world."³¹

By 1775, then, the colonists were thoroughly indoctrinated in Enlightenment political philosophy and its peculiarly American adaptations. No matter what their special concerns or interests, they were therefore primed to accept the argument which Thomas Paine set forth in Common Sense. How he used these premises and beliefs of

³⁰Adams, Works, III, 452.

³¹William Smith, A Sermon of the Present Situation of American Affairs (Philadelphia: James Humphreys, Jr., MDCCLXXV), p. 28.

eighteenth century America as the foundation of his argument for American independence we shall see in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

THE RHETORIC OF COMMON SENSE:

FORM AND ARGUMENT

Before beginning a discussion of the rhetoric of Common Sense, it is necessary to outline what is meant here by the term "rhetoric," which, despite recent growing interest in the field, is yet surrounded by a great deal of confusion and vagueness. One obvious definition of rhetoric is "the art of persuasive oratory. As codified by Aristotle and others of his school in ancient Greece, rhetoric, was along with politics and ethics, one of the practical arts. Analyzing the way in which skillful speakers and writers succeeded in moving their audiences, classical rhetoricians outlined a set of principles and techniques for the student who wished to become proficient in the art of persuasion. Aristotle defined rhetoric as the faculty or power of observing all the available means of persuasion in any given case, and outlined three genres of persuasive discourse: political or deliberative discourse, dealing with matters of future policy;

forensic discourse, primarily related to the defense or indictment of events or actions in the past; and epideictic discourse, concentrating primarily on the praise or blame of actions, persons, or institutions in the present.¹

Among English Renaissance scholars, rhetoric was paired with logic as the two aspects of the art of communication: logic dealing with the scholarly discourse of the philosopher communicating with his colleagues, rhetoric with the more relaxed, ingratiating discourse of the learned speaker or writer communicating with a lay audience.² Throughout the Renaissance these two types of discourse were symbolized by the two metaphors of the closed fist and the open hand, symbolizing the "preoccupation of logic with the tight discourses of the philosopher, and the preoccupation of rhetoric with the more open discourses of orator and popularizer."³ Later, logic became the term used to describe a method of inquiry rather than a theory of communication, and rhetoric began to include all kinds of discourse, both learned and popular.

Persistent throughout the ages, however, has been

¹Aristotle's Rhetoric, trans. by W. Rhys Roberts, BK. i, ch. ii.

²For a comprehensive discussion of this subject see Wilbur Samuel Howell, Logic and Rhetoric in England 1500-1700 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956). Along with logic and rhetoric, the third part of the classical trivium was, of course, grammar.

³Howell, Logic and Rhetoric, p. 4.

the equation of rhetoric with eloquence and the notion that rhetoric is the "dressing" of an argument to make it acceptable and pleasing to an audience. Thus the word rhetoric has often taken on a rather pejorative connotation. In common usage today, for example, rhetoric is many times equated with bombast or empty language, with deliberate falsification or deception. Speeches of political office holders or candidates specifying proposals or programs are thus summarily dismissed by the opposition party as "mere rhetoric." Also common today is the use of the label "rhetoric" to refer to any discourse with which one happens to disagree.

Among contemporary scholars in the field of rhetoric, Kenneth Burke is one of the most highly respected. In his philosophical discussions of the scope and function of rhetoric, Burke has defined rhetoric from a number of perspectives and in a number of ways, but always he returns to the traditional Aristotlean definition of rhetoric as the art of persuasion, or the study of all of the available means of persuasion in any given situation. In Burke's philosophy, however, all of the available means of persuasion are encompassed by the idea of "consubstantiality" or identification. That is, the way in which persuasion is effected is identification--primarily the identification of the cause of the speaker with the interests of the audience but, more basically, the identification of speaker

with audience and audience with speaker. Burke writes in A Rhetoric of Motives, "you persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his."⁴

Burke's concept of identification is based upon the assumption that the beliefs and judgments of a person arise from his experiences and therefore are in many respects similar to the beliefs and judgments of his fellows, since all men share certain universal, permanent, and recurrent patterns of experience. The more effectively a speaker can demonstrate that his values, attitudes, and experiences are like those of the people he is attempting to persuade, the more successful he will be in bringing his audience to his point of view. He demonstrates this by, for example, indicating how their interests are joined, how their experiences are alike, how they agree upon the same premises. He demonstrates this also by showing that his conduct is like the conduct they admire, and by "talking their language." Scholarly research in the field of rhetoric has borne out Burke's philosophic theories. Studies of persuasion have demonstrated that an individual is "likely to feel that persons with status, values, interests and needs similar to his own see things as he does and judge

⁴Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (2nd. edition; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 55.

them from the same point of view."⁵

As the essence of rhetoric is persuasion through identification, its material is language. The speaker's method of handling this material--language--is characteristically a strategy. That is, in the attempt to achieve identification with (to persuade) his audience, a speaker employs what Burke calls rhetorical strategies. According to Burke, all "critical and imaginative works are answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arise." Furthermore, "they are not merely answers, they are strategic answers, stylized answers."⁶ These answers as presented by the speaker will be influenced by his own interests, by his perception of the interests of the audience he is addressing, and by the demands of the situation or occasion. That is, the answers, the rhetorical strategies which the speaker employs, will be stylized or formalized to fit the needs of the situation, the audience, and the speaker himself.

The Burkeian concept of persuasion through identification appears to be an especially fruitful approach to a rhetorical analysis of Common Sense for, as John Adams commented, and many others have since, there was not an

⁵Carl I. Hovland, Irving L. Janis, and Harold H. Kelley, Communication and Persuasion: Psychological Studies of Opinion Change (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), p. 22.

⁶Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1941), p. 1.

idea in it that had not been discussed in and out of the Continental Congress for some time. Thus, the rhetorical effectiveness of Common Sense must have arisen from a source other than its ideas alone. Adams and others have attributed Paine's success to his style, which has variously been described as lucid, forceful, bold, "nervous," and animated. But none of these impressionistic descriptions of the language of Common Sense totally accounts for its persuasive power. It is the object of this chapter and the one which follows, therefore, to propose that the rhetorical effectiveness of Common Sense lay in Paine's ability to achieve identification with his audience through a broad range of rhetorical strategies.

It must be admitted at the start, however, that to distinctly separate the specific rhetorical strategies at work in Common Sense, or for that matter in any discourse, is a difficult task, for there is a great deal of overlapping and interlocking. Whereas the overall strategy in any attempt at persuasion is the one strategy of encompassment (the speaker's attempt to completely identify with his audience), that overall strategy is a composite of many other closely related strategies. There is the strategy which lies in "saying the right thing," that is, in the speaker's demonstrating to his audience that he shares their ideas, attitudes, and interests. There is also the strategy which lies in the form of the work itself.

Burke defines form as "the creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor, and the adequate satisfying of that appetite."⁷ Thus the form of a work is a strategy for identifying speaker with audience. Style is a part of form because the speaker must say the right thing in the right way (style) in order to adequately satisfy the appetite he has created in the audience (form). But Burke, whose ideas are basically Aristotlean,⁸ would have to agree that style is also related to the persona or the character of the speaker in a discourse. Aristotle insisted that the ethos (character) of a speaker is established primarily by his style. Thus a man wholly unknown to his audience, as Paine is in Common Sense, must demonstrate, not only through his subject matter, but also through his style, that he is a man with whom his audience can identify. It can be seen, therefore, that any discussion of the rhetorical strategies operating in a discourse must of necessity recognize their intrinsic inter-relatedness. In attempting to discover the source or sources of the powerful appeal which Common Sense had for its American audience, then, we will focus primarily on four major rhetorical strategies while at the same

⁷Kenneth Burke, Counterstatement (2nd. edition; Los Altos, California: Hermes Publications, 1953), p. 31.

⁸See Virginia L. Holland, Counterpoint: Kenneth Burke and Aristotle's Theories of Rhetoric (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1959)

time suggesting that all of the rhetorical strategies operating in the pamphlet are inextricably related to each other and to the speaker, the audience, the occasion of the work, and the climate of opinion.

The present chapter will begin the analysis with a consideration of the form of Common Sense, the arrangement of parts and the movement from part to part. Since subject matter is closely related to form, this chapter will also focus upon the argument of Common Sense, demonstrating how Paine, grounding his argument in the premises and principles of Enlightenment thought which his audience already accepted, moved from these premises in syllogistic progression to the conclusions he wanted his audience to reach. It will also look at some of the specific appeals directed at specific groups, suggesting that both the general premises and the specific appeals contributed to the process of identification by demonstrating to the audience that the speaker shared their ideas, attitudes, and interests. The next chapter will discuss the persona which Paine attempted to create in Common Sense through both argument and style, and then look more closely at style as a strategy of identification.

"A work has form," Burke writes in Counterstatement, "in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence."⁹ In his

⁹Burke, Counterstatement, p. 124.

discussion of form, Burke delineates five aspects of form or five ways in which a speaker can lead an audience from one part of a work to another: progressive form (subdivided into syllogistic progression and qualitative progression), repetitive form, conventional form, and minor or incidental forms, all or any of which can be operative in any work alone or in combination.¹⁰ Looking at Common Sense, it appears that its overall form is basically syllogistic. By syllogistic progression Burke means that kind of progression of ideas or attitudes which occurs when an audience accepts certain premises and thus can sense the rightness of the conclusions. Paine is attempting to formally move his audience from certain premises to certain conclusions in a syllogistic progression, using as his major premises key Enlightenment political assumptions.

The argument of Common Sense as a whole is designed to persuade the readers that an independent America with a republican form of government of its own is philosophically, practically, and morally preferable to and more feasible than reconciliation with the mother country. Thus the pamphlet attacks three main targets: the British form of government (in Parts I and II), the ties between Britain and America (in Part III), and the various doubts and fears about the possible consequences of independence

¹⁰Ibid., p. 124-29.

(chiefly in Part IV). The conclusions to which Paine leads his audience are confidently presented as self-evident: the British form of government is unnatural, Britain's relationship to the colonies is not only unnatural but disadvantageous to the colonies, and the colonies therefore have a right to declare their independence and establish their own government.

Though it is hardly ever possible to distinguish philosophical appeals from emotional appeals and either of these from practical appeals, it might be said that broadly speaking Common Sense moves from philosophically based arguments in Parts I and II to a blend of emotional and practical appeals in Part III and a basically practical argument in Part IV. The Appendix serves to reiterate and summarize the main points of the preceding sections.¹¹ Overall the sequence has an impelling movement. In Parts I and II Paine attempts to undermine, through a primarily rational argument, the attachment of many Americans to the king and the British constitutional system. Paine then moves in the third part to the question of independence versus reconciliation, first examining one by one

¹¹The text of Common Sense upon which this discussion is based is that reprinted by Foner in The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine. This text includes Parts I - IV plus the Appendix. It does not include Paine's "Address to the Quakers" which, along with the Appendix, was added to the first four parts in Bradford's first edition, published February 14, 1776. See Richard Gimbel, Thomas Paine: A Bibliographical Check List of Common Sense (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956).

the arguments in favor of reconciliation and refuting them, and then setting forth a plan for republican government. In this part and in Part IV, where he attempts to demonstrate that the present time is the best time to declare independence, the argument is more practical than philosophical. He answers some of the very specific doubts and fears of various groups. Interspersed throughout, however, are emotional appeals which reinforce, and indeed sometimes outweigh, both the philosophical and practical argument. In any case, each part of the pamphlet serves to psychologically prepare the reader for the next, and, except perhaps for Parts I and II, could not be arranged otherwise with the same effect.

Within the work itself, each part also moves in a basically syllogistic progression. The first part, "On the Origin and Design of Government" moves from the premises of the compact theory of government to a denunciation of the absurdities of the British constitution. In Part II, "Of Monarchy and Hereditary Succession," Paine moves from the premise that all men are "originally equals in the order of creation" to the conclusion that both institutions (monarchy and hereditary succession) are not only absurd, but evil as well. Part III, "Thoughts on the Present State of American Affairs," is less obviously syllogistic but is still basically so insofar as Paine attempts to lead his readers from premises to conclusions.

The major premise implicit in this part is essentially the same as that in Part I, that the true design and end of government is the happiness, security, and prosperity of the people. Demonstrating that the dependent state of the colonies does not fulfill that end, Paine concludes that reconciliation with Britain will lead only to the ruin of the continent. In Part IV Paine reflects on "the present ability of America." His major premise here is that the separation from Britain is inevitable. His conclusion is that "the present time is preferable to all others." In the Appendix Paine, after an attack upon the king, turns to a reiteration of the main proposition of the entire work: "that it is the interest of America to be separated from Britain."

Because its function is to reiterate the main points of the first four parts, the form of the Appendix is repetitive. But repetition, the restatement of a theme by new details, is also a major formal device throughout Common Sense. Paine consistently maintains the same principles under new guises: it is to the best interest of America to be separated from Britain; independence is in accord with the principles of nature and reason; reconciliation with the mother country will bring about disaster; separation will bring peace and prosperity; independence is the destiny of America; the best time for separation is now. Formal coherence is provided too by the repetition and

variation of certain ideas, images, words, and phrases. The idea of America's destiny as an asylum of freedom, for example, is repeated several times in several forms. The words "nature," "reason," "common sense," "plain truth" are associated with America and the cause of independence, as are "liberty" and "freedom." Emotional phrases like "the blood of the slain," "the weeping voice of nature," and "the passions and feelings of mankind" are also associated with Paine's position. On the other hand, the idea of reconciliation is associated with "cowardliness" and "timidity." Britain and the king are linked to epithets such as "tyranny," "cruelty" and "oppression." Though both figures of speech and diction will be discussed more fully in the next chapter, it is pertinent to point out here that the repetition of words, phrases, and images and their association with certain ideas provides not only a great degree of formal coherence in Common Sense but also a large measure of its persuasive power. Thus the formal progression and coherence of Common Sense provide for the reader the kind of anticipation-gratification sequence which, according to Burke, is so important to the speaker in achieving identification with an audience. When a reader anticipates the form and sequence of an argument and has that anticipation gratified, he in a sense participates in the work itself, and this participation brings about the kind of identification which is crucial to persuasion.

Arising naturally from a discussion of the form of the argument of Common Sense is a closer examination of the argument itself, its premises and its conclusions. Before the argument is examined, however, certain observations about the "logic" and "rationality" of arguments must be made. Modern studies of the persuasive process have observed on numerous occasions that "a major basis for the acceptance of a given opinion is provided by arguments or reasons which, according to the individual's own thinking habits, constitute 'rational' or 'logical' support for the conclusions."¹² Although to twentieth century readers an argument based upon "nature," the "law of nature," and "reason," might not seem logical or rational, it is important only that such an argument seemed so to an eighteenth century audience. And that it did we can deduce from what we know of the climate of opinion in the colonies in 1776.

It is at once obvious that the major rhetorical strategy at work insofar as the argument of Common Sense is concerned is the grounding of that argument in the philosophical premises and principles of Enlightenment political thought to which a majority of the American people assented. This strategy has two important effects: first, it strongly influences the acceptance of the

¹²Hovland, et. al., Communication and Persuasion, p. 11. (Italics mine.)

conclusions of the argument, and second, it demonstrates to the readers that the speaker presenting the argument is a man who shares their beliefs, attitudes, and ideas. The strategy therefore facilitates the identification of the audience with the speaker. The first part of Common Sense, for example, opens with a discussion of the "origin and design of government" The underlying assumption of this discussion is that man is basically a benevolent, social creature. Paine, following Locke, assumes a theoretical "state of natural liberty." In this state, he asserts, men's first thoughts will be of society. Nature has made man suited for a life in society, his needs and desires being greater than his powers. Because men are physically and mentally unsuited for solitude, they will soon seek assistance and comfort from their neighbors, and in return will be obliged to aid them. But Paine, unlike Locke, differentiates between society and government. Locke identifies no intermediate step between the state of nature and what he calls political or civil society. Paine does. He writes:

Thus necessity, like a gravitating power, would soon form our newly arrived emigrants into society, the reciprocal blessings of which would supercede, and render the obligations of law and government necessary while they remained perfectly just to each other. (I, 5)

"Society," according to Paine, "is produced by our wants"; government, on the other hand, "by our wickedness." (I, 4)

Because men are imperfect creatures, "it will unavoidably happen that . . . they will begin to relax in their duty and attachment to each other: and this remissness will point out the necessity of establishing some form of government to supply the defect of moral virtue." (I, 5) Thus, government "is but a necessary evil," "a mode rendered necessary by the inability of moral virtue to govern the world." (I, 4,6) As for the form that government should take, "security being the true design and end of government, it unanswerably follows that whatever form thereof appears most likely to ensure it to us, with the least expence and greatest benefit, is preferable to all others."

(I, 5) According to Paine's reasoning, that form of government which arises most naturally is the "simple democratical form." A society of men emerging from the natural to the civil state will assemble under some convenient tree to deliberate on public matters. "In this first parliament, every man, by natural right, will have a seat." (I, 6)

However, as the problems to be debated, the population, and the distances which separate people increase, it becomes "too inconvenient for all of them to meet on every occasion as at first, when their number was small, their habitations near, and the public concerns few and trifling." (I, 6)

What then is the best form of government for conducting the business of a society after it becomes too large and too populous for the simple democratical form? The mon-

archical form of government cannot adequately replace the democratic because no one individual is capable of understanding enough about the business of a nation--its agriculture, trade, manufacture, and commerce--to lay down a system of principles upon which that nation could operate.

There is something exceedingly ridiculous in the composition of monarchy; it first excludes a man from the means of information, yet empowers him to act in cases where the highest judgment is required. The state of a king shuts him from the world, yet the business of a king requires him to know it thoroughly; wherefore the different parts, by unnaturally opposing and destroying each other, prove the whole character to be absurd and useless. (I, 8)

Of the available forms of government, then, the representative form naturally presents itself as the one which remedies at the same time the faults inherent in both the simple democracy and monarchy.

In this hypothetical emerging colony, the people will soon find out "the convenience of their consenting to leave the legislative part to be managed by a select number chosen from the whole body, who are supposed to have the same concerns at stake which those have who have appointed them, and who will act in the same manner as the whole body would act, were they present." (I, 6) Furthermore,

prudence will point out the propriety of having elections often: because as the elected might by that means return and mix again with the general body of the electors in a few months, their fidelity to the public will be secured by the prudent reflection of not making a rod for themselves. And as this frequent interchange will establish a common interest with every part of the community, they will mutually and naturally support each other, and on this . . . depends the strength of government, and the happiness of the governed. (I, 6)

The important point here--that the representatives have the same interests and concerns as those who elected them--echoes the popular argument which had been expressed for a number of years in America concerning the issue of representation in Parliament. Built into the representative form of government which Paine describes in Common Sense is a protection for every interest in the nation, and it he asserts is therefore the only system which fulfills the design and end of government--the freedom and security of all the people.

Having moved from the premises of the compact theory of government to the conclusion that the representative form of government is the only natural form for a populous nation, Paine turns his attention to a consideration of the constitution of the English government. In this discussion, Paine presents an original contribution to the British-American controversy. Patriot writers had for the most part praised and defended the British constitutional system. Paine, however, instead of defending the British constitution as ideal, finds it "farcical." The English government is supposedly a "union of three powers [the king, the peers, and the commons] reciprocally checking each other." (I, 7) He asks pointedly "How came the king by a power which the people are afraid to trust, and always obliged to check?" (I, 8) Paine contends that power cannot be divided, that such a notion is illogical; "it only

remains to know which power in the constitution has the most weight, for that will govern." In reality, "the crown is the overbearing part in the English constitution" and "derives its whole consequence merely from being the giver of places and pensions." (I, 8)

Paine's conclusion concerning the English constitution is based upon a premise concerning the seat of sovereign power in a nation which was often expressed in European and American political writing. It is, essentially, a corollary of the social compact theory of the origin of government. When men withdraw from a state of natural liberty and enter into a compact with each other to form a government, they agree to obey the laws of the government they establish and to submit to the rulers they choose. At the same time, however, the sovereign power remains with the people who established the government, and they retain the right to overthrow any ruler or disestablish any form of government that fails to fulfill the end of government, which is the happiness, security, and prosperity of the people. That the English constitution fails to fulfill the end of government is Paine's strongest argument against it. "The constitution of England is so exceedingly complex, that the nation may suffer for years together without being able to discover in which part the fault lies." Therefore Common Sense asks its audience to lay aside "all national pride and prejudice" and recognize

"the plain truth . . . that it is wholly owing to the constitution of the people, and not to the constitution of the government that the crown is not as oppressive in England as in Turkey." (I, 9)

In the second part of Common Sense, Paine continues his attack upon the British form of government. The significant premise which underlies the argument in this section is the self-evident truth that all men are "originally equals in the order of creation." Acceptance of this assumption automatically precludes an acceptance of the monarchical form of government, for "exalting one man so greatly above another cannot be justified on the equal rights of nature." (I, 10) It is "a degradation and a lessening of ourselves." (I, 13)

Furthermore, the principle of equality applies not only to all men alive at any one time but also to succeeding generations. As every man is born equal in rights with his contemporaries, so every generation is equal in rights to the generations which preceded it. Therefore the system of hereditary succession is absurd and contrary to the law of nature. It is "an insult and an imposition on posterity."

For all men being originally equals, no one by birth could have a right to set up his own family in perpetual preference to all others forever, and though himself might deserve some decent degree of honors of his contemporaries, yet his descendants might be far too unworthy to inherit them

Secondly, as no man at first could possess any

other public honors than were bestowed upon him, so the givers of those honors could have no power to give away the right of posterity, and though they might say "We choose you for our head," they could not without manifest injustice to their children say "that your children and your children's children shall reign over ours forever." (I, 13)

For the principle of hereditary succession Paine finds only one parallel "in or out of scripture." He attacks hereditary succession as analogous to the doctrine of original sin.

For as in Adam all sinned, and as in the first electors all men obeyed; as in the one all mankind were subjected to Satan, and in the other to Sovereignty; as our innocence was lost in the first, and our authority in the last; and as both disable us from reassuming some former state and privilege, it unanswerably follows that original sin and hereditary succession are parallels. (I, 14)

To support his contention that monarchy and hereditary succession cannot be justified "on the equal rights of nature," Paine introduces the authority of scripture. He cites "direct and positive" portions of scripture to prove that "the Almighty hath . . . entered his protest against monarchical governments." (I, 12)

In the third section of Common Sense the key principle of Enlightenment political thought, that the security, happiness, and prosperity of the people is the "design and end of government," is the implicit premise. On that principle Paine proceeds to examine the colonies' connection with and dependence on Britain. Taking one by one the main loyalist arguments in favor of reconciliation, he demonstrates

that neither economically nor politically is the connection between the mother country and the colonies conducive to the happiness, prosperity, and security of the American people. The argument in this section is both practical and emotional. So long as the colonies are tied to Britain they will become involved in European wars and will be at variance with nations which might otherwise be friendly. Needing and desiring all of Europe as a market, America ought have no connection with any part of it. To the merchants in particular Paine directs the compelling argument that

Europe is too thickly planted with kingdoms to be long at peace, and whenever a war breaks out between England and any foreign power, the trade of America goes to ruin, because of her connection with Britain.
(I, 21)

Paine continues that, if reconciliation occurs the future relationship of the colonies to Great Britain will be forced and unnatural. Reconciliation will also leave future generations in debt for the expenses incurred in the present quarrel, with no guarantee that Britain will not again attempt to subdue the colonies and make them subservient to her. In addition, since Britain has not made any moves toward compromise, surely no terms can be obtained that are worth the "blood and treasure" already expended. The price is very high indeed if all that is won is a change of ministry or a repeal of acts. Too, if there is reconciliation, the king, "the greatest enemy

this continent hath, or can have," shall still have a veto over all the legislation of the continent.

And as he hath shown himself such an inveterate enemy to liberty, and discovered such a thirst for arbitrary power, is he, or is he not, a proper person to say to these colonies, You shall make no laws but what I please!? (I, 25)

And since it is to Britain's advantage to suppress the growth of America, the results of reconciliation will be "the ruin of the continent." (I, 25)

Answering the fear that independence will bring about wars and upheaval, Paine replies that "there is ten times more to dread from a patched up connection than from independence." (I, 27) Those who have suffered from British barbarity will refuse to relinquish the only thing they have left--their liberty, and will never accept reconciliation. The results of reconciliation may therefore be a series of revolts and civil wars. Moreover, while the government is in an unsettled state, the way is left open for some desperate adventurer to usurp the seat of power. Therefore, "nothing but independence can keep the peace of the continent and preserve it inviolate from civil wars." (I, 26)

Paine asserts that the colonies have a natural right to a government of their own, a government based on "perfect equality," "the divine law," and the "Word of God." He offers a simple plan for government, emphasizing equal representation and a division of powers between the

colonial assemblies and the Continental Congress. Adopting Locke's principle of the rule of laws and not of men, Paine states that in America "the law is king." "For as in absolute governments the king is law, so in free countries the law ought to be king; and there ought to be no other." (I, 19)

Having undermined the loyalty of the colonists to the king and the English constitution in Parts I and II and having demonstrated in Part III that reconciliation offers no promise of happiness, security, and prosperity, Paine turns in the fourth part of Common Sense to the basically practical problem of whether the colonies are ready to declare their independence. The premise is that independence is inevitable, a premise which was not completely accepted in the colonies in 1776 but one which was gaining support. The question is only whether the year 1776 is the proper time. Paine immediately dismisses the doubt as ungrounded. First, the number of men under arms is sufficient to repel any army in the world, though the experience and officers gained in the French and Indian War (1756-63) will soon be lost. Second, the sailors and shipwrights presently unemployed, using the natural resources of the country, can build a fleet which will far outmatch the naval force of Britain. Third, every article needed for defense is abundant: hemp, iron, saltpetre, gunpowder, and arms. Fourth, at this time

there is still much unoccupied land in the colonies which can later be sold to discharge the debt of the war to support the new government. Fifth, the country is sufficiently populous to provide an adequate army but is, at the same time, small enough that men are not so occupied with commerce as to be averse to fighting. Last, and most important, the nation is still in its "nonage" and therefore is in the best position to form a government.

Youth is the seed-time of good habits as well in nations as in individuals. It might be difficult, if not impossible, to form the continent into one government half a century hence. The vast variety of interests, occasioned by an increase of trade and population, would create confusion. . . . Wherefore the present time is the best time for establishing it.
(I, 36)

An immediate declaration of independence will have the following effects: an outside power might then step in as mediator between England and the colonies and help to bring about a quick peace; France and Spain might be encouraged to offer assistance to the colonies if they had some assurance that it would not be used to strengthen the ties between America and Britain; the colonists would no longer be considered rebels in the eyes of foreign nations if they declared independence; and the declaration of American grievances and of her peaceable intentions toward other nations could then be heard in foreign courts.

The Appendix, after an attack upon the king, reiterates the main proposition of the entire pamphlet: that it

is the interest of America to be separated from Britain. Beginning again with the widely accepted pragmatic principle that one of the tests of a government is whether it promotes the happiness, security, and prosperity of the people, Paine maintains that it is "self-evident" that "no Nation in a state of foreign dependence, limited in its commerce, and cramped and fettered in its legislative powers, can ever arrive at any material eminence." (I, 41) It is only common sense, therefore, that the economic interests of the people will lead them to accept independence as the most practical course to follow. From this practical principle Paine then turns to the principles of nature.

He who takes nature for his guide, is not easily beaten out of his argument, and on that ground, I answer generally--That independence being a single simple line, contained within ourselves; and reconciliation, a matter exceedingly perplexed and complicated, and in which a treacherous capricious court is to interfere, gives the answer without a doubt. (I, 43)

Paine continues with the essentially moral argument that it is too late for reconciliation. There is no going back to the relationship which the colonies had with Britain in 1763. "The Rubicon is passed."

The taking up arms, merely to enforce the repeal of a pecuniary law, seems as unwarrantable by the divine law, and as repugnant to human feelings, as the taking up arms to enforce obedience thereto. The object, on either side, doth not justify the means; for the lives of men are too valuable to be cast away on such trifles. (I, 45)

Thus, in every section of Common Sense Paine grounds the major portion of his argument in the widely accepted premises and principles of Enlightenment political thought, a strategy which greatly contributed to the process of persuasion through identification. A closely related strategy is the consistent measuring of various institutions and ideas against the abstract principles of natural law. Throughout the pamphlet the controlling concept of Paine's argument is the key Enlightenment dictum "Follow Nature." We have seen that "nature," to the eighteenth century philosophers, to the American people, and to Thomas Paine, meant harmony, law, and order. The laws of nature were to the Enlightenment also the laws of reason, always and everywhere the same, needing only to be presented to be acknowledged as just and right by all men. Both nature and reason were, therefore, the standard to which everything must be brought. "However our eyes may be dazzled with show, or our ears deceived by sound; however prejudice may warp our wills, or interest darken our understanding, the simple voice of nature and reason will say, 'tis right." (I, 6)

Simplicity is one principle which nature and reason approve. Thus Paine writes that he drew his principle of government from "a principle in nature . . . that the more simple anything is, the less liable to be disordered, and the easier repaired when disordered." (I, 6) He there-

fore can attack the constitution of England on the basis that it is faulty because it is "exceedingly complex." Independence is defended on the grounds of simplicity. It is a "single simple line, contained within ourselves," whereas reconciliation is "a matter exceedingly perplexed and complicated." (I, 43)

The test of nature and reason is also applied to the ties between America and Britain. Paine examines "that connexion and dependance on the principles of nature and common sense." (I, 18) He maintains that "everything that is right or natural pleads for separation." (I, 21) He answers those who insist that because America has flourished in the past under the colonial system, she will always continue to do so. "We may as well assert that because a child has thrived upon milk, that it is never to have meat, or that the first twenty years of our lives is to become a precedent for the next twenty." (I, 18) And, in another effective analogy drawn from nature, Paine asserts that "there is something very absurd, in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island."

In no instance hath nature made the satellite larger than its primary planet, and as England and America, with respect to each other, reverse the common order of nature, it is evident that they belong to different systems. England to Europe: America to itself. (I, 24)

The test of nature and reason, in addition to

referring to those principles of order and harmony which govern the universe, meant to Paine also "those feelings and affections which nature justifies." (I, 23) "The Almighty," he says, "hath implanted in us these unextinguishable feelings for good and wise purposes."

They are the guardians of his image in our hearts. They distinguish us from the herd of common animals. The social compact would dissolve, and justice be extirpated from the earth, or have only a casual existence were we callous to the touches of affection. (I, 30)

Morally, therefore, the doctrine of reconciliation, cannot pass this test. Paine pleads with his audience to "examine the passions and feelings of mankind: bring the doctrine of reconciliation to the touchstone of nature, and then tell me whether you can hereafter love, honor, and faithfully serve the power that hath carried fire and sword into your land?" (I, 22) He also takes the opposite approach. It is unnatural to support reconciliation, and all those who do so "may be included within the following descriptions."

Interested men, who are not to be trusted, weak men who cannot see, prejudiced men who will not see, and a certain set of moderate men who think better of the European world than it deserves. (I, 21)

In addition to expanding the dictum "Follow Nature" to include "those feelings and affections which nature justifies," Paine expands it also to include the origins of institutions and ideas; that is, he asks whether the beginnings of an institution or idea were in harmony with

the principles of nature and reason. The British constitutional system does not pass this test; he finds it to be merely "the base remains of two ancient tyrannies [monarchical and aristocratical] compounded with some new republican materials." (I, 7) Monarchy and hereditary succession do not pass this test either, for how did kings come at first?

The question admits but of three answers, viz. either by lot, by election, or by usurpation. If the first king was taken by lot, it establishes a precedent for the next If the first king of any country was by election, that likewise establishes a precedent for the next. . . .

As to usurpation, no man will be so hardy as to defend it. (I, 14)

The examination of the claim of the English monarchs to the throne is destroyed with the assertion that "a French bastard landing with an armed banditti and establishing himself king of England against the consent of the natives, is in plain terms a very paltry rascally original." (I, 14)

A corollary of the essentially philosophical test of nature and reason is the very practical test of effects or results. An idea or an institution is invalid if its effects are contrary to the laws of nature and reason. Conversely, if the effects can be shown to be good, then the idea or institution must be good. Thus Paine's strongest argument against the British constitutional system is that its effects are bad. "That it is imperfect, subject to convulsions, and incapable of producing what it seems to

promise, is easily demonstrated." (I, 7) He also examines the effects of the institutions of monarchy and hereditary succession, whether kings are "the means of happiness or of misery to mankind." (I, 9) The most grievous error of the institution of monarchy is that it has the effect of shutting off from the world, by exalting him above other men, the one man who needs to know it most thoroughly. The sovereign power of a nation must be informed of all the business of a nation--its commerce, its agriculture, and its industry--yet the king, by virtue of his station, has no experience with any of these and thus cannot lay down rules and principles on the basis of knowledge. Furthermore, hereditary succession, "did it ensure a race of good and wise men, . . . would have the seal of divine authority." But it does not and cannot.

Men who look upon themselves born to reign, and others to obey, soon grow insolent. Selected from the rest of mankind, their minds are early poisoned by importance; and the world they act in differs so materially from the world at large, that they have but little opportunity of knowing its true interests, and when they succeed to the government are frequently the most ignorant and unfit of any throughout the dominions. (I, 15)

In addition to the possibility of being ruled by a king who is unfit or incompetent, the nation may at any time be subjected to a king who is infirm, senile, mentally unfit, or an infant. Thus the most powerful argument against hereditary succession is the natural consequences of that institution. "Nature," writes Paine, "disapproves it,

otherwise she would not so frequently turn it into ridicule by giving mankind an Ass for a Lion." (I, 13) As for the loyalist argument that hereditary succession preserves peace and eliminates wars by determining in advance who shall succeed to the throne upon the decease of the leader, Paine denies this vehemently as "the most barefaced falsity ever imposed upon mankind."

The whole history of England disowns the fact. Thirty kings and two minors have reigned in that distracted kingdom since the conquest, in which time there has been (including the revolution) no less than eight civil wars and nineteen rebellions. Wherefore instead of making for peace, it makes against it, and destroys the very foundation it seems to stand upon. (I, 15)

Paine uses the test of effects most extensively in Part III in examining the question of independence versus reconciliation. Dependence upon Britain involves the colonists in European wars, it restricts their trade, it limits their freedom. Reconciliation will leave future generations in debt though there has been no gain to America; the king will still have veto power over the continent, and the country will still totter "on the brink of commotion and disturbance." (I, 26) Independence, on the other hand, "is the only BOND that can tie and keep us together." (I, 46) It is the only thing which will prevent a fatal civil war.

The grounding of the argument of Common Sense in the basic premises and principles of Enlightenment thought

is a major rhetorical strategy of the pamphlet and was, in large measure, responsible for its powerful appeal in America in 1776. (It was also a major source of its appeal to the much wider audience which received it in later years in such countries as France, England, Germany, Scotland and Peru.¹³) For those who professed to accept the premises that all men are created equal, that governments are formed through a social compact, that the end of government is the happiness, security, and prosperity of the people, and that the people have a right to change a government which does not fulfill that end, it was difficult, if not impossible, to deny Paine's conclusions. Another kind of appeal, also aimed at a broad spectrum of the American people, is the appeal based upon one of the peculiarly American adaptations of Enlightenment thought, the American sense of destiny. "The cause of America," Paine writes in the Introduction, "is in great measure the cause of all mankind." (I, 3) This theme is repeated several times with different variations. Sometimes it is stated matter-of-factly:

The Reformation was preceded by the discovery of America: As if the Almighty graciously meant to open a sanctuary to the persecuted in future years, when home should afford neither friendship nor safety. (I, 21)

At other times passionately:

O! ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose not only the tyranny but the tyrant, stand forth! Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression.

¹³See Gimbel, Thomas Paine for an account of the various editions of Common Sense.

Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. Asia and Africa have long expelled her. Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O! receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind. (I, 30-31)

Or again prophetically:

We have it in our power to begin the world over again. A situation, similar to the present, hath not happened since the days of Noah until now. The birthday of a new world is at hand, and a race of men, perhaps as numerous as all Europe contains, are to receive their portion of freedom from the events of a few months. (I, 45)

In addition to using this broad appeal with which almost all of the American people could identify, Paine takes care to answer some of the objections of specific groups who, as we have seen, were still reluctant for various reasons to accept the idea of independence. These specific appeals enabled Paine to demonstrate that the interests of these groups were his interests also, and that their concerns were his concerns. For example, he several times directs his attention to the merchants. He suggests that, though America has flourished under British rule, she "would have flourished as much, and probably more, had no European power taken any notice of her. The commerce by which she hath enriched herself are the necessities of life, and will always have a market while eating is the custom of Europe." (I, 18) More important, parliamentary restrictions on American trade hinder the expansion of America's commerce. Therefore, "as Europe is our market for trade, we ought to form no partial connection with any part of it." (I, 21)

Paine reminds the merchants also that connection with Britain "tends directly to involve this continent in European wars and quarrels, and set us at variance with nations who would otherwise seek our friendship, and against whom we have neither anger nor complaint." (I, 21) These particular appeals to mercantile interests were, of course, influential with farmers and manufacturers too, for they as well as merchants desired and needed both foreign and domestic markets. Too, all classes of people were interested in avoiding foreign wars; therefore Paine's point that connection with Britain involves America in Britain's quarrels had widespread appeal.

To the merchants and others of the upper classes who feared a possible revolution should independence be declared, Paine contends that reconciliation will be followed by "a revolt somewhere or other, the consequences of which may be far more fatal than all the malice of Britain." (I, 26) He reminds the American people of the plight of the besieged Bostonians and hints that they and others who have similarly suffered might revolt should reconciliation occur.

I make the sufferer's case my own, and I protest, that were I driven from house and home, my property destroyed, and my circumstances ruined, that as a man, sensible of injuries, I could never relish the doctrine of reconciliation, or consider myself bound thereby. (I, 27)

There were also many people of all classes who, like Carter

Braxton, anticipated the outbreak of conflict between colonies should independence be declared. Paine summarily dismisses those fears.

The colonies have manifested such a spirit of good order and obedience to continental government, as is sufficient to make every reasonable person easy and happy on that head. No man can assign the least pretence for his fears, on any other grounds, than such as are truly childish and ridiculous, viz., that one colony will be striving for superiority over another. (I, 27)

For the people of the backcountry and those in the cities who had long been deprived of political power and felt that they might still be so should independence be declared, Paine reassuringly promises a government in which they can share. "There is no political matter" which deserves attention more, he declares, "than the necessity of a large and equal representation." (I, 37) Using a recent instance in the Pennsylvania Assembly as an example, he illustrates that "a small number of electors, or a small number of representatives, are equally dangerous." (I, 37) Though some of the more sophisticated members of Paine's audience must have distrusted the simple unicameral plan for a national government which he sets down in Part III, many of his politically powerless readers were no doubt impressed by his emphasis on more equal representation, "securing freedom and property to all men," and "the free exercise of religion."

To recent immigrants and the underprivileged generally, Paine's attacks upon monarchy and aristocracy must have

been especially appealing. "Of more worth," he affirms, "is one honest man to society and in the sight of God, than all the crowned ruffians that ever lived." (I, 16) Paine's emphasis on the worth of the individual was also an effective appeal to the people of the frontier who saw themselves as proud, independent, and self-reliant men. Too, the German, Scotch, and Irish immigrants, as well as those from other countries, must have appreciated Paine's insistence that "Europe, and not England, is the parent country of America." (I, 19)

Paine identifies also with the religious dissenters of many different sects in the colonies. He plays upon their hatred of Catholicism by labeling monarchy "the popery of government," (I, 12) and by accusing the king and his advisors of "jesuitically" using the idea of mother country with a "low papistical design." (I, 19) He also appeals to their strong belief in the authority of the Scriptures by demonstrating at length, on the basis of that authority, that monarchy is frowned upon by God. Another instance of a specific appeal to the concerns and interests of religious dissenters is Paine's affirmation that he "fully and conscientiously" believes "it is the will of the Almighty that there should be a diversity of religious opinions among us." (I, 37) The most impressive of Paine's appeals to religious dissenters, however, must have been suggestion that the founding of America was

associated in God's plan with the Reformation. He writes, "the Reformation was preceded by the discovery of America: As if the Almighty graciously meant to open a sanctuary to the persecuted in future years, when home should offer neither friendship nor safety." (I, 21) The same idea is repeatedly implied throughout Common Sense, as for example when he affirms that "this new world hath been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from every part of Europe." (I, 19)

Although it was necessary and important for Paine to answer the specific fears and objections of various segments of colonial society and to demonstrate to them that he shared their interests and concerns, the most important of the appeals in Common Sense is, of course, the overall attack on the British constitutional system and on the relationship between the colonies and the mother country. For, as we have seen, the most pervasive opposition to independence arose out of the natural conservatism of the people, their loyalty to and preference for the established order and their affection for the reigning monarch. This kind of conservatism can be counteracted only by an argument based upon beliefs so deeply rooted in the consciousness of the audience that it overcomes any resistance to change or to a shift in loyalties. Because Paine grounded his argument in the premises and

beliefs which the American people already held, he was successful in overcoming this conservatism.

CHAPTER VI

THE RHETORIC OF COMMON SENSE:

PERSONA AND STYLE

We have seen that, in Kenneth Burke's philosophy of rhetoric, persuasion is effected chiefly through the identification of speaker with audience and audience with speaker. Burke writes that the speaker "draws on identification of interests to establish rapport between himself and his audience,"¹ and through this identification attempts to achieve persuasion. In this process the speaker employs rhetorical strategies: strategic answers to the needs of the situation, the audience, and himself. With these principles in view, the preceding chapter has proposed that the basic syllogistic form of Common Sense was a major rhetorical strategy which contributed to the effectiveness of its appeal. It has also suggested that a second major rhetorical strategy was Paine's selection from among the available premises of eighteenth century America those popularly accepted premises which would best support the argument and also demonstrate to the major

¹Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, p. 46.

portion of his audience that the speaker shared their attitudes, their ideas, and their interests. Thus both the form of the argument and the argument itself can be seen as rhetorical strategies which contributed to the establishment of identification between speaker and audience and hence to persuasion.

Another major rhetorical strategy in Common Sense, closely related to argument and also, as we shall see, to style, was the creation of a persona who exhibited qualities with which the major portion of the audience could identify. This persona is created through both argument and style and, in addition, through what the anonymous author says implicitly or explicitly about himself. From the Introduction on, Paine characterizes both himself (the anonymous author) and his audience as disinterested seekers of truth and men of foresight and compassion. He assures his readers:

In the following sheets, the author has studiously avoided every thing which is personal among ourselves. Compliments as well as censure to individuals make no part thereof. The wise and the worthy need not the triumph of a pamphlet; and those whose sentiments are injudicious or unfriendly will cease of themselves, unless too much pains is bestowed upon their conversions. (I, 3)

He further identifies both his audience and himself as foresighted men of feeling and lovers of mankind:

The cause of America is in great measure the cause of all mankind. Many circumstances have, and will arise, which are not local, but universal, and through which the principles of all lovers of mankind are affected, and in the event of which their affections are interested. The laying of a country desolate with

fire and sword, declaring war against the natural rights of all mankind, and extirpating the defenders thereof from the face of the earth, is the concern of every man to whom nature hath given the power of feeling; of which class, regardless of party censure, is

The Author. (I, 3-4)

Adding a postscript to the Introduction in the third edition, the anonymous author of Common Sense endeavors to further inspire the confidence of his audience by insisting upon his anonymity and emphasizing once again that he is a disinterested seeker of truth:

Who the author of this publication is, is wholly unnecessary to the public, as the object for attention is the doctrine itself, not the man. Yet it may not be unnecessary to say that he is unconnected with any party, and under no influence, public or private, but the influence of reason and principle. (I, 4)

An interesting contrast to the persona Paine presents in his Introduction is that presented by James Chalmers, author of a pamphlet published in Philadelphia on March 13, 1776, in the Introduction to his answer to Common Sense. Also anonymous, Chalmers' pamphlet was entitled Plain Truth; Addressed to the Inhabitants of America, Containing, Remarks on a Late Pamphlet, Entitled Common Sense.² Note the self-characterization presented here.

If indignant at the Doctrine contained in the Pamphlet, entitled COMMON SENSE: I have expressed myself, in the following Observations, with some ardor; I entreat the reader to impute my indignation, to honest zeal against the Author's Insidious Tenets. Animated and impelled by every inducement of the Human

²Reprinted in Jensen, Tracts, pp. 447-488.

Heart; I love, and (if I dare so express myself,) I adore my country. Passionately devoted to true Liberty, I glow with the purest flame of Patriotism. Silver'd with age as I am, if I know myself, my humble Sword shall not be wanting to my Country (if the most Honorable Terms are not tendered by the British Nation)³ to whose Sacred Cause, I am most fervently devoted.

In focusing upon himself and his feelings, rather than upon the common feelings and attitudes of his audience, Chalmers presents an egocentric persona who is anything but rational and disinterested. He is emotional and sentimental. Thus whereas in his Introduction Paine displays the qualities most admired by the American colonists--rationality, disinterestedness, and manly compassion, Chalmers displays the qualities they suspected--enthusiasm, sentimentality, and effusiveness. One might venture then that this contrast is perhaps in part at least responsible for the varied reception of the two pamphlets.⁴

Again and again throughout Common Sense Paine assures his readers that he is a man like themselves, a man therefore whose views they can trust, that he offers "nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense," and that he "has no other preliminaries to settle with the reader." (I, 17) In the third part of Common Sense he reaffirms his disinterestedness, assuring his audience that his motives are honorable, not self-seeking:

³Ibid., p. 449.

⁴Jensen notes that one man suspected of being the author of Plain Truth was attacked by a mob. Tracts, p. 447.

I am not induced by motives of pride, party, or resentment to espouse the doctrine of separation and independence; I am clearly, positively, and conscientiously persuaded that it is the true interest of this continent to be so. (I, 24)

He further explains that, as a thinking man, he had "always considered the independency of this continent as an event, which sooner or later must arrive." Therefore, as an ordinarily peaceful man, he felt it "not worth the while to have disputed a matter which time would have finally redressed, unless we meant to be in earnest." (I, 24-25) But, as a man who responds instinctively to injustice, he was forced to come to his present opinion.

No man was a warmer wisher for reconciliation than myself, before the fatal nineteenth of April, 1775, but the moment the event of that day was made known, I rejected the hardened, sullen-tempered Pharaoh of England for ever; and disdain the wretch that with the pretended title of FATHER OF HIS PEOPLE can unfeeling hear of their slaughter, and composedly sleep with their blood upon his soul. (I, 25)

Paine identifies himself with the sufferings of others, feeling both compassion and manly indignation, and implicitly invites his readers to share these emotions with him.

As we have seen in the discussion of the argument of Common Sense, Paine demonstrates to his readers that he shares with them the American sense of destiny. He joins with them in idealistically looking beyond any immediate material interests and contemplating the effects of their acts upon the distant future. This idea is first presented

in the passage in the Introduction which begins "the cause of America is in great measure the cause of all mankind." As a contrast to the American people, Paine accuses the ministry of England, through "the late Mr. Pelham," of caring only if their measures last their lifetimes, a "fatal and unmanly" thought. The hyperbolic language of the following paragraph illustrates how Paine appeals to the emotional commitment of his reader to "generously enlarge his views beyond the present day":

The sun never shone on a cause of greater worth. 'Tis not the affair of a city, a county, a province, or a kingdom; but of a continent--of at least one-eighth part of the habitable globe. 'Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected even to the end of time, by the proceedings now. (I, 17)

Thus did Thomas Paine, as the anonymous author of Common Sense, attempt to create a persona with whom his audience could identify. He tried to demonstrate to them that his attitudes were their attitudes, that his interests were their interests, and that his conduct was like the conduct they admired. But, as rhetoricians since Aristotle have observed, an audience's judgment of a speaker's character is not determined solely by what he says, no matter how well his statements agree with the attitudes and interests of that audience. That judgment is also determined by the way in which a speaker presents his material, that is, by the form of the argument (which has already

been discussed) and by his style. Kenneth Burke writes that "in its simplest manifestation, style is ingratiation." Identification is a function not only of saying the "right thing," but also of saying it in the "right way." An audience will identify with a speaker or writer only in so far as he "speaks their language." As Buffon said "Le style c'est l'homme meme"--style is the man himself. The words he chooses, the manner in which he constructs his sentences, the kinds of figures he employs--all these and more contribute to the establishment of the character of the speaker and determine whether his audience can identify with him. At the same time the style must be appropriate, in whole and in part, to the purpose of the discourse. That is, if a speaker is attempting to persuade through logic and reason, his style must reflect rationality rather than emotion. On the other hand, if a particular appeal is an emotional one, the style in which it is presented must reflect that, too.

The most obvious observation that can be made about Paine's style in Common Sense is that it is especially appropriate for an appeal to a wide audience. James T. Boulton, commenting upon Paine's style in The Rights of Man, notes that it is "vulgar," by which he means "not boorish or debased, but plain, of the people,

⁵Kenneth Burke, Permanence and Change (New York: New Republic, Inc., 1935), p. 71.

vulgus."⁶ Although The Rights of Man is a later work and not written for the same purpose or for the same audience as Common Sense, what Boulton says about Paine's style seems appropriate here. He observes that there is "a philosophical claim inherent" in the language Paine uses.

Paine is suggesting by his choice of idiom, tone, and rhythm, that the issues he is treating can and ought to be discussed in the language of common speech; that these issues have a direct bearing on man's ordinary existence . . . and that they ought not be reserved . . . for language whose aura of biblical sanctity suggests that such issues are above the head of the common man. . . . Secondly, of course, Paine's style gains in intelligibility and immediacy, and, as one result, his readers were provided with quotable phrases which would become part of their verbal armoury for use against the status quo. And thirdly, there is a rumbustious energy . . . about this writing; it marks out the writer as a man of vigorous and healthy common sense. Paine, in fact, is creating an image of himself as one of the vulgar, using the language of the masses with just sufficient subtlety to induce their acceptance of his views.⁷

Paine's style in Common Sense not only marks him as one of the "vulgar," the people, it also fits many of the criteria set down for the "plain style" in the age of Enlightenment, and consequently fulfills certain expectations which his readers would have had about the style of a political pamphlet.

In his ideas about style, Paine was doubtless influenced from several sources, some more significant than

⁶James T. Boulton, "Tom Paine and the Vulgar Style," in The Burke-Paine Controversy, ed. by Ray B. Browne (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1963), p. 216.

⁷Ibid., p. 216-17.

others. The Real Whig faction in England tended to use a plain style and, as has been noted in Chapter I of this study, Paine was quite likely familiar with their writings. Insofar as the influence of individuals is concerned, his discussions with that most accomplished of American writers, Benjamin Franklin, most certainly touched, on occasion, on matters of function and style in prose. Franklin, writing in 1731, made the same promise to his readers that Paine was to make forty-five years later: "I intend to offer you nothing but plain Reasoning, devoid of Art and Ornament; unsupported by the Authority of any Books or men how sacred soever; because I know that no Authority is more convincing to Men of Reason than the Authority of Reason itself."⁸

The late seventeenth century saw a movement in the scientific world toward a more simple, more concrete prose style, close to the language of "Artizans, Countrymen, and Merchants."⁹ This movement was paralleled by a revolution in sermon style in both Britain and America. In the eighteenth century, ministers writing on the subject of sermon style almost invariably emphasized plainness and

⁸The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, ed. by Leonard W. Labaree (14 vols.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959-70), I, 265.

⁹Thomas Sprat, The History of the Royal Society of London (fourth edition; London: J. Knapton, et. al., MDCCXXXIV), p. 113.

lucidity as ideals for which to strive.¹⁰ Thus colonial audiences became accustomed to and expected a simple, lucid, concrete style, not only in pulpit discourse, but also in political discourse. As has been discussed previously, the political writings of the Real Whigs, who characteristically employed the plain style, were quite popular in the colonies and quite likely contributed to the formation of the American taste in political style as well as ideas. Nonetheless, with a few exceptions American political writing generally failed to achieve the ideal of the plain style, and, more important, could be understood only by the more educated segment of the population. As Philip Davidson points out, for example, probably few of the Sons of Liberty, who publicly thanked Richard Bland for his pamphlet An Inquiry into the Rights of the British Colonies (1776), understood a word of it.¹¹ The language of Bland's pamphlet, like that of a majority of the pamphlets published in the period before the Revolution, was for the most part erudite and legalistic. An excellent illustration is provided by the following excerpt from Alexander Hamilton's The Farmer Refuted, published in February, 1775.

Sir:--I resume my pen, in reply to the curious

¹⁰See Howard Mumford Jones, "American Prose Style: 1700-1770," Huntington Library Bulletin, VI (1934).

¹¹Davidson, Propaganda, p. 210.

epistle you have been pleased to favor me with, and can assure you that notwithstanding I am naturally of a grave and phlegmatic disposition, it has been the source of abundant merriment to me. The spirit that breathes throughout is so rancorous, illiberal, and imperious; the argumentative part of it is so puerile and fallacious; the misrepresentation of facts so palpable and flagrant; the criticisms so low, sterile and splenetic, that I will venture to pronounce it one of the most ludicrous performances which has been exhibited to the public view during all the present controversy.¹²

Hamilton's diction is quite sophisticated, far above the language of the common people. He tends toward circumlocution rather than plain statement. His tone is, furthermore, gratuitous and condescending, as though Seabury (the "farmer" Hamilton is refuting) is far beneath him in status and intellect.

Even when the language of a political pamphlet was plain the ideas were often confusing, as for example in the following excerpt from John Dickinson's first Farmer's Letter in which he deals with the act of Parliament suspending the New York Assembly for its refusal to obey the Quartering Act of 1765:

The matter being thus stated, the assembly of New York either had, or had not, a right to refuse submission to that act. If they had, and I imagine no American will say that had not, then the parliament had no right to compel them to execute it. If they had not that right, they had no right to suspend their legislation, which is a punishment. In fact, if the people of New York cannot be legally taxed but by their own representatives, they cannot be legally

¹²The Works of Alexander Hamilton, ed. by Henry Cabot Lodge (12 vols.; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1902), I, 55.

deprived of the privilege of legislation, only for insisting on that exclusive privilege of taxation. If they may be legally deprived in such a case, of the privilege of legislation, why may they not, with equal reason, be deprived of every other privilege?¹³

This passage from Dickinson is written in plain language, but its legalistic argument is not very clear to the average reader. The succession of conditional clauses, together with several ambiguous pronoun references, makes the thought difficult to follow.

A stylistic analysis of Thomas Paine's language in Common Sense reveals first of all that it is exceedingly plain. He avoided floridity and elaborate metaphors and, as much as possible, limited himself to the diction of the people. Harry Hayden Clark notes also that Paine's "general programme of returning to the simplicity of nature and his ostensible contempt for book-learning as opposed to the universal and sufficient light of nature tended, furthermore, to free his style from pedantic literary allusions which so often clogged earlier American style."¹⁴ An excellent contrast to Paine is, again, James Chalmers in Plain Truth. The first part of Common Sense opens with a discussion of society and government.

Some writers have so confounded society with government, as to leave little or no distinction between

¹³Jensen, Tracts, pp. 130-31.

¹⁴Harry Hayden Clark, "Literary Theories of Thomas Paine," Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters, XXVIII (1933), p. 309.

them; whereas they are not only different, but have different origins. Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness. The former promotes our happiness positively by uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices. The one encourages intercourse, the other creates distinctions. The first is a patron, the last a punisher. (I, 4)

The following is Chalmers' answer to the above:

In the beginning of his pamphlet, the Author asserts that society in every state is a blessing. This in the sincerity of my heart I deny; for it is supreme misery to be associated with those, who to promote their ambitious purposes, flagitiously pervert the ends of political society. I do not say that our Author is indebted to BURGH'S POLITICAL DISQUISITIONS, or to ROUSSEAU's Social Compact for his definition of Government, and his large Tree

With the utmost deference to the celebrated ROUSSEAU, I cannot indeed imagine, that laws even so constructed, would materially benefit our imperfect race, unless omniscience deigned previously to exalt our nature. The judicious reader will therefore perceive, that malevolence only, is requisite to declaim against, and arraign the most perfect Governments. Our Political Quack avails himself of this trite expedient, to cajole the people into the most abject slavery, under the delusive name of independence.¹⁵

Several differences between Paine's style and Chalmers' can be immediately noted. First, the difference in diction between these two selections. The words Paine chooses are such as can be easily understood by the average reader. There is no word in this selection which was not then and is not now in common use. Chalmers' diction, on the other hand, is more latinate, more sophisticated. Second, Paine makes a special effort to avoid literary allusions. The only "book" he refers to in all of Common

¹⁵Jensen, Tracts, p. 450.

Sense is the Bible, though he does quote from Dragonetti and Milton. His case against monarchy is based almost entirely on the Old Testament and on familiar English history. Chalmers refers in his short passage to Burgh and Rousseau and in contiguous paragraphs to Montesquieu and Hume. He quotes liberally from each and, in addition, from "the noble impartial historian Sully" and some classical sources. Though the late eighteenth century American was familiar with the classics, especially the classical works on government, the literary and historical allusions contained in Plain Truth suggest how far Chalmers' style is from the language of the common people. His style suggests either that he is deliberately addressing a highly educated minority or, what is more likely, that he is insensitive to the probable effect of such a style upon a reader with only a limited degree of sophistication.

The clarity of Paine's style was also a factor in its effectiveness. Note how he uses, in the above quoted passage, balanced sentence construction, parallel structure, antithesis, and alliteration in order to emphasize the contrast he is setting up between society and government. For example, in the sentence "Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness," the balanced construction of the sentence and the alliteration in "wants" and "wickedness" emphasize and clarify the contrast and help the reader remember the idea expressed.

The same is true of the last sentence in the paragraph: "The first is a patron, the last a punisher." The third and fourth sentences also use balance and antithesis for emphasis and clarity. These stylistic devices enable the average reader to easily follow the concept Paine is trying to convey. The ideas are expressed clearly and precisely and allow no confusion. Insofar as the audience of Common Sense is concerned, then, Paine is talking their language. He is a plain man speaking to plain people, and rapport or identification is easily established.

In addition to aiding clarity, there is another important effect of such balanced constructions. Parallelism, balance, and antithesis lend a rhythm and cadence to Paine's prose, producing a distinct poetic or aesthetic pleasure. The ear of the eighteenth century American appreciated and was attuned to, not only the plain style, but also the rhythm and cadence characteristic of most eighteenth century prose and poetry. Sermons, political speeches, and holiday orations all introduced the colonial audience to the aesthetic delights of verbal rhythms. Thus the familiar and pleasing rhythms of Paine's prose might well have contributed to arousing in his readers the kind of favorable emotions like to predispose them to accept both him and his argument.

Also a significant effect of such constructions is the definitiveness they suggest. They lend an air of syllogistic convincingness to his argument. Verbal antithesis, for example, which presents balanced elements in direct opposition to each other, implies an absolute philosophical contrast which admits no "in-between." In one passage in Common Sense Paine implicitly admits both the advantages and limitations of balanced construction:

Some writers have explained the English Constitution thus: the king, say they, is one, the people another; the peers are a house in behalf of the king, the Commons in behalf of the people; but this hath all the distinctions of a house divided against itself; and though the expressions be pleasantly arranged, yet when examined they appear idle and ambiguous; and it will always happen, that the nicest construction that words are capable of, when applied to the description of something which either cannot exist, or is too incomprehensible to be within the compass of description, will be words of sound only, and though they may amuse the ears, they cannot inform the mind. (I, 8)

Paine's recognition of the limitations of balance as a stylistic device does not, however, deter him from using it. Significantly, he uses it when he wants to be most definitive, most authoritative, as for example when he opens his discussion of society and government in the first part of Common Sense. Here we see how style complements both the message and the image that Paine is attempting to convey. At the outset, Paine must establish the credibility of the anonymous author. The more confident and positive he can seem, the more likely his readers will be

to accept him as an informed man, believe his argument, and identify with his attitudes. Stylistically, he can establish his credibility by employing, among other devices, the balance of opposites--antithesis--which suggests assurance and total conviction.

Paine's extensive use of other kinds of balanced constructions also adds to the emphatic tone of Common Sense. He especially favors the parallel series which, as one rhetorician has demonstrated, "functions rhetorically in a number of different but simultaneous ways." By manipulating the duration of the series, for example, the writer can achieve an overall effect appropriate to the tone he desires to convey and the subject he is concerned with. "He can write the two-part series and create the aura of certainty, confidence, didacticism, and dogmatism. He can write the three-part series and create the effect of the normal, the reasonable, the believable, and the logical. He can write the four-or-more-part series and suggest the human, emotional, diffuse, and inexplicable."¹⁶ Paine, in Common Sense, especially favors the two-part series because it, like antithesis, suggests totality, certainty, and absoluteness. The following passage from the third part of Common Sense illustrates this use quite well:

¹⁶Winston Weathers, "The Rhetoric of the Series," College Composition and Communication, XVII (Dec. 1966), p. 217.

This is not inflaming or exaggerating matters, but trying them by those feelings and affections which nature justifies, and without which we should be incapable of discharging the social duties of life, or enjoying the felicities of it. I mean not to exhibit horror for the purpose of provoking revenge, but to awaken us from fatal and unmanly slumbers, that we may pursue determinately some fixed object. 'Tis not in the power of Britain or of Europe to conquer America, if she doth not conquer herself by delay and timidity. The present winter is worth an age if rightly employed, but if lost or neglected the whole continent will partake of the misfortune; and there is no punishment which that man doth not deserve, be he who, or what, or where he will, that may be the means of sacrificing a season so precious and useful. (I, 23)

The long succession of coordinate pairs--"inflaming or exaggerating," "feelings and affection," "fatal and unmanly," "delay and timidity," "lost or neglected," "precious and useful"--and, in addition, the coordination of several longer grammatical units, creates an aura of certainty which almost compels the reader to accept the ideas expressed. The passage, furthermore, is doubly effective in establishing the tone of certainty because it follows a passage in which Paine is especially emotional, a passage in which he asks the reader a series of rhetorical questions designed to arouse the emotions of rage and indignation against those who have carried "fire and sword" into the land.

A second important stylistic device in the above quoted paragraph is the longer two-part series presented in a negative-positive form: "This is not inflaming or exaggerating matters, but trying them by those feelings

and affections which nature justifies . . ."; "I mean not to exhibit horror for the purpose of provoking revenge, but to awaken us from fatal and unmanly slumbers. . . ." Such negative-positive sequences not only communicate certainty, they also at the same time place special emphasis upon the second, positive part of the series. Presenting the negative first has the effect of strengthening the positive and suggests that the writer's awareness of the negative only makes the positive more certain. Paine uses the negative-positive sequence in other instances where great emphasis on the positive is desirable, as for example when he asserts, "Hither have they fled, not from the tender embraces of the mother, but from the cruelty of the monster." (I, 19) Or when he reassures his readers, "It is not in numbers, but in unity, that our great strength lies." (I, 31)

Less frequently used in Common Sense is the three-part series, ordinarily a more popular stylistic construction than the two-part series. Paine uses the three-part series when he desires to seem less dogmatic and authoritarian and more reasonable and conciliatory. He opens the third section of the pamphlet, for example, by assuring his readers that he offers nothing more than "simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense." (I, 14) And later in that key section he reaffirms that he is "not induced by motives of pride, party, or resentment to

espouse the doctrine of separation and independence," that he is "clearly, positively, and conscientiously persuaded that it is the true interest of this continent to be so." (I, 24)

In writing about highly charged subjects, Paine appropriately employs the four-or-more part series which suggests a greater degree of subjectivity and emotional involvement, as for example in the following passage: "Not one third of the inhabitants, even of this province, are of English descent. Wherefore I reprobate the phrase of parent or mother country applied to England only, as being false, selfish, narrow and ungenerous." (I, 20) Or when he insists that any man who has suffered at the hands of the British "and can still shake hands with the murderers" is "unworthy the name of husband, father, friend, or lover." (I, 23) Commenting upon those "who espouse the doctrine of reconciliation" and hence reject the idea of independence, Paine characterizes them as "Interested men, who are not to be trusted, weak men who cannot see, prejudiced men who will not see, and a certain set of moderate men who think better of the European world than it deserves." (I, 21) Here he employs not only a four-part series but also repetition of relative clauses to emphasize both his emotional involvement and the sense that he is expressing an indisputable truth.

Though he can manipulate his sentences in many

ways, depending upon the desired effect, Paine generally prefers the balanced effect of the two-part series of single words, phrases, or clauses. The persistent employment of this kind of construction is largely responsible for conveying the tone of confidence and definitiveness which makes the argument of Common Sense so compelling. Furthermore, sentences like the following carry the reader along in agreement from the sheer power of their balance and progression. "Our present condition is, Legislation without law; wisdom without a plan; a constitution without a name; and, what is strangely astonishing, perfect independence contending for dependence." (I, 43)

The prevalence of balanced constructions in Paine's writing also contributes in large measure to the clarity of style which enables Paine's readers to identify him as a man of reason. Contributing also to both the definitive tone and the clarity of style in Common Sense is the special terse quality of Paine's writing. Paine has a flair for the epigrammatic, and often succeeds in making his point both memorable and quotable. Harry Hayden Clark observes that Paine is "a master of epigrams, clothed often in homely phrases, which 'became catchwords; household proverbs; verbal banners to flaunt before the astonished vision of a comfortable aristocracy and a contented conservatism.'" "

This facility in the art of epigrams stems, no doubt, partly from the neo-classical delight in the general rather than the particular, partly from Paine's delight in logical abstraction as opposed to historic relativism, and partly from the fact that his delight in the university of natural law led to a delight in framing major premises in terms universal.¹⁷

Two of the most notable examples of this technique are the succinct and alliterative "Reconciliation and ruin are nearly related" (I, 24), and the epigrammatic simile, "Government, like dress, is the badge of lost innocence." (I, 4) Paine also employs a number of terse sentences which have the authoritative tone of aphorisms and are distinctly reminiscent of Poor Richard's favorite wisdom; for example "A firm bargain and a right reckoning make long friends" (I, 37) and "The more men have to lose, the less willing are they to venture." (I, 36) Because these aphoristic expressions are memorable and therefore quotable, they provided the average reader, as Boulton noted in reference to The Rights of Man, with verbal armor to use against the opponents of independence. Important also, this quality of Paine's writing again marks him as one of the "vulgar," the people. For the people, as evidenced by the popularity of Poor Richard's Almanac and other writings like it, delighted in the quotable wisdom of the proverb, the maxim, and the aphorism.

Just as Paine's sentence construction contributes

¹⁷Clark, "Literary Theories," p. 326.

to an image which allows his readers to identify with him, so do the figures of speech and rhetorical devices which he employs. He uses a variety of figures of speech, drawing them from the widest possible range of human experience. At the same time, however, he keeps them at a level which can be easily understood by the great majority of his readers. His metaphors, similes, and analogies are drawn from natural phenomena, mechanics, Christian tradition, and everyday human experience. As such, they make palpable for his audience the most abstract of principles while at the same time contributing to identification by suggesting to his readers that he is a man who lives the life they live, whose concerns are their concerns.

One of the most effective and most memorable figures which Paine draws from nature appears in Part III of Common Sense. In this passage which combines metaphor and analogy, Paine urges the Americans to remember that their deeds today, whether honorable or dishonorable, will grow with time, just as the carvings on the bark of a tree enlarge through the years.

Now is the seed-time of continental union, faith and honor. The least fracture now will be like a name engraved with the point of a pin on the tender rind of a young oak; the wound would enlarge with the tree, and posterity read it in full grown characters. (I, 17)

He draws his figures from astronomy as well as botany, comparing England and America for example to two celestial bodies.

There is something absurd, in supposing a Continent to be perpetually governed by an island. In no instance hath nature made the satellite larger than its primary planet; and as England and America, with respect to each other, reverse the common order of nature, it is evident that they belong to different systems. England to Europe: America to itself. (I, 24)

As Paine's interest in science was quite likely the source of the figures he drew from nature, so it was also the source of his mechanical figures. In discussing the British constitutional system, for example, he uses the following mechanical analogy to prove how the system of checks and balances is unworkable.

But the provision whereby the people act as a check on the king is unequal to the task; the means either cannot or will not accomplish the end, and the whole affair is a Felo de se: for as the greater weight will always carry up the less, and as all the wheels of a machine are put in motion by one, it only remains to know which power in the constitution has the most weight, for that will govern: and though the others, or a part of them, clog, or, as the phrase is, check the rapidity of its motion, yet so long as they cannot stop it, their endeavours will be ineffectual: The first moving power will at last have its way, and what it wants in speed is supplied by time. (I, 8)

Paine also effectively uses a number of figures based upon Christian tradition, another source of identification with his religiously concerned readers. He metaphorically asserts, for example, that "government by kings . . . was the most prosperous invention the Devil ever set on foot for the promotion of idolatry." (I, 10) Associating both the Devil and idolatry with monarchy certainly has the effect of blackening that in-

stitution in the mind of the pious reader. The most memorable of Paine's figurative uses of Christian tradition is, however, his allusion to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden in the simile, "Government, like dress, is the badge of lost innocence; the palaces of kings are built upon the ruins of the bowers of paradise." (I, 4-5) Here Paine makes palpable the abstract notion that government is artificial, made necessary only by man's imperfect nature, just as Adam and Eve clothed themselves to cover their imperfections and the institutions of government replace the edenic paradise.

Most extensive of all are the figures Paine draws from everyday human experience. Anyone who has ever suffered an illness and had several physicians advise different cures can appreciate the extended medical metaphor which Paine uses as a vehicle for his criticism of the British form of government.

Absolute governments, (though the disgrace of human nature) have this advantage with them, they are simple; if the people suffer, they know the head from which their suffering springs; know likewise the remedy; and are not bewildered by a variety of causes and cures. But the Constitution of England is so exceedingly complex, that the nation may suffer for years together without being able to discover in which part the fault lies; some will say in one and some in another, and every political physician will advise a different medicine. (I, 7)

Another homespun metaphor also points out a fault in the British system. "Though we have been wise enough to shut

and lock a door against absolute Monarchy, we at the same time have been foolish enough to put the crown in possession of the key." (I, 8) An experience common to all colonists was having goods weighed for purchase; thus they could appreciate the following expressive metaphor which deals with America's political affairs. "It is the true interest of America to steer clear of European connections, which she never can do, while, by her dependence on Britain, she is made the make-weight in the scale of British politics." (I, 21)

In the discussions of the relationship between America and Britain, it was common to consider America the child and Britain the parent. Paine uses this idea on several occasions and turns it back upon the loyalists. If Britain is the parent country (and Paine denies that it is) "then the more shame upon her conduct. Even brutes do not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families." (I, 19) Retaining the image of America as a youth, Paine expresses in another analogy the belief that if reconciliation occurs the colonies will feel about the mother country as a rebellious adolescent feels about his parent (or an apprentice about his master): "The general temper of the colonies, towards a British government, will be like that of a youth who is nearly out of his time; they will care very little about her." (I, 27)

Drawn also from the everyday life of the common

people are several figures which might have shocked some of Paine's readers, as for example when he asks of those who desire a return to the status of the colonies before 1763: "Can ye restore to us the time that is past? Can ye give to prostitution its former innocence? . . . As well can the lover forgive the ravisher of his mistress, as the continent forgive the murders of Britain." (I, 30) Similarly, he declares that "as a man who is attached to a prostitute is unfitted to choose or judge of a wife, so any prepossession in favor of a rotten constitution of government will disable us from discerning a good one." (I, 9) Though perhaps shocking to some, these analogies lend an earthiness to Paine's writing, and are an excellent illustration of what John Adams meant when he wrote "the phrases, suitable for an emigrant from Newgate, or one who had chiefly associated with such company . . . had as much weight with the people as his argument."¹⁸

Paine's rhetorical devices were also effective in enabling his readers to identify with him. In the following allusion, for example, he reawakens for his readers memories of the day in June, 1775, when British troops and American militia engaged in a bloody battle, an event which aroused feelings of fear, indignation, and hatred in the American people.

¹⁸Adams, Works, II, 509.

If the whole continent must take up arms, if every man must be a soldier, 'tis scarcely worth our while to fight against a contemptible ministry only. Dearly, dearly do we pay for the repeal of acts, if that is all we fight for; for, in just estimation 'tis as great a folly to pay a Bunker Hill price for law as for land. (I, 24)

More important, this allusion suggests to the American people that as the "Bunker Hill price" the British paid on that day is far too dear a price for any piece of land, so likewise the present war is too dear a price to pay for the repeal of legislation. Independence is the only object worth such a price.

Paine also effectively uses rhetorical questions. He suggests that as Americans in Boston are now suffering, so Americans elsewhere may soon become victims of British atrocities. He asks:

Hath your house been burnt? Hath your property been destroyed before your face? Are your wife and children destitute of a bed to lie on, or bread to live on? Have you lost a parent or a child by their hands, and yourself the ruined and wretched survivor? (I, 22)

When John Adams described the language of Common Sense as "suitable for an emigrant from Newgate," he was referring especially to the extensive name-calling in which Paine engages. Paine's boldness of phrase, though, was evidently quite intentional. In 1802, in a letter to Elihu Palmer, he deprecated what he called "the hinting and intimidating manner of writing" and expressed the conviction that "it is necessary to be bold. Some people can be reasoned into sense, and others must be shocked into it.

Say a bold thing that will stagger them, and they will begin to think." (II, 1496) In Common Sense Paine indulges in a good deal of very bold name-calling. He refers to King George as "the Royal Brute of Britain," the "hardened sullen-tempered Pharoah of England," a "wretch, that with the pretended title of FATHER OF HIS PEOPLE can unfeelingly hear of their slaughter and composedly sleep with their blood upon his soul." (I, 25) Kings in general are referred to as "crowned ruffians," and "chief among plunderers." William the Conqueror is "a French bastard." Paine also turns his verbal artillery upon those who would listen to the arguments of the loyalists.

And he who can calmly hear, and digest such doctrine, hath forfeited his claim to rationality--an apostate from the order of manhood--and ought to be considered as one who hath not only given up the proper dignity of man, but sunk himself beneath the rank of animals, and contemptibly crawls through the world like a worm. (I, 41)

Name-calling, of course, plays upon the emotions of the audience by reducing the stature of the recipient of the epithet. Paine also effectively uses the device of reductio ad absurdum to produce a similar result. Again employing the image of America as a youth Paine states:

I have heard it asserted by some, that as America has flourished under her former connection with Great Britain, the same connection is necessary towards her future happiness, and will always have the same effect. Nothing can be more fallacious than this kind of argument. We may as well assert that because a child has thrived upon milk, that it is never to have meat, or

that the first twenty years of our lives is to become precedent for the next twenty. (I, 18)

Thus one of the loyalists' arguments is reduced to an absurdity. Also rendered absurd is the idea that Britain is the parent country of America.

But, admitting that we were all of English descent, what does it amount to? Nothing. . . . The first king of England, of the present line (William the Conqueror) was a Frenchman, and half the peers of England are descendants from the same country; wherefore, by the same method of reasoning, England ought to be governed by France. (I, 20)

One final rhetorical device of which Paine makes impressive use is apostrophe. In the moving conclusion in Part III he pleads:

O! ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose not only the tyranny but the tyrant, stand forth! Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. Asia and Africa have long expelled her. Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O! receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind. (I, 30-31)

Here, as so many times throughout *Common Sense*, there occurs the metaphor of America as an asylum for the persecuted people of the world who are searching for freedom. The idea is compelling, and the expression of it is masterful. Other kinds of figures and rhetorical devices in Common Sense could be noted. Certainly we have not exhausted the wide range of tropes which Paine employs. The important point, however, has been made. He had at his command a variety of figures and rhetorical devices and employed them effectively in achieving identification with his audience.

Finally, Paine's diction, aimed as it is at affecting the emotions, allows his readers to identify with him. Throughout Common Sense pejorative words and phrases are associated with the ideas and institutions Paine attacks. Monarchy is "ridiculous," hereditary succession is "absurd" and "evil." The idea of England as a mother country is "false, selfish, narrow, and ungenerous." Delaying independence is "timid" and "unmanly"; it is opening the door to "eternal tyranny." Britain is a barbarous and hellish power" dealing "brutally" and "treacherously." Reconciliation will be "forced and unnatural"; it is "madness" and "folly." Playing upon American fears and hatred of Catholicism, Paine attacks monarchy as "the Popery of government" and makes the accusation that "the phrase parent or mother country hath been jesuitically adopted by the king and his parasites, with a low papistical design of gaining an unfair bias on the credulous weakness of our minds." (I, 19) The most honorific terms of the eighteenth century, on the other hand, are attached to the ideas and institutions which Paine advocates. He maintains that he is offering "nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense." (I, 17) A republican form of government follows "nature" and "reason." It is "simple" and "right." A government of its own is America's "natural right." "Everything that is right or natural pleads for separation."

Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1821 that "no writer has exceeded Paine in ease and familiarity of style, in perspicuity of expression, happiness in elucidation, and in simple and unassuming language."¹⁹ Paine's rather plain style, free of learned diction and pedantic literary allusions; the tone of confidence and authority he conveys through his sentence construction; the clarity and force of his writing; his use of tropes appealing to a wide range of human experience and feeling--all of these are, in Kenneth Burke's terms, some of the "strategic answers" which Paine provides in Common Sense to the situation in which he found himself. Astutely gauging the occasion and his audience, Paine was able in his style, as he was in his argument, to successfully embody the accepted values and attitudes of the people he wished to persuade, and consequently to effect identification with them.

¹⁹The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, ed. by H. A. Washington (12 vols.; Washington, D. C.: Taylor and Maury, 1894), VII, 198.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of what has been said about the author, the occasion, the audience, the climate of opinion, and the work itself, it should be clear that more than one factor was responsible for the rhetorical effectiveness of Common Sense. Paine himself admitted in November, 1778, that the disposition of the colonists, when Common Sense was published, was such that "they might have been led by a thread and governed by a reed." (I,143) Angered by Parliament's continued acts of repression, many Americans in the winter of 1775-76 were quite ready to accept the idea of independence and needed only to be stirred by a forceful argument into expressing their readiness. They were, one might say, only waiting for a voice to speak for them; but until Paine spoke for independence, there was no voice. Especially fortuitous was Paine's timing the publication of Common Sense to coincide with the appearance in the American press of the king's speech to Parliament. The king's rejection of the Congress' second petition, together with his assertion that the colonies were carrying out a "rebellious war" for "the purpose of establishing an independent empire," and Paine's contention that

such a course was only "right" and "natural," convinced many that allegiance to Britain and the crown was no longer possible.

The fortuitous timing of the pamphlet, however, was only one factor in its effectiveness. The pamphlet itself was perfectly designed to answer the needs of the wide audience that Paine was trying to reach. He was able to reflect in both his argument and his style the ideas, attitudes, and interests accepted by a majority of the American people. This enabled him to achieve what Kenneth Burke calls the "identification" so crucial in the persuasive process. Were the rhetorical strategies Paine employed in achieving identification with his audience consciously planned? It is doubtful that all of them were. More likely, the argument, the style, and the image conveyed were Paine's instinctive responses to the situation. His habit of thinking was syllogistic. Therefore the form of his argument was basically syllogistic. Because he believed in most of the premises of Enlightenment political thought, these premises became the foundation of his argument. He could not have done otherwise. Yet at the same time the syllogistic form of the argument and the grounding of it in the premises of Enlightenment thought were two of the important strategies which enabled Paine to achieve identification with his audience. The style of Paine's argument was also probably an instinctive response to the

situation. Because he fervently believed in his argument, his tone was authoritative, his statements bold. Because he was himself a man of humble origins, he wrote in the plain language of the people. His "turn or talent" for poetry contributed to the variety and effectiveness of the tropes he employed, but those figures and devices were drawn from a wide range of human experience because Paine himself had had such a range of experience. Finally, the image conveyed through both argument and style was that of an honest man whose ideas, attitudes, and interests were those of most Americans--a man, in short, with whom the audience could identify.

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