

HENRY FIELDING  
AND  
THE LANGUAGE OF MORALS:

An Experiment in Contextual Reading

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An Experiment in Contextual Reading

This historical study attempts a thorough revision of some current assumptions about Fielding's moral 'philosophy'. It endorses the orthodox view that Latitudinarian Anglicanism was a decisive influence, but questions whether the Anglican moralists can usefully be described as exponents of 'benevolism' — their sermons are distinguished most notably by an overriding concern with the inculcation of prudence, and by persistent hortatory appeals to self-interest. 'Prudentialism' is arguably a better term for Latitudinarian ethics, and indeed for that dimension of Fielding's work which is attributable to Anglican influence — above all, the reiterated emphasis on the coincidence of virtue and interest.

The Latitudinarian connexion is important. But there were other formative influences, including the 'negative' influence of philosophies with which Fielding disagreed, such as ethical rationalism and psychological egoism. The moral 'philosophy' of Tom Jones is not a rigid conceptual structure: it is a dynamic, and sometimes polemical, response to contemporary ethical debate. This study therefore analyzes Fielding's moral vocabulary by relating it to various other contemporary moral vocabularies. Making constant, detailed reference to chosen contextual sources, it explores Fielding's views on a range of 'live' moral and moral-psychological issues: on the functions of prudence and the grounds of prudential obligation; on the relations between prudential obligation and other moral duties; on benevolence, self-love, and 'disinterestedness'; on the relative status of 'private' and 'public' virtues; on the moral functions of reason and the passions; and on the psychology of moral judgment.

This study suggests that Fielding's writings embody a complex and uneasy synthesis of two historically divergent ethical traditions: in his didactic emphasis on interest and his concern with the enlightenment of self-love, Fielding is a literary heir of Anglican prudentialism; in his esteem for the 'heart', he can be seen as an ally of the newer 'sentimental' school of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Hume.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

### I. FIELDING

<u>Amelia</u>	<u>Amelia</u> , ed. Martin C. Battestin. The Wesleyan Edition of the Works of Henry Fielding. Oxford, 1983.
<u>CGJ</u> (Jensen)	<u>The Covent-Garden Journal</u> , ed. Gerard Edward Jensen. 2 vols. London, 1915.
Henley	<u>The Complete Works of Henry Fielding, Esq., With an Essay on the Life, Genius, and Achievement of the Author</u> , by William Ernest Henley. 16 vols. London, 1903.
<u>JA</u>	<u>Joseph Andrews</u> , ed. Martin C. Battestin. The Wesleyan Edition. Oxford, 1967.
<u>JJ</u> (Coley)	<u>The Jacobite's Journal and Related Writings</u> , ed. William B. Coley. The Wesleyan Edition. Oxford, 1974.
<u>JW</u>	<u>Jonathan Wild</u> .
<u>Miscellanies I</u>	<u>Miscellanies by Henry Fielding, Esq; Volume One</u> , ed. Henry Knight Miller. The Wesleyan Edition. Oxford, 1972.
<u>TJ</u>	<u>The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling</u> , ed. Fredson Bowers, with introduction and commentary by Martin C. Battestin. The Wesleyan Edition. 2 vols. Oxford, 1975.
<u>TP</u> (Locke)	<u>The True Patriot: and The History of Our Own Times</u> , ed. Miriam Austin Locke. London, 1965.

### II. JOURNALS

<u>BJECS</u>	<u>British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies</u> .
<u>ECS</u>	<u>Eighteenth-Century Studies</u> .
<u>MLN</u>	<u>Modern Language Notes</u> .
<u>MLQ</u>	<u>Modern Language Quarterly</u> .
<u>MLR</u>	<u>Modern Language Review</u> .
<u>MP</u>	<u>Modern Philology</u> .
<u>N&amp;Q</u>	<u>Notes and Queries</u> .
<u>PQ</u>	<u>Philological Quarterly</u> .

<u>RES</u>	<u>Review of English Studies.</u>
<u>SAQ</u>	<u>South Atlantic Quarterly.</u>
<u>SEL</u>	<u>Studies in English Literature.</u>

CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a modest contribution to the 'history of ideas' branch of Fielding studies. Its principal historical object is to reassess the nature and extent of Fielding's debt to the Latitudinarian Anglican moralists. I accept the orthodox view that many of Fielding's leading ideas and beliefs, and indeed his characteristic moral vocabulary, were more or less directly derived from the teachings of such Anglican divines as Isaac Barrow, John Tillotson and Benjamin Hoadly.<sup>1</sup> But it seems to me that many orthodox accounts of Latitudinarian moral thinking are inadequate in themselves, and misleading as contexts for the study of Fielding. A number of commonplace misconceptions about the ethical premises of Fielding's work are directly traceable to prior misconceptions about Latitudinarian Anglicanism. And many of these, in turn, can be attributed to the persistent influence of an essay published more than fifty years ago: R. S. Crane's "Suggestions toward a Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling'".<sup>2</sup>

Crane's research was, and is, of immense value. But the "Genealogy" is far from infallible.<sup>3</sup> In some respects, it is positively misleading. Crane reduces the "ethical and psychological teaching" of the Anglican divines to four simple propositions: first, that charity or benevolence is the principal part of virtue; second, that true charity or benevolence is constituted psychologically by sympathy, compassion, feeling; third, that human nature is essentially good (that the sentimental energies which constitute charity or benevolence are radically natural); and,

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<sup>1</sup> See especially James A. Work, "Henry Fielding, Christian Censor", in The Age of Johnson: Essays Presented to Chauncey Brewster Tinker, Oxford, 1949, pp. 139-48 (a pioneering essay); Martin C. Battestin, The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art: A Study of "Joseph Andrews", Middletown, Conn., 1959, esp. Chs. ii, v; Henry Knight Miller, Essays on Fielding's Miscellanies: A Commentary on Volume One, Princeton, 1961, esp. pp. 54-88, 189-228.

<sup>2</sup> First published in ELH, 1 (1934), 205-30. Reprinted in The Idea of the Humanities and Other Essays, Chicago, 1967, I, 188-213. All subsequent references are to the 1967 volume, cited hereafter as Essays.

<sup>3</sup> I am not the first to take issue with this celebrated essay, nor the first to suggest that its influence on students of Fielding has been disproportionate: see Donald Greene, "Latitudinarianism and Sensibility: The Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling' Reconsidered", MP, 75 (1977), 159-83.



fourth, that the exercise of charity or benevolence is psychologically self-rewarding, productive of incomparably exquisite pleasures.<sup>4</sup> Of these four propositions (all of which are indeed typical of Latitudinarian homiletics), only the first two could be said to be ethical, and these are in any case exactly what we would expect from any Christian moralist. The third and fourth are more distinctively Latitudinarian, but these are merely descriptive and psychological, rather than ethical. And yet students of Fielding have enthusiastically adopted Crane's essay as a definition of something called "the benevolist ethic" or, worse, a "benevolist philosophy".<sup>5</sup> And this "philosophy" has often been simplified even further: by A. D. McKillop, for instance, who reduces the so-called "doctrine of benevolism" to an "exaltation of the good heart".<sup>6</sup> But the most damaging consequence of Crane's influence is the widespread tendency to conflate "benevolism" with "Latitudinarianism". Miller, for instance, talks of a "latitudinarian-benevolist" moral tradition.<sup>7</sup> Students of Fielding have frequently been led to believe that Latitudinarian Anglicanism amounted to little more than a belief that charity or benevolence is a very good thing,<sup>8</sup> or a tendency towards facile optimism about human nature: thus, according to one eminent student of the eighteenth century, Fielding's "commitment to latitudinarian Anglicanism" can be glossed as "a readiness to see man as possessing natural and spontaneous urges towards benevolence and sympathy".<sup>9</sup> Rogers, like many others, was no doubt depending on Battestin's account of Latitudinarianism, which was itself heavily influenced by Crane's. Battestin did in fact improve upon the "Genealogy" by disclosing some of the moral-theological

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<sup>4</sup> Essays, I, 191 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Battestin, The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art (cited hereafter as Moral Basis), p. 70; Miller, Essays, p. 67.

<sup>6</sup> The Early Masters of English Fiction, Lawrence, Kansas, 1956, p. 130.

<sup>7</sup> Essays, p. 66.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Michael Irwin, Henry Fielding The Tentative Realist, Oxford, 1967, pp. 9-13.

<sup>9</sup> Pat Rogers, The Augustan Vision, 1974, p. 278. Cf. Morris Golden, Fielding's Moral Psychology, Amherst, Mass., 1966, p. 4.

contexts of the so-called "benevolist ethic".<sup>10</sup> But the oversimplifications continued, sometimes in modified form. Irvin Ehrenpreis, for instance, implies that Latitudinarian Anglicanism involved little more than the "interpretation of Christian love as active charity" (how else would one interpret it?) and a belief that good works are "the test of faith".<sup>11</sup>

It is not surprising that literary scholars have lost interest in Latitudinarianism. Rather than stimulating further enquiry, the important pioneering efforts of Crane and Battestin have established a stale and tedious orthodoxy.<sup>12</sup> Students of Fielding have, perhaps understandably, preferred to depend upon Crane and Battestin rather than cultivate

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<sup>10</sup> See Moral Basis, Ch. ii, esp. pp. 14-15, 20-25. Battestin's account of Latitudinarian moral theology is however less than adequate, and has itself been challenged by others: see Greene, op. cit., passim; and cf. Rolf P. Lessenich, Elements of Pulpit Oratory in Eighteenth-Century England (1660-1800), Köln, 1972, pp. 201 ff.

<sup>11</sup> Fielding: "Tom Jones", 1964, pp. 28, 27.

<sup>12</sup> There is a good deal of further enquiry in Mahmoud A. Hussein, "The Eighteenth-Century Concept of the Good Man in Relation to the Novels of Henry Fielding", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Leicester, 1965. Hussein's study of the historical background features a substantial and detailed account of the Cambridge Platonists and the Latitudinarians (pp. 1-67), and he goes on to summarize the moral thought of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Butler and Hume (pp. 131-82), among others. But his conclusions about these contexts are sometimes rather odd in themselves (the Latitudinarians are classed as ethical "intellectualists"), and the contextual research (Chs. i-ii) is only tenuously related to Fielding's work (dealt with quite separately in Chs. iii-iv). Oddly, Hussein's reading of Fielding appears to have been more heavily influenced by Battestin's account of "benevolism" than by his own extensive historical research: thus, the "basis" of Fielding's "moral thought" is said to be constituted essentially by his "optimistic view of human nature" and a "firm belief in good-nature and benevolence" (pp. 183, 191, 183). Ultimately, this study does nothing to revise the Crane-Battestin view, which has proved extremely resilient. The orthodoxy has very recently been further consolidated by David Nokes, in Henry Fielding: "Joseph Andrews", 1987, pp. 63-83. This account of "Fielding's Moral Outlook" features a description of Latitudinarian ethics which is frankly dependent on Battestin (see esp. pp. 63-7), and argues principally that "charity is the cardinal virtue in the system of Christian benevolence presented in Joseph Andrews" (p. 70). This sounds even more tautological than most other accounts of "benevolism". As one of the Penguin Masterstudies, Nokes's book is addressed to relatively young and callow readers of Fielding (including undergraduates), and does not aim to expound any complex or original theories about its subject. It would be churlish to blame Nokes for recapitulating the orthodox view of Fielding's ethics. But the recapitulation of this view in this context is perhaps some measure of the extent to which the Crane-Battestin argument has become institutionalized in recent years.



first-hand acquaintance with Latitudinarian homiletics. My own research was prompted by a nagging suspicion that there was something missing from the standard definitions of Anglican "benevolism". The trouble seems in fact to have begun with Crane's "Genealogy", which is in some respects a salutary example of what happens when history is read backwards. Crane was of course looking for seventeenth-century precedents of eighteenth-century "sentimental benevolism",<sup>13</sup> and he found them in abundance in a vast range of Anglican sermons. What he did not find (contrary to his implicit claims) was Latitudinarian Anglicanism. His tendentious historical method led to a confusion of the genus with the species, of the whole with one of its parts, and thereby set a precedent for all subsequent conflations of Latitudinarianism with "benevolism".

This becomes clear when one discovers what Crane omitted from his account of Anglican homiletic themes. Confronted with an orthodoxy as rigid as the Crane-Battestin tradition, it is difficult to approach Latitudinarian sermon literature with an open mind, but this is what I have attempted to do. Bearing in mind Greene's strictures against certain kinds of laziness among literary scholars, I have also endeavoured to take account of relevant historical research in other disciplines.<sup>14</sup> My own working suppositions about the nature of Latitudinarian Anglicanism owe much to the work of Pattison, Cragg, Locke, Westfall, McAdoo, Simon, Downey, Lessenich, Jacob, and Rivers.<sup>15</sup> The studies by Pattison, McAdoo and Lessenich can be particularly recommended to those wishing to

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<sup>13</sup> Essays, I, 190.

<sup>14</sup> Donald Greene, "The Study of Eighteenth-Century Literature: Past, Present, and Future", in Phillip Harth, ed., New Approaches to Eighteenth-Century Literature, Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1974, pp. 1-32 (pp. 13-19). Cf. "Latitudinarianism and Sensibility", pp. 180-83.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Pattison, "Tendencies of Religious Thought in England, 1688-1750", in Essays, ed. Henry Nettleship, Oxford, 1889, II, 42-118; G. R. Cragg, From Puritanism to the Age of Reason, Cambridge, 1950, Ch. iv, and The Church and the Age of Reason 1648-1789, Pelican History of the Church, Vol. 4, 1960, esp. Chs. v, xi; Louis G. Locke, Tillotson: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Literature, Anglistica, Vol. 4, Copenhagen, 1954, esp. Ch. ii; Richard S. Westfall, Science and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England, New Haven, 1958, esp. Ch. v; H. R. McAdoo, The Spirit of Anglicanism, 1965, esp. Chs. v-vi; Irene Simon, Three Restoration Divines: Barrow, South, Tillotson, Paris, 1967, Vol. I; James Downey, The Eighteenth-Century Pulpit, Oxford, 1969, Ch. i; Lessenich, Elements of Pulpit Oratory, esp. Ch. vii; Margaret C. Jacob, The Newtonians and the English Revolution, Hassocks, Sussex, 1976, Ch. i; Isabel Rivers, "Reason, Grace and Sentiment: Studies in the Language of Religion and Ethics, 1650-1750" (work in progress), Ch. i.



investigate the moral character of Latitudinarianism. Lessenich's impressively exhaustive collation of leading homiletic themes will perhaps be found most useful of all. What all of these studies show (among other things) is that the Latitudinarian Anglicans were much more than a school of moralists: they were also of great historical importance as exponents of rational theology, and indeed as champions of comprehension or toleration for the nonconformists.<sup>16</sup> As preachers, they were indeed distinctively preoccupied with practical morality. But "benevolism" is a sadly inadequate term to characterize their typical homiletic concerns. If we must give their ethical teaching a label, it would be much better to call it "prudentialism". (This is the term I shall employ hereafter, though with a due sense of the reductiveness of all labels.) As Christian moralists, the Latitudinarians did of course believe that benevolence is a very good thing, and sought tirelessly to promote it.<sup>17</sup> In a sense, what made them distinctive was their manner of promoting it.

In a typical hortatory sermon by Barrow or Tillotson, Crane's four propositions are effectively subsumed in the following, much larger, propositions: first, that happiness is the natural and necessary end of man, individually and collectively; second, that the practice of virtue and religion is the surest guarantee of happiness in this world, and a certain guarantee of happiness in the next; and, third, that virtue and religion are therefore incomparably prudent practices. Whether explicit or implicit, these three propositions are ubiquitous in Latitudinarian homiletics. A classic application can be found in Tillotson's early sermon, The Wisdom of Being Religious (1664). But the premises of Anglican prudentialism were given their fullest exposition in John Wilkins's Of the Principles and Duties of Natural Religion (1675): the argument of Book II, "Of the Wisdom of Practising the Duties of Natural Religion", is the argument of sermon after sermon by Wilkins's close associates,

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<sup>16</sup> Greene insists on redefining the "Latitudinarians" entirely in terms of their position on this latter issue: see "Latitudinarianism and Sensibility", pp. 176-83. But this, again, is to confuse the whole with one of its parts: tolerance was indeed an important function of the Latitudinarian ethos of 'reasonableness', but cannot be said to have constituted that ethos. In his zeal to correct Crane's errors, I think Greene seriously understates the ethical and theological distinctiveness of the Latitudinarians.

<sup>17</sup> It is perhaps worth citing the example of Isaac Barrow, whose congregation apparently had on one occasion to sit through more than three hours of "The Duty and Reward of Bounty to the Poor", though the truth of this anecdote has been doubted by some: see P. H. Osmond, Isaac Barrow: His Life and Times, 1944, p. 165.

Barrow (1630-77) and Tillotson (1630-94).<sup>18</sup> Indeed, McAdoo has argued convincingly that Wilkins (1614-72) was the prime mover of what has become known as Latitudinarianism, not least in his preoccupation with practical wisdom.<sup>19</sup>

The origins of Anglican prudentialism are historically and philosophically complex. McAdoo sees Latitudinarianism itself as a product of two quite different kinds of influence, on the one hand from the Cambridge Platonists, and on the other from Wilkins, who was responsible for the distinctively 'prudential' ethos of the later school.<sup>20</sup> Among the theological and philosophical sources of Wilkins's emphasis on wisdom were Richard Hooker (1554-1600), Aquinas, and ultimately Aristotle. His favourite biblical sources, ones to which he returned again and again, were the Old Testament wisdom books, particularly Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.<sup>21</sup> A similar predilection for the practical wisdom of the Old Testament is one of the distinctive characteristics of the Latitudinarian preachers. And it seems to me that Wilkins's revival of Aristotelian influence is another key to the ethos of Anglican prudentialism. But there were of course more immediate historical reasons for the rise of the prudential argument. In some ways it was a practical response to the 'practical' atheism of Restoration culture, an attempt to stem the tide of libertinism (and the licentious thinking that went with it) by advertising the infinitely greater satisfactions to be derived from virtue and religion.<sup>22</sup>

Whatever its historical origins, the prudential thesis was massively influential, surviving well into the eighteenth century, and indeed

<sup>18</sup> Tillotson was the editor of Wilkins's Natural Religion, and of Barrow's Works (first edition, 1683-7). For a detailed account of the close personal and professional connexions between these three, see Rivers, "Reason, Grace and Sentiment", Ch. i. Wilkins and Tillotson were particularly close, but it is probable that there was strong mutual influence between all three, and it seems certain that the distinctive ethos of Latitudinarian homiletics was originally conceived by this illustrious trio.

<sup>19</sup> The Spirit of Anglicanism, Ch. vi, esp. pp. 203-30.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 205, 212, 221-2, 230.

<sup>21</sup> For the various typical sources of Wilkins's thought, see McAdoo, op. cit., pp. 205, 212-3, 220-21, 223-4, 226-7.

<sup>22</sup> See Westfall, Science and Religion, pp. 110-11; and, especially, Simon, Three Restoration Divines, I, 111-13, on Tillotson's The Wisdom of Being Religious.



becoming the keynote of Anglican pulpit oratory in the decades before 1750. According to Downey, Tillotson was by far the strongest individual influence, and if he is correct it would seem that the years 1720-1740 might almost be called The Age of Tillotson.<sup>23</sup> Downey notes that Tillotson's "prudential ethic" was "ubiquitous not only in the homiletics of the eighteenth century but in the literature as well", and rightly mentions Fielding in this connexion.<sup>24</sup> It seems to me that Fielding, as moralist and as rhetorician, was essentially an Anglican prudentialist, belonging squarely in the tradition established by Wilkins, Barrow and Tillotson. But his considerable debt to this tradition did not exclude the influence of other contemporary ethical 'schools'. In fact, Fielding was keenly responsive to trends and controversies in moral thought, and any adequate reading of his work must I think take this into account.

In many ways, the agenda of early eighteenth-century ethical debate could be said to have been set by the so-called Cambridge Platonists, and in particular by Benjamin Whichcote (1609-83) and Ralph Cudworth (1617-88).<sup>25</sup> Many subsequent developments in moral thought can in one way or another be traced back to their decisive reaction against puritan theology and, later, against the philosophy of Hobbes's Leviathan (1651). The characteristic philosophical temper of Cambridge Platonism was very largely conditioned by these two potent 'negative' influences.<sup>26</sup> In retrospect, Whichcote's importance seems to lie principally in his emphatic reaction against Calvinistic and Hobbesian accounts of human nature, and his contrary insistence upon the moral potential of the natural man: he lays great stress on "the Principle of GOOD NATURE, and

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<sup>23</sup> The Eighteenth-Century Pulpit, Ch. i, esp. pp. 14-16, 19, 24-9.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> The other principal members of the school were Nathaniel Culverwell (1619-51), Henry More (1614-87) and John Smith (1616-52). Helpful accounts of the Cambridge Platonists and their typical doctrines can be found in John Tulloch, Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the Seventeenth Century, 2nd ed., 1874, Vol. II; Frederick J. Powicke, The Cambridge Platonists: A Study, 1926; Cragg, From Puritanism to the Age of Reason, Chs. ii-iii; J. A. Passmore, Ralph Cudworth: An Interpretation, Cambridge, 1951 (despite its title, a useful key to the moral philosophy of the whole school); Ernst Cassirer, The Platonic Renaissance in England, trans. J. P. Pettegrove, 1953 (an excellent study); McAdoo, The Spirit of Anglicanism, Chs. iii-iv; C. A. Patrides, ed., The Cambridge Platonists, 1969, Introduction; and Rivers, "Reason, Grace and Sentiment", Ch. i.

<sup>26</sup> See Cassirer, The Platonic Renaissance, Ch. iii, esp. pp. 65 ff.; and cf. Passmore, Cudworth, pp. 11-12, 40-41.

the charitable Disposition".<sup>27</sup> In more than one sense Whichcote sees morality as a natural system, and one in which man himself is inescapably rooted. Happiness and misery are fundamentally moral phenomena, natural and consequential products of virtue or vice: "Virtue hath Reward, arising out of itself; so Sin and Wickedness hath Punishment"; "VERTUE, and VICE, are the Foundations of Peace and Happiness, or Sorrow and Misery"; VERTUE is antecedent to Happiness; and VICE to Misery" (Select Sermons, I, v, p. 109; II, iii, p. 233; II, vi, p. 293). This emphasis on the natural origins of reward and punishment (and indeed of heaven and hell)<sup>28</sup> is an aspect of Whichcote's reaction against puritan moral theology, with its God of arbitrary omnipotence, as well as a practical homiletic strategy. The same emphasis was to become a distinctive rhetorical feature of Latitudinarian homiletics, as was Whichcote's emphasis on "GOOD NATURE", even though the theological arguments had been largely won. As the practical moralist of the Cambridge school, Whichcote clearly exerted a strong influence on the Latitudinarian preachers. Cudworth, on the other hand, was very much the philosopher of the school. His importance for the historian of ethical thought lies principally in his quasi-Platonic theory of "eternal and immutable morality", which postulated that moral distinctions are objective and absolute, prior to law and institution, and independent even of God's will.<sup>29</sup> This, again, was primarily a reaction against "the neo-Augustinian Calvinist God",<sup>30</sup> "not a God of peace, but of might and fear", who "confronts man primarily as a judge".<sup>31</sup> Cudworth emphatically rejected voluntaristic accounts of right and wrong. As he saw it, puritan legalism and Hobbesian nominalism were different manifestations

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<sup>27</sup> Select Sermons of Dr. Whichcot, ed. with Preface by Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1698); 3rd ed., revised by William Wishart, Edinburgh, 1742, Part I, Sermon vi, p. 143. Subsequent references to this edition will be abbreviated (e.g. Select Sermons, I, vi, p. 143) and given after quotations in the text.

<sup>28</sup> See Select Sermons, I, ii, pp. 55-7; I, v, p. 120. And cf. Cudworth, A Sermon Preached before the Honourable House of Commons at Westminster, Cambridge, 1647, pp. 48-52, where the naturalistic interpretation of heaven and hell is taken much further.

<sup>29</sup> See A Treatise concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality (1731), esp. Bk. I, Chs. i-iii. And, on this aspect of Cudworth's thought, see Tulloch, Rational Theology, II, 281-9; Cassirer, The Platonic Renaissance, pp. 78-80; and, especially, Passmore, Cudworth, Ch. vi.

<sup>30</sup> Rivers, "Reason, Grace and Sentiment", Ch. i (n. pag.).

<sup>31</sup> Cassirer, op. cit., p. 75.



of a single philosophical enemy: ethical relativism. Redefining God in terms of the Idea of the Good, he insisted that God's will was not autonomous, but was bound by His own nature, and by the eternal and immutable differences of good and evil, just and unjust. To put this more simply, Cudworth argued that moral differences were not constituted but rather confirmed by God's revealed will. Like the other Cambridge Platonists, he thus evolved an anti-voluntaristic conception of Christian morality;<sup>32</sup> and along with this went an anti-legalistic conception of Christian virtue as goodness rather than obedience, something willing rather than willed, animated not by fear but by love, something fundamentally inward and vital.<sup>33</sup>

This nexus of ideas exerted a great and various influence on subsequent intellectual history.<sup>34</sup> As I have said, the Latitudinarians took up the practical spirit (and many of the themes) of Whichcote's preaching, and continued his championship of "GOOD NATURE" (now principally in opposition to Hobbes); but, perhaps under the special influence of Wilkins, they reverted to a quasi-legalistic theological ethics, and an emphasis on future rewards and punishments which is quite uncharacteristic of Cambridge Platonism. Samuel Clarke (1675-1729) adopted, and made a philosophy out of, Cudworth's theory of "eternal and immutable morality" but evolved a very different ethics in which virtue is essentially a rational and voluntary accomplishment rather than a vital condition of the heart: Clarke took a metaphysics and a language, rather than a moral philosophy, from the Cambridge Platonists.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, the rationalist tradition in the eighteenth century is obviously rooted

<sup>32</sup> See Cassirer, pp. 73-8.

<sup>33</sup> See Cudworth's Sermon Preached before the House of Commons, pp. 73-82; and cf. Cassirer, pp. 162-5; Passmore, Ch. vi, passim.

<sup>34</sup> On the influence of the Cambridge Platonists, general and particular, see Cassirer, Ch. vi (largely about their influence on Shaftesbury); Passmore, Ch. viii; and Powicke, The Cambridge Platonists, pp. 197-213. It should perhaps be noted that Whichcote published nothing in his own lifetime, and that Cudworth's principal ethical theories were not published until long after his death (A Treatise of Freewill first appeared in 1838). Many of Cudworth's manuscripts remain unpublished: for a detailed account of these, see Passmore, pp. 197-113. But the influence of Whichcote and Cudworth through teaching, preaching, manuscript circulation, and personal connexions, was clearly considerable: again, see Rivers, Ch. i, on the transmission of ideas among and between the Cambridge Platonists and the Latitudinarians.

<sup>35</sup> This view is borrowed from Passmore, pp. 100-103.

to some extent in the philosophy of Cambridge Platonism, and the direct influence of Cudworth can apparently be found in Clarke's principal successor, Richard Price (1723-91).<sup>36</sup> But the most important and devoted follower of the Cambridge Platonists was the Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713).<sup>37</sup> With Cudworth, Shaftesbury believed that moral values are objective and absolute; but, unlike Clarke and the rationalists, he argued that moral distinctions are perceived sentimentally, not by reason but by a natural moral "sense" which functions intuitively rather than discursively. Shaftesbury's essentially optimistic account of human nature clearly owes something to Whichcote, as does his account of moral goodness in terms of the practical exercise of the natural affections. It is of course highly significant that Shaftesbury's first publication was the selection of Whichcote's sermons from which I have already quoted: this first appeared in 1698 with a laudatory preface, where Whichcote is hailed as "the Preacher of Good Nature" (Select Sermons, p. xxxi).<sup>38</sup> The more general influence of the Cambridge Platonists can also be found in Shaftesbury's anti-legalistic emphasis on the spontaneity and inwardness of virtue, and indeed in his quasi-Platonic idea of God.<sup>39</sup>

Shaftesbury's own influence in the eighteenth century was of course considerable:<sup>40</sup> the moral philosophy of Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) owes much to Shaftesbury's Inquiry concerning Virtue, or Merit (first published anonymously in 1699, as An Inquiry concerning Virtue, in Two

<sup>36</sup> See Passmore, Cudworth, pp. 100, 103-4.

<sup>37</sup> Again, see Passmore, pp. 96-100; and, especially, Cassirer, The Platonic Renaissance, Ch. vi, passim. Passmore goes as far as to say that Shaftesbury was "fundamentally a Cambridge Platonist" (p. 99), and Cassirer's conclusions are hardly less decisive.

<sup>38</sup> On Shaftesbury's edition of Whichcote and its significance, see Robert Voitle, The Third Earl of Shaftesbury 1671-1713, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1984, pp. 111-18.

<sup>39</sup> For a good introduction to Shaftesbury's thought, see Voitle, op. cit., Chs. iv, viii; and, for a more detailed study, see Stanley Grean, Shaftesbury's Philosophy of Religion and Ethics, Ohio, 1967 (Chs. ix-xiii constitute a particularly useful account of his moral thought).

<sup>40</sup> See William E. Alderman, "Shaftesbury and the Doctrine of Benevolence in the Eighteenth Century", Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters, 31 (1931), 137-59; and the same author's "Shaftesbury and the Doctrine of Moral Sense in the Eighteenth Century", PMLA, 46 (1931), 1087-94. Also, for a literary perspective, see C. A. Moore, "Shaftesbury and the Ethical Poets in England, 1700-1760", PMLA, 31 (1916), 264-325.



Discourses);<sup>41</sup> and, partly through the medium of Hutcheson's work, the Inquiry also exerted some influence on the ethical thinking of David Hume (1711-76). Shaftesbury gets an honourable mention in Hume's introduction to A Treatise of Human Nature (1739-40), along with Locke, Mandeville, Hutcheson and Butler, as a pioneer of "the science of man".<sup>42</sup>

Thus, as Passmore puts it, the Cambridge Platonists can be said to have "stimulated and profoundly affected the two main non-utilitarian ethical movements of the eighteenth century, rationalism and sentimentalism".<sup>43</sup> There is an historical paradox here, in that the rationalists and the sentimentalists were of course philosophically at odds. Together, they were also at odds with Anglican prudentialism, which (to borrow Passmore's term) is essentially a "utilitarian" ethic. The moral philosophy of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, in particular, is distinctively anti-legalistic and anti-prudential. In this, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson were consciously setting themselves against the dominant trend in Anglican homiletics. More specifically, however, they were opposing themselves to Locke, who has been called "the fountainhead of utilitarianism and prudential ethics".<sup>44</sup> With its denial of innate ideas and innate moral principles, and its reduction of all human motivation to basic hedonistic impulses, Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690) could be said to have taken the "benevolism" out of Anglican prudentialism: morality was denaturalized and externalized, reduced to a system of external laws and sanctions by which man's hedonistic impulses were to be directed and controlled, and virtue was truly and effectively

<sup>41</sup> The crude first edition of the Inquiry was apparently published by John Toland, without Shaftesbury's permission and contrary to his wishes. The first authorized version appeared as part of Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times (first edition, 1711). On the curious publishing history of the Inquiry, see David Walford's introduction to his edition of the work (Manchester, 1977), pp. ix-xi; and Voitle, The Third Earl, pp. 133-5.

<sup>42</sup> A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed., revised by P. H. Nidditch, Oxford, 1978, p. xvii. This edition used throughout. Cited hereafter as Treatise.

<sup>43</sup> Cudworth, p. 105.

<sup>44</sup> Ernest Tuveson, "The Origins of the 'Moral Sense'", Huntington Library Quarterly, 11 (1947-8), 241-59 (p. 241).

reduced to nothing more than enlightened self-interest.<sup>45</sup>

It is not surprising that Shaftesbury, as a devoted philosophical disciple of the Cambridge Platonists, saw in Locke's Essay a radical concession to the psychological egoism -- and indeed the ethical relativism -- of Hobbes's Leviathan.<sup>46</sup> The animus against Hobbes aligns Shaftesbury with a solid tradition of Anglican polemic,<sup>47</sup> and Hobbes-bashing was still virtually de rigeur among early eighteenth-century moralists, though many contented themselves with vilifying his contemporary successor, Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733). But the same moralists evidently did not share Shaftesbury's attitude to Locke. The Essay did initially provoke a storm of theological polemic, and largely on account of its denial of innate ideas. Like Shaftesbury, some of Locke's early critics were concerned by the ethical implications of his epistemological theories; but most were concerned with the more general theological implications, and the storm was in any case virtually spent by the time Shaftesbury published Characteristicks (1711).<sup>48</sup> Thereafter, Locke rapidly became the leading philosophical voice of the age: according to MacLean, the influence of the Essay was second only to that of the Bible in the eighteenth century.<sup>49</sup> Shaftesbury's clear-sighted

<sup>45</sup> Bertrand Russell's brief account of Locke's ethics can still be recommended: see his History of Western Philosophy, 2nd ed., 1961, pp. 592-5. For a more recent and much more detailed analysis, see John W. Yolton, Locke and the Compass of Human Understanding, Cambridge, 1970, esp. Chs. vi-vii.

<sup>46</sup> See Tuveson, "The Origins of the 'Moral Sense'", passim; Cassirer, The Platonic Renaissance, pp. 188-93; Voitle, The Third Earl, pp. 118-35 (esp. pp. 118-22); and Kenneth MacLean, John Locke and English Literature of the Eighteenth Century (1936), New York, 1962, Ch. i, esp. pp. 24-5.

<sup>47</sup> For a detailed survey of anti-Hobbes propaganda in the seventeenth century, see Samuel I. Mintz, The Hunting of Leviathan, Cambridge, 1962.

<sup>48</sup> MacLean touches upon this controversy (op. cit., pp. 5-7). My own brief account of it is derived from the detailed full-length study by John W. Yolton, John Locke and the Way of Ideas (1956), Oxford, 1968. See esp. Chs. i (on the general reaction to the Essay) and ii (on the argument about innate ideas).

<sup>49</sup> Op. cit., Preface, p. v. On the massive philosophical and literary influence of the Essay, especially after 1725, see MacLean's Introduction, pp. 1-17. On Locke's 'neutral' account of human nature and its historical significance, particularly as an influence on eighteenth-century educational theory, see also J. A. Passmore, "The Malleability of Man in Eighteenth-Century Thought", in Earl R. Wasserman, ed., Aspects of the Eighteenth Century, 1965, pp. 21-46.



doubts were clearly not shared by the majority of Fielding's contemporaries, perhaps because there was so much else in the Essay besides a hedonistic ethics, perhaps because its frame of theological reference was essentially that of Latitudinarian Anglicanism, but most probably because Locke had only taken prudentialism to its logical conclusion. In a sense, it was Shaftesbury who was out of step with the dominant ethical currents of Fielding's day. While Fielding's own admiration of Locke did not prevent him from admiring Shaftesbury's ethics, it could be said that this eclecticism carried with it the risk of philosophical self-contradiction.

Locke is a rather special case. But I think we can say that there were four principal currents of moral thought in the first half of the eighteenth century. If any one of these currents can be said to typify the ethos of the age, it is Anglican prudentialism. (It should however be remembered that "prudentialism" was a characteristically homiletic phenomenon, both an ethical and a rhetorical tradition: the term embraces a manner of recommending virtue.) Second, there was the moral philosophy of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, which I shall hereafter refer to as sentimental benevolism. Third, there was the rationalist tradition, recently reinvigorated by the influential arguments of Clarke's Discourse concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion (1706), but always vital, and with a genealogy stretching back to Plato and the Stoics. And, last but not least formidable, there was psychological egoism, which had been given a new and provocative lease of life by Mandeville's The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits (first edition, 1714). This is not of course an exhaustive account of early eighteenth-century moral thought. And I make these tidy schematic distinctions with a due sense of their historical and philosophical inadequacy. My four 'schools' overlapped in various and complex ways. There are particularly strong continuities between the Latitudinarian Anglicans and the sentimental benevolists, not least in their common emphasis on the natural rewards of virtue. Clarke, ethical rationalist par excellence, was also a theologian in the Latitudinarian tradition, and, despite his obsession with the objectivity of moral obligations and the eternal fitness of things, he can be found arguing the practical, utilitarian necessity of eternal rewards and punishments in very 'Latitudinarian' fashion. Whichcote, Locke and Hutcheson, no less than Clarke, can be found suggesting, arguing, or demonstrating that morality is in one way or another susceptible of mathematical analysis. Viewed as

a philosopher, Locke seems to have more in common with Hobbes than with the Latitudinarians; viewed as an Anglican apologist, he appears to belong squarely in the Latitudinarian tradition. Hobbes himself could be said to have shared certain basic beliefs -- and fears -- with the Latitudinarians. And so on. I have no wish to obfuscate this kind of historical complexity. But the historian must sometimes simplify to dissect, and the intersections between my four ethical 'schools' will necessarily be understated in what follows. My labels are provisional heuristic devices, and ones which should be tested by their usefulness.

As I have said, my primary historical object is to reassess the nature and extent of Fielding's debt to the Latitudinarian moralists. In this, my work seeks to revise and extend the findings of other scholars, particularly Battestin and Miller. But my object is not exclusively historical. What follows is also an attempt to disclose and analyze the distinctive ethical premises of Fielding's major writings, and the thesis must stand or fall according to my success or failure in this. It seemed to me, however, that the value of any ethical analysis of Fielding's work must depend upon the degree to which it clarifies Fielding's own objectives as a moralist. (In this, I am an old-fashioned intentionalist.) It therefore seemed necessary to read his work in the context of contemporary ethical debate. As the reader might expect, I do make some suggestions about the possible or probable influence of particular moralists, or particular moral 'schools', on Fielding's writings. But in a sense these historical postulations are secondary and incidental. I am not primarily seeking to establish direct and specific channels of influence, nor do I suppose that the philosophical 'classification' of Fielding can properly be an end in itself. Biographical and taxonomic obsessions among students of Fielding have been responsible for many of the ethical oversimplifications which this thesis seeks to challenge and correct.

Often, these obsessions have also encouraged scholars to misconceive or misrepresent the nature of the relationship between 'text' and 'context', between the man of letters and the history of ideas. Some have been prepared to view Fielding as "a competent amateur in moral philosophy, presenting the conclusions of the experts in simple untechnical forms": thus, we are assured that Fielding actually "appreciated much of the substance" of Shaftesbury's moral philosophy, and, having appreciated it, "reproduced" it "in unphilosophical



terms".<sup>50</sup> Actually, Dudden's account of Fielding's "chief ethical ideas" is still among the best,<sup>51</sup> but this picture of Fielding as intellectual dilettante is reductive and misleading. Dudden's approach shades naturally into the more general methodological error of viewing Fielding's mind as a (paradoxically) permanent tabula rasa, and Fielding himself as some kind of philosophical magpie. It has been implied again and again that Fielding was somehow capable of standing outside the cultural and intellectual history of his time, observing new developments from a standpoint of quasi-Olympian disengagement, and appropriating whatever current moral or psychological theories seemed most "convenient" for his immediate literary purposes. Thus, in the sermons of the Anglican divines Fielding "found ready made a congenial philosophy of morals and religion", and a "convenient rationale" for his satiric strategies; and, when writing Joseph Andrews, he luckily "found at hand a workable theory of the good man".<sup>52</sup> (What would Fielding have done without these sermons?) Miller is generally more subtle than this, but occasionally perpetrates the same kind of historical solecism: thus, Fielding "sought ...various ways to propound a theory of human nature that would sort with the psychology of the day and prove amenable to the purposes of the moralist as well".<sup>53</sup> (Could Fielding have propounded a theory of human nature that would not sort with contemporary psychology? Was it historically possible to adopt a Freudian model?) This most glaring of methodological false trails might be called the Tabula Rasa Fallacy. It is surprisingly persistent.

In terms of the history of literary criticism, the Tabula Rasa Fallacy seems to be one more manifestation of the old-fashioned dichotomy between 'foreground' (literary text) and 'background' (historical context). This dichotomy is of course particularly inappropriate, and therefore particularly damaging, when applied to the study of eighteenth-century English letters. It has been said that philosophy and literature "have

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<sup>50</sup> F. Homes Dudden, Henry Fielding: His Life, Works, and Times, Oxford, 1952, II, 679. Dudden echoes W. R. Irwin, who also described Fielding as "a competent amateur in philosophy": see The Making of "Jonathan Wild" (1941), Hamden, Conn., 1966, p. 79.

<sup>51</sup> Op. cit. (cited hereafter as Dudden), II, 679-87.

<sup>52</sup> Battestin, Moral Basis, pp. 14, 17, 43.

<sup>53</sup> Essays, p. 215.

never been closer than they were for the Augustans".<sup>54</sup> Surely one could go further and say that philosophy, like pulpit oratory or historiography, was literature for Fielding and his generation: Addison and Steele had long since dragged ethics out of the study and into broad cultural daylight. And, as Humphreys points out, Addison's public "was also the public for the philosopher, who spoke in general not as a specialist but as a reasonable man talking to reasonable men".<sup>55</sup> Given this cultural catholicity, it would not be unreasonable to suppose that Fielding himself read philosophy or theology not as an "amateur" philosopher or theologian, but as an eighteenth-century man of letters who, typically, felt himself interested in these things. More important, perhaps, it should be remembered that Fielding's novels were addressed to a readership who felt themselves interested in these things.

The traditional text-context dichotomy simply will not do. Its persistence is perhaps related to a parallel hierarchical dichotomy between two different species of literary scholar: between those who read literature as Literature and those who read it as something else (or as Literature and something else). Historical or philosophical approaches to fiction have been viewed by many as intrinsically less worthy than purely 'literary' approaches, and have repeatedly been called upon to justify themselves, ideally by reference to 'literary' criteria. Here, one might cite the unduly influential strictures of W. B. Coley, who complained in 1959 that students of Fielding were becoming too straight-faced, neglecting the funny side of Fielding's seriousness (in defiance of their subject's own criteria of "wit"), losing the satirist in the moralist, and thereby "doing a disservice to an important and peculiar literary achievement".<sup>56</sup> Others have since argued in the same vein.<sup>57</sup> It is hard to imagine this kind of complaint being directed at serious students of Shakespearean comedy. Coley's argument is a classic

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<sup>54</sup> A. R. Humphreys, The Augustan World: Life and Letters in Eighteenth-Century England, 1954, p. 210.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 180. This is more true of some philosophers than of others: see John Valdimir Price, "The Reading of Philosophical Literature", in Isabel Rivers, ed., Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England, Leicester, 1982, pp. 165-96.

<sup>56</sup> William B. Coley, "The Background of Fielding's Laughter", ELH, 26 (1959), 229-52 (p. 252). See esp. pp. 229-32.

<sup>57</sup> See, for instance, K. K. Ruthven, "Fielding, Square, and the Fitness of Things", ECS, 5 (1971-2), 243-55, esp. pp. 243-4.



statement of a recurrent critical theme: that literature should be read as literature, satire as satire, humour as humour, and not as something else. To read and analyze literature in this way is a self-justifying activity. If we wish to read and analyze it some other way, perhaps historically or philosophically, we must offer some explicit justification of our activities. Hence, perhaps, Battestin's questionable premiss that "the moral pattern and purpose of Joseph Andrews could not be fully understood in isolation from the larger ethical and religious contexts that conditioned them".<sup>58</sup> There is some truth in this, of course. But if it were wholly true, we would have to conclude that Joseph Andrews is an artistic failure, or that all readers before 1959 had been hopelessly benighted. Neither of these conclusions is at all plausible, and it would therefore seem that there was something wrong with the terms of Battestin's apology.<sup>59</sup>

"It would be no reflection on the critical complexion of our own day", as Sacks argued many years ago, "if we reverted to the notion...that literary history or ethical considerations of literary works were themselves valuable disciplines".<sup>60</sup> Such a reversion has indeed been taking place in recent years, and it may therefore be thought that my own complaints are anachronistic. I hope they are. But the old hierarchy does occasionally turn in its grave: "It won't do to reduce Fielding to moral patterns, let alone prudential ones", we are told in a recent essay by an eminent eighteenth-century specialist.<sup>61</sup> (The essay in question is itself an attempt to reduce Fielding to quasi-mystical patterns.) It seems to me that there are very definite moral "patterns" in Fielding's work, including "prudential" ones. Why should it be supposed that the detection and analysis of these patterns is a reductive process? Or that an interest in these things is a measure of the student's indifference to other (more important) things, such as humour or satire? Thankfully, this is now a more or less eccentric attitude to adopt. And of course the literary critics have never succeeded in diverting the literary historians from their honourable métier. But it does seem to me that the

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<sup>58</sup> Moral Basis, p. ix.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Sheldon Sacks, Fiction and the Shape of Belief, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1964, pp. 264-6, on this kind of misguided apology.

<sup>60</sup> Op. cit., p. 265.

<sup>61</sup> Mark Kinkead-Weekes, "Out of the Thicket in Tom Jones", BJECS, 3 (1980), 1-19 (p. 18).

old hierarchy has had a general and baneful influence on the methods and practices of some historical critics. Above all, it has encouraged literary history to regard and present itself as a mere ancillary discipline, supplying 'background' and other heuristic aids to the literary critics, whose chosen domain is the 'foreground'. It has encouraged the treatment of contextual sources as second-class texts, ones undeserving of the kind of careful and scrupulous reading that we would devote to a Tom Jones, or any other 'literary' text. It also seems to have stunted the growth of methodological self-consciousness among some literary historians, not least by compelling them to seek bogus and unnecessary raisons d'être. One typical false trail is the pursuit of profundity. Some have attempted to demonstrate that Fielding's ideas were as great and complex as his literary skills, presumably owing to the apologetic supposition that they would otherwise be unworthy of serious attention. One recent essay begins by arguing that the hero of Tom Jones "personifies the history of western civilization's ethical, moral progress toward perfection in human nature", and must therefore be "viewed in the context of the entire history of Western thought".<sup>62</sup> Leaving aside her curious view of Western history, one is not surprised to find that Hodges has promised more than she can deliver in one brief article. This is of course a particularly extreme instance of the inflationary approach. But it serves to illustrate and epitomize what is a recurrent underlying tendency in some quarters, and one which damages the credibility of historical criticism as a discipline. The desire to inflate Fielding's ideas is bound to obstruct any attempt to define or illuminate them; and it certainly tends to encourage what Ehrenpreis has called "a flight from explicit meaning":<sup>63</sup> thus Battestin's weighty essay on "The Definition of Wisdom" in Tom Jones totally ignores Fielding's one explicit definition of "true Wisdom" (TJ, VI, iii, pp. 282-3), perhaps because it is inconsistent with the author's real, underlying purpose, which seems

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<sup>62</sup> Laura F. Hodges, "Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics and Tom Jones", PQ, 63 (1984), 223-38 (p. 223). This essay cited hereafter as "NE and TJ".

<sup>63</sup> Irvin Ehrenpreis, "Meaning: Implicit and Explicit", in Harth, ed., New Approaches, pp. 117-155 (p. 120).



to be to prove that Fielding had profound and complex ideas about "Wisdom".<sup>64</sup> Battestin's very choice of contextual sources appears to be conditioned by this desire to magnify his subject, and the essay fails as historical criticism precisely because of this. Here, as in the essay by Hodges, we can perhaps see historical criticism defeating itself in the attempt to justify itself.

Like Sacks, I believe that historical or philosophical approaches to literature are self-justifying. If this were more generally taken for granted, it seems to me that some of the traditional gaucheries of historical criticism could easily be avoided. More important, I believe that disciplinary self-respect would be likely bring with it a greater degree of methodological self-consciousness. It is surely time to do away with the old text-context dichotomies. Like Bernard Harrison, I believe that Fielding's work should be viewed not as a philosophically reductive patchwork of second-hand ideas, but as an articulation of his own distinctive ideas.<sup>65</sup> More important, it seems to me that Fielding's work can and should be read as a contribution to contemporary ethical debate, and not as an imitative response to certain "convenient" or "congenial" elements of that debate. Harrison's own book is an important, and fascinating, attempt to read Fielding in this way. But it has its own weaknesses. Most damaging is Harrison's misconception (and misrepresentation) of the historical context. He does demonstrate a first-hand acquaintance with the ethics of Shaftesbury and Butler (which is more than can be said for many other students of Fielding's thought), but his account of their ideas is unsympathetic to the point of hostility.<sup>66</sup> For Harrison, these two great philosophers belong squarely

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<sup>64</sup> "Fielding: The Definition of Wisdom", in The Providence of Wit: Aspects of Form in Augustan Literature and the Arts, Oxford, 1974, pp. 165-92. (This volume cited hereafter as Providence.) See C. J. Rawson's penetrating general critique of Battestin's methods in this book: "Order and Misrule: Eighteenth-Century Literature in the 1970's", ELH, 42 (1975), 471-505 (pp. 471-90).

<sup>65</sup> See Henry Fielding's "Tom Jones": The Novelist as Moral Philosopher, 1975, p. 22.

<sup>66</sup> Op. cit., Ch. iv, esp. pp. 84-8. Until Harrison came along, Butler had been notably ignored by the leading historical critics, including Battestin and Miller. Shaftesbury's name has frequently been invoked in connexion with Fielding, but his ideas have been chronically misrepresented, and so badly misrepresented that one is sometimes tempted to doubt whether those who invoke his name have actually read his work. See, for instance, Miller's account of the agreements and differences



in "the drab landscape of conventional Augustan moral piety", and Butler in particular is merely an illustrious exponent of "Standard Benevolism", which can in turn be dismissed as "a rather depressing bundle of half insights and not quite avowed concessions [to egoism]".<sup>67</sup> Harrison bases his reading of Fielding on these very firm assumptions about the banality and triviality of early eighteenth-century English moral thought. This "drab landscape" is invoked as a mere foil for his analysis of Fielding's ethics, an analysis which is essentially unconnected with his historical research. Ultimately, Harrison's method can be said to involve a radical (and paradoxical) compromise with the background-foreground fallacy: his book consistently implies that Fielding's moral thought was evolved in spite of (and, by a further implication, outside of) contemporary ethical debate. In a way, Harrison also involves himself in the misguided pursuit of profundity: one of his purposes is to prove that Fielding (unlike most of his contemporaries) was a great and original moral philosopher. His closing sentence is revealing: "it is because his thought is set so obstinately against the thought of his time...that I find Fielding such an interesting writer".<sup>68</sup> It seems to me that Harrison's conclusions are dependent upon a misreading of history and an ahistorical reading of Fielding. For all its merits, this book fails to synthesize historical research with philosophical acumen.

Contextual readings of literature are quite futile, and often counter-productive, if the reader does not in the first place take the trouble to understand the context, whether it be social, political, or philosophical. When the chosen context is a complex ethical debate, it would seem reasonable to expect the scholar to be acquainted with the major contributions to that debate. But even a reading of these is likely to be fruitless if the scholar has not first acquainted himself with the (transhistorical) rudiments of moral philosophy. Ethical discourse of any age must in the first place be read and understood as ethical discourse. Only then will we be in a position to say anything useful about its historical significance (about, for instance, its significance as a contribution to ethical controversy), and only then can we say anything useful about its significance for the modern reader

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between Fielding and "the great Earl", Essays, pp. 69-73. It is notable that Miller neither quotes from Shaftesbury nor supplies any useful references to his work. Battestin's earlier account of Fielding's putatively ambiguous debt to Shaftesbury is similarly nebulous: see Moral Basis, pp. 12-13, 60-65.

<sup>67</sup> Harrison, pp. 85, 70.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 138.



of contemporaneous literature. But more than this is required. The status of any single contribution to an ethical controversy cannot properly be assessed unless the scholar is similarly acquainted with all the major contributions to that controversy, or at least with all the ethical positions which it was historically possible to take within the debate. To put this much more simply: the scholar must understand the terms of the controversy. Because much of Fielding's own writing is controversial or polemical, this kind of research seemed to me to be a necessary condition of any serious attempt to grasp the details of his moral position, which is constituted in part by its differences from certain other contemporary positions.

The early eighteenth-century ethical debate can of course be broken down into a set of various and discrete philosophical issues. But the most important issues have been accurately pinpointed by Harrison, in his (alas, evaluative) account of the debate:

The debate about whether men are wholly selfish or also (some of the time) benevolent, and about whether 'morality' in the sense of benevolence is or is not compatible with 'self-interest' in some sense of that obscure term, is certainly far less fundamental than that other controversy whose heights are dominated still by Kant and Hume..., over whether morality is fundamentally a matter or sentiment, of the impulses of the heart, or whether it consists rather in willed obedience to principle and is in consequence perpetually at odds with impulse. The two controversies of course overlap in places, but the second is radically more fundamental than the first: to assign Fielding to a place in the spectrum of views defined by the first is thus to classify him automatically as relatively negligible from a philosophical point of view.<sup>69</sup>

This defines the issues clearly enough, but Harrison's argument is rather tendentious. The fact is that Fielding was directly involved in both of these controversies, and the first (about morality and self-interest) was if anything of greater importance to him, as it was to most eighteenth-century British moralists before Hume. This issue may or may not be "relatively negligible" in philosophical terms, but it is of very great historical importance, not least for the student of Fielding. Harrison's historically wayward analysis of Fielding's moral position reflects his prior evaluation of the philosophical issues. His arguments about 'text' and 'context' are rooted in this failure of historical sympathy.

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<sup>69</sup> Harrison, p. 24.



As I have said, Fielding was engaged in both of the debates defined by Harrison. To elucidate the nature and extent of this engagement, I have adopted a method of detailed and continuous comparison between Fielding's work and various specific contextual sources, ones which can be said to be 'typical' or 'representative' of the four ethical 'schools' I defined earlier. (The notion of 'typicality' is historically dubious in itself, but a necessary heuristic compromise: it would be impossible to make reference to all the significant productions of any particular ethical tradition, or 'school', without diluting the detail which I regard as necessary to my method.) These contextual sources were carefully chosen, but I am well aware that others might have served my purpose equally well.

Anglican prudentialism is represented principally by Isaac Barrow's sermons. (I had originally intended to make reference to Barrow and Tillotson, but found that this would simply have led to pointless duplications: they speak in very much the same language.) Barrow's sermons were first published posthumously, in Tillotson's edition of his Works (1683-7). As a later example of prudential homiletics, and partly as evidence of the continuity of this tradition, I also make some reference to Benjamin Hoadly's Twenty Sermons, published in 1755 but preached mostly in the 1720s. Joseph Butler (1692-1752) was in many ways the philosopher of Anglican prudentialism, whose work does much to clarify the ethical premises of that tradition: I refer to several of his Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel (first edition, 1726), to A Dissertation of the Nature of Virtue (1736), and to The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed (also 1736). If it achieves nothing else, I hope this thesis will do something to recommend Butler's work to students of Fielding.

Sentimental benevolism, as I have called it, is represented by Shaftesbury's Inquiry concerning Virtue, or Merit, and by Hutcheson's Inquiry concerning Moral Good and Evil (published in 1725 as the second half of his first major work, An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue).<sup>70</sup> I also make some reference to Hume's Treatise of Human Nature, which in ethical terms belongs to the same line as these

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<sup>70</sup> Hutcheson's other principal philosophical works are: An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations upon the Moral Sense (1728); Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria (1745), later published in English as A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy (posthumous, 1747); and A System of Moral Philosophy, compiled and edited by Francis Hutcheson, Jr (1755).



works, and to his Essays Moral, Political and Literary (1741-2). It should perhaps be said here that Hume's philosophical scepticism makes him unique among the moralists considered in this thesis. When I compare him, implicitly or explicitly, with Hutcheson (a presbyterian minister) or with Shaftesbury (a deist), or indeed with Butler (an Anglican bishop), I have no wish to obfuscate his philosophical radicalism. But many of Hume's moral-psychological ideas were in one way or another traditional. He revolutionized these ideas by divorcing them from their traditional theological contexts.<sup>71</sup>

Rationalism is represented principally by John Balguy (1686-1748), Anglican clergyman and devoted philosophical disciple of Clarke. I do make some reference to Clarke's own work, but in some ways Balguy's The Foundation of Moral Goodness (1728-9) is better for my purposes, not only as a restatement of Clarke's ethical principles, but also as a detailed rationalist critique of sentimental benevolism: the Foundation was a direct polemical response to Hutcheson's Inquiry.<sup>72</sup>

Egoism is represented by Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), particularly Leviathan (1651) and Human Nature (published in 1650 as the first part of The Elements of Law); and by Mandeville's An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue, first published as part of The Fable of the Bees in 1714. Mandeville's moral 'philosophy' is of course complicated by mischievous ironies and paradoxes, and is ultimately of greater interest as satire than as ethical discourse; but it is firmly rooted in quasi-Hobbesian premises, and its very notoriety in the early eighteenth century must give it a place in this thesis.<sup>73</sup> It is perhaps worth noting here that

<sup>71</sup> This is less clear in the Treatise than it is in his later publications, particularly An Inquiry concerning Human Understanding (1748); but this, like An Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals (1752), was essentially a reworking of ideas expounded in the Treatise. Hume's scepticism was given its fullest expression only posthumously, in Dialogues concerning Natural Religion (1777). The core of his moral philosophy is certainly contained in the Treatise, and in what follows I assume that this work is 'representative' of that philosophy.

<sup>72</sup> This, at least, is true of 'Part I' of the Foundation (1728). Part II, originally unplanned and published separately in 1729, is a detailed reply to the criticisms of "a Gentleman" (title-page), who had defended Hutcheson against Balguy's arguments. Balguy had also attacked Shaftesbury in A Letter to a Deist (1726). He published several other minor works, all of which appear to have been "applications of the principles of which Clarke is the chief exponent" (DNB).

<sup>73</sup> On Mandeville's thought, and its influence positive and negative, see F. B. Kaye's excellent introduction to his edition of The Fable of the Bees, 2 vols, Oxford, 1924, I, xxxviii-cxlv. This edition used throughout. Cited hereafter as Fable.



Hutcheson's Inquiry was in part a philosophical response to Mandevillean egoism.<sup>74</sup>

My other contextual sources cannot be neatly allotted to any of these ethical camps. Cambridge Platonism is (imperfectly) represented by Shaftesbury's edition of Whichcote's Select Sermons, and by occasional quotations from Cudworth, in particular his Treatise concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality and A Treatise of Freewill. (I had originally intended to give much more weight to the Cambridge Platonists, especially Whichcote, but space did not permit. Their presence in the thesis is in a sense vestigial, but I hope not incongruous.) Locke is invoked principally as a special representative of Latitudinarian Anglicanism: I shall make extensive reference to the Essay, and particularly to its practical psychology, which throws a good deal of light on the psychological postulates of Anglican prudentialism. Most of the many issues covered by Locke's Essay are of course beyond the scope of this thesis, and for reasons of economy I have had to omit a consideration of Lockean associationism, which is in some respects within my scope. (Fielding's later views on education clearly owe much to Locke.<sup>75</sup> The whole question of moral education, and the far knottier one of moral self-determination, are ones which could not be considered in adequate detail here, and I have therefore avoided them altogether.) I also make some reference to Book I of Hooker's Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity (1593 ff.), partly as one of the original, formative influences on Latitudinarian Anglicanism, and partly as an important conduit of Aristotelian influence. Hooker's moral psychology owes much to the Nicomachean Ethics, and this text became by far the most important classical 'authority' of Anglican prudentialism. Its influence was indeed ubiquitous in this period, and Fielding himself seems to have been directly (as well as indirectly) indebted to it. For these reasons, I have given much detailed attention to the Ethics. My other principal classical text is Cicero's De Officiis, chosen partly because of its

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<sup>74</sup> In the Inquiry, according to its title-page, "The Principles of the late Earl of SHAFTESBURY are Explain'd and Defended, against the Author of the Fable of the Bees".

<sup>75</sup> See Amelia, IV, iii, p. 167, and Battestin's footnote on the same passage. For a good account of Fielding's changing educational views and their contemporary contexts, see C. R. Kropf, "Educational Theory and Human Nature in Fielding's Works", PMLA, 89 (1974), 113-19.



popularity in the early eighteenth century,<sup>76</sup> and partly because it is often invoked by students of Fielding as a significant influence on his moral thinking.<sup>77</sup>

Fielding probably was directly influenced by De Officiis, and by many of the other texts cited here.<sup>78</sup> But I think it pointless to speculate about whether he did or did not have first-hand knowledge of Hutcheson's Inquiry, or Butler's Fifteen Sermons, or any other of these contextual sources. Even the most precise biographical information about Fielding's reading could not in itself tell us much about his typical habits of mind. On the other hand, it seems to me that contextual analysis can be useful and productive even in the absence of this kind of information (though it would of course be foolish to ignore the circumstantial evidence).<sup>79</sup> And even if we had certain knowledge that Fielding was ignorant of (say) Butler's sermons on human nature, there would still be

<sup>76</sup> The two most popular translations of De Officiis were those of Sir Roger L'Estrange (1680, 1681, 1684, 1688, 1699, 1720, etc.), and of Thomas Cockman (1699, 1706, 1714, 1722, 1732, 1739, etc.).

<sup>77</sup> See, for instance, Dudden, II, 679; Miller, ed., Miscellanies I, pp. xvii-xxvii; and Battestin, Providence, pp. 166, 167-8.

<sup>78</sup> Note the final, fulsome tribute to De Officiis and its author in "A Fragment of a Comment on Lord Bolingbroke's Essays", Henley, XVI, 322. Fielding's thorough and consistent admiration of Aristotle has been well documented by Frederick G. Ribble, "Aristotle and the 'Prudence' Theme of Tom Jones", ECS, 15 (1981-2), 26-47 (p. 26). There are explicit, and more or less laudatory, references to Barrow in the Covent-Garden Journal (Nos. 29, 39, 44, 69), as well as in Amelia, where Booth's conversion is attributed directly to his influence (XII, v). (See also Amelia, VI, vii, on the heroine's reading.) There are respectful references to Hoadly in Joseph Andrews (I, xvii) and in Tom Jones (II, vii). Clarke is cited in the Champion leaders for 22 January 1739/40 (along with Tillotson) and 15 March 1739/40; also in the Covent-Garden Journal, No. 4 (along with Tillotson and Barrow). References or allusions to Shaftesbury can be found in the Preface to Joseph Andrews, in Tom Jones (V, ii; VIII, i; XIII, xii), and elsewhere. Fielding's acquaintance with Locke manifests itself in Tom Jones (IV, i; VI, i), and in the Covent-Garden Journal (see Nos. 4, 15, 39, 66). Critical references to Mandeville, explicit or implicit, can be found in the Champion (22 January 1739/40), in Tom Jones (VI, i), and in Amelia (III, v).

<sup>79</sup> The most valuable circumstantial evidence of Fielding's reading is the sale catalogue of his library, reprinted as Appendix in Ethel Margaret Thornbury, Henry Fielding's Theory of the Comic Prose Epic (1931), New York, 1966, pp. 169-89. But it would surely be a mistake to suppose that Fielding read every item in this list, or indeed that it represents his whole working library (where, for instance, is Richardson?). Even as a biographical source, its usefulness is limited.



very good reasons for reading them, since they can help us to understand the kind of moral thinking with which Fielding was certainly familiar. An understanding of the context can help us to read Fielding on his own terms, not only as a writer of comic fiction but also as a moralist, and one who knew himself to be toiling in the same vineyard as men like Shaftesbury, Butler, or Hoadly. More than this, it can help us to read Fielding as an ethical controversialist. This is important: it seems to me that his best work cannot ultimately be divorced from its context without obscuring some of its argumentative complexity. What follows is an attempt to clarify some aspects of that complexity.

I have devoted a great deal more attention to Tom Jones than to Fielding's other major works, not only because it was in this work that his most cherished ethical convictions received their fullest expression, but also because the critical debate about Fielding's moral 'philosophy' has for the most part been a debate about this novel. I do however offer some suggestions toward a reassessment of Amelia, and I have drawn comparative material from most of Fielding's other prose writings, including the journalism. The plays I have left alone, partly for reasons of economy and manageability, and partly because there are special difficulties involved in extrapolating moral 'doctrine' from dramatic literature. It may of course be said that there are similar hazards involved in the extrapolation of authorial ideas and beliefs from fiction, and especially from the complex ironic rhetoric of Tom Jones.<sup>80</sup> This is true, and I have endeavoured to take these hazards into account. I am aware that contextual research can be no substitute for critical sensitivity. In fact, some of my complaints about recent 'history of ideas' readings of Fielding are complaints about critical insensitivity; but no doubt some of my own readings will provoke a tu quoque from some quarters. Perhaps tone-deafness is one of the occupational hazards of historical criticism.

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<sup>80</sup> For an impressive analysis of these difficulties, see Sacks, Chs. iii-vi, esp. Ch. vi.

## CHAPTER II

### THE DUTY WHICH WE OWE TO OURSELVES

Fielding's modern critics are generally agreed that Tom Jones is in some sense a novel 'about' prudence.<sup>1</sup> In fact, it could be argued that Fielding's entire oeuvre is distinctively preoccupied with this intellectual virtue, or with its various failures and perversions. Among the many readers who have recognized this preoccupation, there appear to be two principal kinds of misunderstanding. On the one hand, there are those who see clearly enough that prudence is some kind of rational self-interest, but who argue that Fielding has only a slight, grudging, or rigorously qualified respect for this accomplishment.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, there are those who argue that Fielding has a great and unqualified respect for prudence, but who seem to have difficulty accepting that it is merely a species of self-interest.<sup>3</sup> Though apparently incompatible, it seems to me that these two different views are ultimately rooted in the same prejudice against so-called "prudential values".<sup>4</sup> Among the second

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<sup>1</sup> Apart from those cited below, see Eleanour N. Hutchens, "'Prudence' in Tom Jones: A Study of Connotative Irony", PQ, 39 (1960), 496-507 (reprinted as Chapter v of Hutchens's Irony in "Tom Jones", Alabama, 1965, pp. 101-118); Maurice Johnson, Fielding's Art of Fiction (1961), Oxford, 1962, pp. 115-19; and William W. Combs, "The Return to Paradise Hall: An Essay on Tom Jones", SAQ, 67 (1968), 419-36 (pp. 431-4). One notable exception to the rule is Kinkead-Weekes, who argues that Fielding is not seriously concerned with prudence at all, but with "the pure moral wisdom of love", the "essence" of which is "unconsciousness of self" ("Out of the Thicket", pp. 10, 11).

<sup>2</sup> Among those I have in mind are A. E. Dyson, "Satiric and Comic Theory in Relation to Fielding", MLQ, 18 (1957), 225-37 (see p. 237); Homai J. Shroff, The Eighteenth-Century Novel: The Idea of the Gentleman, New Delhi, 1978, pp. 135-7; Rawson, "Order and Misrule", pp. 484-6, and "Fielding and Smollett", in Roger Lonsdale, ed., Dryden to Johnson, Sphere History of Literature in the English Language, Vol. 4, 1971, pp. 259-301 (pp. 277-9); and Nokes, Henry Fielding: JA, pp. 74-6.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Battestin, Providence, pp. 164-92; Miller, Essays, pp. 227-8, and "Some Functions of Rhetoric in Tom Jones", PQ, 45 (1966), 209-35 (pp. 221-3); Harrison, pp. 69, 104-112, 122-3; Ribble, "Aristotle", pp. 42-7; John S. Coolidge, "Fielding and 'Conservation of Character'", MP, 57 (1959-60), 245-59; Glenn W. Hatfield, "'The Serpent and the Dove': 'Prudence' in Tom Jones", Chapter v of Henry Fielding and the Language of Irony, Chicago, 1968, pp. 179-96; Frederick R. Karl, A Reader's Guide to the Development of the English Novel in the Eighteenth Century, 1975, pp. 152, 167-8; Patricia M. Spacks, Imagining a Self, 1976, p. 244.

<sup>4</sup> Rawson, "Order and Misrule", p. 486.



school of readers, particularly, there seems to be a fear that Tom Jones, explicitly concerned as it is with prudence, might actually be recommending the cultivation of self-interest. In any case, there has been a series of attempts to define (or, rather, redefine) prudence in ways which will obviate or minimize this unsavoury implication.

Battestin has been particularly vehement in his attempts to distinguish Fielding's "exalted" conception of prudence from "our present perverse understanding of the term".<sup>5</sup> In his essay on "The Definition of Wisdom", this is done largely by means of a process of contextual accretion. Virtually all of Battestin's formal definitions of prudence (which is apparently the same thing as "Virtue" or "moral Wisdom") are quoted or derived not from Fielding, nor indeed from his favourite Anglican moralists (with the exception of a single passage from Barrow), but from the "philosophers and divines" of what he loosely calls "the Christian humanist tradition". At the head of these putative authorities on prudence is Cicero, who is said to have been "principally responsible for its meaning during the period in question" (which would surely be odd if it were true, popular though his De Officiis was).<sup>6</sup> Battestin's commitment to this sweeping historical premiss is reflected in his tendency to conflate Fielding's idea of prudence with Ciceronian prudentia, to define the one by reference to the other.<sup>7</sup> This would be less objectionable if his account of prudentia were adequate. "Prudentia est enim locata in dilectu bonorum et malorum", says Cicero.<sup>8</sup> Battestin, like Miller, takes this to mean that the function of prudence is "to discriminate...between moral good and moral evil",<sup>9</sup> neglecting the fact that Cicero's terms for these things are not bonum and malum but honestas and turpitude (a distinction manifest even in the sentence from which Battestin and Miller derive their definition of prudentia). Battestin assures us that prudence was for Fielding "that faculty of moral vision and foresight which...was in the Christian humanist

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<sup>5</sup> Providence, pp. 169, 168.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 165, 166, 167. Miller makes out a more detailed case for Ciceronian influence in his General Introduction to Miscellanies I, pp. xvii-xxvii.

<sup>7</sup> See Providence, pp. 167-8; and cf. TJ, I, ii, p. 36, n. 1.

<sup>8</sup> De Officiis, trans. Walter Miller, Loeb Classical Library, 1947, III, xvii, 71. This translation used throughout.

<sup>9</sup> Miller, Miscellanies I, p. xxv (my emphases).

tradition synonymous with prudentia", itself the "chief of the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude".<sup>10</sup> This too involves a casual misrepresentation of Ciceronian ethics. Battestin effectively conflates prudentia with sapientia, defined by Cicero as "the knowledge of things human and divine", and explicitly distinguished from the former in a passage which Battestin himself quotes:

And then, the foremost of all virtues is wisdom [sapientia] -- what the Greeks call sophia; for by prudence, which they call phronēsis, we understand something else, namely, the practical knowledge of things to be sought for and of things to be avoided.<sup>11</sup>

Battestin's essay persistently neglects these distinctions. Here and elsewhere, he tends to use the word "prudence" rather nebulously, in effect implying that it embraces every kind of rationality. "Discretion", for instance, is a "more or less synonymous term".<sup>12</sup> Other terms, such as "judgment", "understanding", and even "reason", are frequently substituted, presumably for the sake of stylistic variety, but with the clear implication that these terms also are "more or less synonymous" with prudence.<sup>13</sup> All of these words had quite precise meanings for Fielding and his contemporaries, and Battestin's habit of conflating them is decidedly unhelpful.

Battestin attributes to prudence an impressive variety of functions: inductive reasoning (memory, intelligence, foresight), the cognition of ethical values ("moral vision"), and quasi-stoical self-command ("knowledge and discipline of the self").<sup>14</sup> According to many of his authorities, prudence does apparently involve all these things.<sup>15</sup> (There were 'rationalist' usages of the term: it is notable that Thomas Cockman's translation of De Officiis also collapses Cicero's distinction

<sup>10</sup> Providence, pp. 164 (my emphases), 167. Cf. Hatfield's brief genealogy of prudence, Language of Irony, p. 192.

<sup>11</sup> De Officiis, I, xliii, 153 (Greek terms transliterated). Quoted by Battestin, Providence, p. 166.

<sup>12</sup> TJ, I, ii, p. 36, n. 1.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Providence, pp. 170 ("judgment"), 179 ("understanding"), 177 ("reason").

<sup>14</sup> Providence, pp. 167-8, 177.

<sup>15</sup> See Providence, pp. 167 ff. (though it must be said that Battestin's paraphrases of his contextual quotations are not always convincing).



between prudentia and sapientia.) But Ciceronian prudentia, "the practical knowledge of things to be sought for and of things to be avoided", is far more straightforward. As Cicero himself points out, prudentia is the Latin equivalent of the Greek phronēsis, a virtue clearly defined by Aristotle in the Nicomachean Ethics:

We may arrive at a definition of Prudence by considering who are the persons whom we call prudent. Now it is held to be the mark of a prudent man to be able to deliberate well about what is good and advantageous for himself, not in some one department, for instance what is good for his health or strength, but what is advantageous as a means to the good life in general.<sup>16</sup>

The wish for happiness could be said to underlie all purposive action: happiness (eudaimonia) is "a first principle of starting-point, since all other things that all men do are done for its sake" (NE, I, xii, 8). Prudence is the servant of this radical desire. "Prudent", in other words, is an epithet we apply to "those who are wise in their own interest" (VI, viii, 4).

Aristotelian phronēsis is the prototype of "prudence" as the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Latitudinarian Anglican moralists understood it. For Isaac Barrow, the "wise man" is he "that...tendereth his own welfare".<sup>17</sup> Like Cicero, he distinguishes explicitly between the two kinds of human wisdom:

As for wisdom, that may denote either sapience, a habit of knowing what is true; or prudence, a disposition of choosing what is good.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The Nicomachean Ethics, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library, 1947, VI, v, 1. Cited hereafter as NE. Miller invokes Aristotelian phronēsis as a relevant analogue of Fielding's "conception of prudence", but defines it rather differently, as a "rational sense of the good and advantageous for humankind in general" (Essays, p. 227, n. 102). Ribble's essay on "Aristotle and the 'Prudence' Theme of Tom Jones" is actually at its weakest when dealing with prudence (pp. 42-7), and does not even offer a definition. See also Hodges, "NE and TJ", esp. p. 224.

<sup>17</sup> "The Danger and Mischief of Delaying Repentance", The Works of Isaac Barrow, D.D., ed. James Hamilton, 3 vols, London and Edinburgh, 1852, I, 451. Cited hereafter as Works. This sermon cited hereafter as "Repentance".

<sup>18</sup> "The Consideration of Our Latter End", Works, I, 431 (my emphases). Cited hereafter as "Consideration".

The "good", in this and similar contexts, denotes not moral good (not, at least, as Battestin and Miller understand it), but that which constitutes or generates happiness: the "good and advantageous", as Aristotle puts it. Quoting Cicero, Barrow goes on to affirm that "the sum or whole of philosophy refers to living happily" (loc. cit.). Prudence is the most practical part of philosophy. It is "an habitual skill or faculty of judging aright about matters of practice, and choosing according to that right judgment, and conforming the actions to that good choice"; in this, it disposes us "to acquire and enjoy all the good, delight, and happiness we are capable of".<sup>19</sup> In negative terms, prudence is also "an habitual skill or faculty" of avoiding pain and misery. (As Cicero says, prudencia "est rerum expetendarum fugiendarumque scientia") (De Officiis, I, xliii, 153). Wisdom, says Barrow, frees us "from all the inconveniences, mischiefs, and infelicities our condition is subject to": "From a thousand snares and treacherous allurements, from innumerable rocks and dangerous surprises...she redeems and secures us" ("Pleasantness", Works, I, 1-2). Clearly, this kind of wisdom would have saved Tom Jones a great deal of trouble.<sup>20</sup>

The present sense of "prudence" (an ability "to discern the most suitable, politic, or profitable course of action": OED) cannot be dismissed as a recent corruption of something traditionally more "exalted". Certainly, the dominant eighteenth-century sense of the word was entirely consistent with its modern sense. Johnson's Dictionary (1755) defines prudence simply as "wisdom applied to practice". But it can be inferred from the related entries on "prudential" and "prudentially" that the "rules of prudence" are those which concern self-interest, in one way or another. This is confirmed by Johnson's own use of the word in his Life of Savage (1744), the history of a chronically imprudent man. A single comment on Savage will be enough to illustrate the general sense of the word for Johnson: "As he was never celebrated for his prudence...he took all opportunities of asserting and propagating his principles, without much regard to his own interest".<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> "The Pleasantness of Religion" (cited hereafter as "Pleasantness"), Works, I, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Note the consonance of Barrow's metaphors with the language of the Dedication of Tom Jones, p. 7 ("snares"), and of TJ, III, vii, pp. 141-2 ("rocks").

<sup>21</sup> Lives of the English Poets, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, 3 vols, Oxford, 1905, II, 386.



Johnsonian usage also squares with Bishop Butler's definition in A Dissertation of the Nature of Virtue (1736): "a due concern about our own interest or happiness, and a reasonable endeavour to secure and promote it...is, I think, very much the meaning of the word prudence, in our language".<sup>22</sup> If Butler was right, it would surely be surprising if prudence meant something completely different for Fielding.

Battestin mistakenly supposes that this primary and general sense of the word (basically, rational self-interest) was a lamentable corruption of its "original sense", the result of insidious "reinterpretation by writers of bromidic conduct books addressed chiefly to a middle-class audience of shopkeepers and schoolboys": the word was "vulgarized" by the bourgeoisie, and the terms "prudence, wisdom, and virtue were, in effect, emptied of their original significance and made to refer to...the pursuit of personal gain". "In this new context", Battestin adds, "the prudent person is coolly self-interested".<sup>23</sup> But this is precisely how Butler (hardly a "bromidic" writer) would have defined the prudent person. In general terms, the real difference between the shopkeepers and the Anglican moralists lay not in their understanding of prudence, but in their respective definitions of "interest" or "personal gain". For Fielding, as for Barrow, prudence is primarily an ability "to discern... such things as are truly best for us": the wise man's first rational accomplishment is to understand his own "true Interest" (TJ, Dedication, p. 7: my emphasis).<sup>24</sup> (I shall return to the implied distinction between "true" and "false" interest.)

Since "prudence" is a name for practical wisdom, the terms "wise" and "prudent" are technically interchangeable. Barrow tends to use only the former. Fielding himself uses the former more often than the latter. This shared preference has less to do with semantics than with the influence of biblical usage: what the classical moralists called prudentia or phronēsis, the Old Testament called wisdom, and it should not surprise us that Fielding and the Anglicans preferred the biblical term. "Wisdom",

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<sup>22</sup> Butler's Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel and A Dissertation of the Nature of Virtue, ed. T. A. Roberts, 1970; Dissertation, para. 6 (p. 150). This volume cited hereafter as 15 Sermons.

<sup>23</sup> Providence, pp. 168, 173, 175, 173.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Parson Adams's admonition to his young companion in JA, III, xi: "Joseph, if you are wise, and truly know your own Interest, you will peaceably and quietly submit to all the Dispensations of Providence" (p. 266, my emphases).

as Fielding understands and uses the term, is generally synonymous with "prudence" in its largest sense: in Dr Harrison's words, it is fundamentally "a Regard to our own Welfare" (Amelia, IX, viii, p. 392).

Though essentially a private accomplishment, prudence in this sense is by no means inconsistent with our larger social obligations. In fact, Fielding's conception of this virtue is usefully clarified by a number of passages in the True Patriot, where he applies the characteristic language of Anglican prudentialism to the political crisis precipitated by the Jacobite Rebellion. He repeatedly projects himself as a man sincerely attached to the "true Civil Interest" of the nation (TP, No. 1: Locke, p. 35). He ranks himself with the truly patriotic, who are distinguished by "a strict Adherence to the true Interest of their Country", and who understand that patriotism of this kind is a function of prudence:

Nay, indeed, what is such Patriotism better than true Wisdom, and by what Action can we deserve the Appellation of wise, so justly as by using our utmost Endeavours to preserve our Properties, our Liberties, and our Religion? (No. 17: Locke, p. 153)

"It is the Observation of a very wise Man", Fielding notes elsewhere, "that it is a very common Exercise of Wisdom in this World, of two Evils to chuse the least" (Amelia, XII, v, p. 515). This is particularly true of political wisdom, apparently. In the public domain, prudent decision-making involves exactly the kind of rationality which constitutes personal prudence. In Tom Jones (set in the year 1745), Fielding continues his attack on the Jacobites with an intricate political "parable",<sup>25</sup> concluding this with a characteristic prudential warning against the revival of absolute monarchy:

To conclude, as the Examples of all Ages shew us that Mankind in general desire Power only to do Harm, and when they obtain it, use it for no other Purpose; it is not consonant with even the least Degree of Prudence to hazard an Alteration, where our Hopes are poorly kept in Countenance by only two or three Exceptions out of a thousand Instances to alarm our Fears. In this Case it will be much wiser to submit to a few

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<sup>25</sup> See Martin C. Battestin, "Tom Jones and 'His Egyptian Majesty': Fielding's Parable of Government", PMLA, 82 (1967), 68-77.



Inconveniencies arising from the dispassionate Deafness of Laws, than to remedy them by applying to the passionate open Ears of a Tyrant. (TJ, XII, xii, pp. 672-3)<sup>26</sup>

Fielding's main point in the True Patriot leaders is that the "true Interest" of the individual is radically bound up with the "true Interest" of the nation: "his own and his Family's Ruin are necessarily involved in the Ruin of his Country", and to connive at the latter is therefore a mark of "the highest Folly" (TP, No. 17: Locke, p. 153).<sup>27</sup> One thing is surely clear: to be "wise" or "prudent", singly or collectively, is to be firmly and rationally attached to our own "true Interest".

There are various probable reasons for Battestin's failure to grasp the primary meaning of "prudence". But it seems to me that his attempt to redefine this term reflects an a priori conviction that cool self-interest is self-evidently a bad thing, and therefore unlikely to be recommended by Fielding, who in any case manifestly preferred warm benevolence. Battestin is not alone in this. Hatfield is anxious to distinguish prudence from "crass self-interest", presumably for similar reasons.<sup>28</sup> ("Crass" is question-begging.) Rawson accepts that prudence is a species of enlightened self-interest, and concedes that it is "positively recommended as a good thing" in Fielding's work:

But there is a good deal of evidence that, as a form of self-interest, it has for Fielding a certain unattractiveness. Not only is it a quality which, in its nastier forms, is to be found in most of his bad characters. It is also in its good sense the quality which good people, almost by definition, will tend to lack... Their natural generosity tends to be unchecked by a self-regarding caution, and they are not calculating in their pursuit of their own interests.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. TP, No. 2: "There are some Imperfections perhaps innate in our Constitution, and others too inveterate and established, to be eradicated; to these, wise and prudent Men will rather submit, than hazard shocking the Constitution itself by a rash Endeavour to remove them" (Locke, p. 47).

<sup>27</sup> William Empson notes that the setting of Tom Jones in the period of the '45 Rebellion "gives a further range to the vistas of the book, because all the characters are being as imprudent about it [the Jacobite threat] as Tom Jones about his own affairs". "Tom Jones" (The Kenyon Review, 20 [1958], 217-49), in Ronald Paulson, ed., Fielding: A Collection of Critical Essays, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1962, pp. 123-45 (p. 130).

<sup>28</sup> Language of Irony, p. 180.

<sup>29</sup> "Order and Misrule", p. 485.

That Fielding's better characters tend not to think very hard about their own interests, Rawson implies, is not only a natural but an ethical function of their goodness. Any degree of prudence is likely to compromise this goodness, and it is recommended only reluctantly by Fielding, since it thus "risks becoming unattractive".<sup>30</sup>

The critical (and ethical) premises of Rawson's argument are important, and I shall return to these. But it seems to me that this kind of reasoning involves an unwarranted devaluation of Squire Allworthy's clear, and resonant, announcement that "Prudence is...the Duty which we owe to ourselves" (TJ, XVIII, x, p. 960). I believe that Allworthy speaks with authority here. "Duty" is not a term that Fielding uses lightly. Nor is it at all certain that he harboured a generalized aversion to self-interest. Like most other contemporary moralists, he recognized that "the Passion of Self-love" is a simple and important fact of nature:

Man is universally allowed to have been created a Social Animal, and intended for a Life of Society; we find therefore that he has implanted in his Nature several Passions and Affections, which tend to prompt him to the Practice of Benevolence, and the Exercise of the other Social Virtues: And as he was likewise designed for Happiness, his All-wise Creator thought proper also to place in him the Passion of Self-love, in order to excite him to the Pursuit of his own real Good. (TP, No. 25: Locke, p. 203)

This is commonplace, conventional psychology. Barrow, though believing firmly in the benevolent energies of "good-nature", in "a kind of natural charity", also took for granted the "invincible principle of self-love".<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 485. Shroff has also argued that the "general effect" of Tom Jones is "to make the reader feel a certain antipathy towards prudence and prudent men" (The Eighteenth-Century Novel, p. 137). Rawson goes further by arguing that the "anti-prudential overtones" he finds in Fielding's work are also, "in a large sense, anti-Richardsonian" ("Fielding and Smollett", p. 279; cf. "Order and Misrule", p. 486). This is a little misleading. In some ways it is true that Fielding's work is "anti-Richardsonian", especially in that it is anti-puritanical. (I shall return to this point.) And Fielding was obviously offended by what he saw as the crude, materialistic prudentialism of Pamela. But Clarissa is a different matter altogether: among many other things, this monumental work is itself a ruthless critique of prudence and prudentialism, and draws much of its power from the unworldly (and of course "imprudent") moral absolutism by which its heroine is governed. Could it not be said that Clarissa is (in Rawson's sense of the term) a more truly "anti-Richardsonian" work than Tom Jones?

<sup>31</sup> "Of the Love of Our Neighbour" (cited hereafter as "Love"), Works, I, 235; "The Reasonableness and Equity of a Future Judgment" (cited hereafter as "Future Judgment Reasonable"), ibid., II, 376.



Butler thought man "designed to pursue his own interest" as well as "to contribute to the good of others": "The nature of man considered in his single capacity...is adapted and leads him to attain the greatest happiness he can for himself in the present world".<sup>32</sup> Even Shaftesbury, who cherished a considerable distaste for Anglican prudentialism, has no trouble accepting that "every Creature has a private Good and Interest of his own; which Nature has compel'd him to seek".<sup>33</sup> Elsewhere in the True Patriot, Fielding refers to the same "universal Desire of Happiness which Nature hath implanted in the Mind of every Man" (No. 6: Locke, p. 75).<sup>34</sup>

It is perhaps worth emphasizing again that this was traditional Anglican psychology. Hooker argues that "our sovereign good is desired naturally", and that God is "the author of that natural desire": "Our felicity therefore being the object and accomplishment of our desire, we cannot choose but wish and covet it".<sup>35</sup> Whichcote likewise insists on the necessity and constancy of desire:

The most universal Principle belonging to all Kind of Things, is Self-preservation; which, in Man, being a rational Agent, is somewhat farther advanc'd to strong Propensions and Desires of the Soul after a State of Happiness, which hath the Predominancy over all other Inclinations; as being the supreme and ultimate End to which all his Designs and Actions must be subservient by a natural Necessity. (Select Sermons, I, vi, p. 142)

Cudworth (explicitly following Aristotle) declares that the "spring and principle" of all human action is "a constant, restless, uninterrupted

<sup>32</sup> "Upon Compassion", 15 Sermons, Sermon V, para. 1; "Upon Human Nature", *ibid.*, Sermon I, para. 15. Subsequent references to the sermons will be abbreviated (e.g., V, 1) and supplied in brackets within the text.

<sup>33</sup> An Inquiry concerning Virtue, or Merit, ed. David Walford, Manchester, 1977, Book I, Part 2, Sect. i, para. 21. Cited hereafter as Inquiry. Subsequent references will be abbreviated (e.g., I.2.i, 21) and supplied in brackets within the text.

<sup>34</sup> As he puts it elsewhere, "we all naturally pursue Happiness and avoid Misery" ("Of the Remedy of Affliction for the Loss of Our Friends", Miscellanies I, p. 218).

<sup>35</sup> Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, Book I, Ch. xii, Sects. 2-3; Ch. viii, Sect. 1: Works, ed. John Keble, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1841, I, 264, 225. Subsequent references will be abbreviated (e.g., Laws, I.xii.2-3: Works, I, 264) and incorporated in brackets within the text.

desire, or love of good as such, and happiness": this is not "a mere passion or horme, but a settled resolved principle...working in the soul by necessity of nature".<sup>36</sup> For all these Anglicans, as well as Barrow, "Self-love, and the proposing of Happiness as our chief End", is radically natural, "and under no Kind of Liberty of being suspended".<sup>37</sup>

Fielding's belief in natural benevolence (which he shared with Whichcote, "the Preacher of Good Nature")<sup>38</sup> clearly did not rule out a belief in natural self-love. This is something that Fielding's historical critics have typically been reluctant to consider, perhaps because the modern sense of "self-love" is comparatively reductive, perhaps because of erroneous assumptions about the so-called Latitudinarian "benevolism" to which Fielding was so obviously indebted.<sup>39</sup> According to Battestin, "self-love is to Barrow...the chief vice subsuming all others, the root of uncharitableness".<sup>40</sup> This is true, in a sense: Barrow calls it "the root from which all other vices do grow".<sup>41</sup> But this partial truth is expansively qualified by the sermon which follows. Barrow's definition of natural self-love (which Battestin ignores) features a complex

<sup>36</sup> Ralph Cudworth, A Treatise of Freewill, ed. John Allen, 1838, Ch. viii, pp. 28, 30. Cited hereafter as Freewill.

<sup>37</sup> Whichcote, Select Sermons, I, vi, pp. 142, 141.

<sup>38</sup> Shaftesbury's phrase, from his Preface to Select Sermons, p. xxi.

<sup>39</sup> Miller actually quotes from TP, No. 25, on the social affections, but stops short of quoting the rest: Fielding's remarks are thus made to fit what Miller takes to be "the orthodox benevolist view" of human nature, in which there is presumably no place for self-love (Essays, p. 73). Miller's truncation of this passage seems to me to epitomize a widespread squeamishness about self-love among students of Fielding. But there are some exceptions. See, for instance, LeRoy W. Smith, "Fielding and Mandeville: The 'War Against Virtue'", Criticism, 3, No. 1 (1961), 7-15. Smith notes that self-love had a place in Fielding's psychology, but explains this by reference to the putative influence of Hobbes and Mandeville, associating it only negatively with the Anglicans. (His assumptions about Anglican psychology are basically the same as Miller's.) The best account of the matter is still that of W. R. Irwin, in The Making of JW, pp. 59-64, though his understanding of it seems to me to be marred by ethical prepossessions. Cf. also Dudden, II, 685-7; Ehrenpreis, Fielding: TJ, pp. 35-6; and Allan Wendt, "The Moral Allegory of Jonathan Wild", ELH, 24 (1957), 306-320 (pp. 317-8).

<sup>40</sup> Moral Basis, p. 53.

<sup>41</sup> "Of Self-Love in General" (cited hereafter as "Self-Love"), Works, I, 533.



tripartite division, and I quote at length because this is essential Anglican psychology:

The word self-love is ambiguous; for all self-love is not culpable; there is a necessary and unavoidable, there is an innocent and allowable, there is a worthy and commendable self-love.

There is a self-love originally implanted by God himself in our nature, in order to the preservation and enjoyment of our being; the which is common to us with all creatures, and cannot anywise be extirpated...: every man living, by a natural and necessary instinct, is prompted to guard his life, shunning all dangers threatening its destruction; to purvey for the support and convenience of it; to satisfy those natural appetites, which importunately crave relief, and without intolerable pain cannot be denied it; to repel or decline whatever is very grievous and offensive to nature: the self-love that urgeth us to do those things is no more to be blamed than it can be shunned.

Reason further alloweth such a self-love, which moveth us to the pursuance of any thing apparently good, pleasant, or useful to us, the which doth not...obstruct the attainment of some true or greater good; doth not produce some over-balancing mischief...

Reason dictateth and prescribeth to us, that we should have a sober regard to our true good and welfare; to our best interest and solid content; to that, which (all things being rightly stated, considered, and computed) will in the final event prove most beneficial to us; a self-love working in prosecution of such things common sense cannot but allow and approve. ("Self-Love", Works, I, 534-5)

The first and most radical form of self-love is "a natural and necessary instinct", implanted by God, whose end is "the preservation and enjoyment of our being": this manifests itself in the promptings and cravings of the natural appetites. The second, "which moveth us to the pursuance of any thing apparently good, pleasant, or useful", is clearly a collective name for what we would usually call the passions. But the object of the third and highest form of self-love is "our final happiness", "our true good and welfare" -- in short, "our true interest" (I, 536). The numerous qualifiers here ("sober, "true", "best", "solid", "all things being rightly stated, considered, and computed", "in the final event", "most") indicate the specifically rational functions of this obligatory self-love. The job of reason is to determine what is our "true" or "best" interest: to state, consider, and compute the benefits or advantages of different courses of action, to decide what will "in the final event prove most beneficial to us". In short, rational self-love is the same thing as practical wisdom. Or to put this another way, prudence is a name for rational self-love.



"Reason", says Barrow, "dictateth and prescribeth to us, that we should have a sober regard to our true good and welfare". Prudence, in other words, is "the Duty which we owe to ourselves". And this duty is derived originally from what Fielding calls "the Passion of Self-love", from our own radical desire of happiness. This account of prudential obligation is a conventional feature of Anglican ethics. According to Locke (for whom all obligations are ultimately prudential), human beings are in every practical dilemma under an obligation to inform themselves "whether that particular thing, which is then proposed, or desired, lie in the way to their main end, and make a real part of that which is their greatest good":

For the inclination, and tendency of their nature to happiness is an obligation, and motive to them, to take care not to mistake, or miss it; and so necessarily puts them upon caution, deliberation, and wariness, in the direction of their particular actions, which are the means to attain it.<sup>42</sup>

Our natural desire of happiness obliges us to the intelligent pursuit of happiness. The same logic is implicit in Butler's affirmation that we are "under an absolute and formal obligation, in point of prudence and of interest", to determine and pursue profitable courses of conduct: every individual is "bound in prudence to do what upon the whole appears...to be for his happiness".<sup>43</sup> This is surely exactly the kind of "Duty" that Squire Allworthy has in mind at the end of Tom Jones.

Fundamentally, then, prudential prescriptions are derived from our own radical desire of happiness. But in an important sense they are also rational, and this is because they are practical. As Aristotle puts it, prudence is "a truth-attaining rational quality, concerned with action in relation to things that are good and bad for human beings" (NE, VI, v, 4). It is rational in the sense that it involves practical knowledge, and "deliberation with regard to what is expedient as a means to the end" (VI, ix, 7). Deliberation terminates in the choice of a particular course of action: "the cause of action...is choice, and the cause of choice is desire and reasoning directed to some end" (VI, ii, 4). Desire is the constant factor in prudential deliberation. As Aristotle says, "we wish

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<sup>42</sup> John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. Peter H. Nidditch, Oxford, 1975, Book II, Ch. xxi, para. 52 (p. 267). Cited hereafter as Essay. Subsequent references will be abbreviated (e.g., II, xxi, 52, p. 267) and given after quotations in the text.

<sup>43</sup> Joseph Butler, The Analogy of Religion, ed. E. C. Mossner, New York, 1961: Butler's Introduction, p. 3. Cited hereafter as Analogy.



rather for ends than for means, but choose the means to our end":

...for example, we wish to be healthy, but choose things to make us healthy; we wish to be happy, and that is the word we use in this connexion, but it would not be proper to say that we choose to be happy; since, speaking generally, choice seems to be concerned with things within our own control.  
(NE, III, ii, 9)

Happiness is the end of action in general, and every individual action involves desire of some particular felicific end. The object of choice is the action itself: in deliberation, we "take some end for granted, and consider how and by what means it can be achieved" (III, iii, 11). The function of practical reason is to determine which course of action is most fitted to satisfy a desire. For the Anglicans, likewise, the most important function of practical reason is to serve and direct our desires. As Cudworth says, the general desire of happiness "may be diversely dispensed out, and placed upon different objects, more and less". Its ultimate end is always "good as such, and happiness", but on the way to this summum bonum are various intermediate ends, "which have a face and mien, or alluring show, and promising aspect of good to us" (Freewill, Ch. viii, pp. 30, 29). All worldly goods fall into this category. The difference between rational self-love and self-love per se is that the former dictates the choice of goods which are not only desirable in themselves but also conducive to (or at least consistent with) our true interest or final happiness. The distinction between these two kinds of "good" is usefully formulated by Hobbes when he distinguishes between "good in effect, as the end desired, which is called jucundum, delightful", and "good as the means, which is called utile, profitable".<sup>44</sup> "Those things which please us, as the way or means to a further end", says Hobbes, "we call profitable" (Human Nature, Ch. vii: Works, IV, 33). (Conversely, of course, "evil in effect, and end, is molestum, unpleasant, troublesome; and evil in the means, inutile, unprofitable" (Leviathan, I, vi: Works, III, 42).) The evaluation of intermediate ends is for the Anglicans the most truly practical function of practical wisdom, since it involves the evaluation of actions. The "good" (or "profitable") action will be that which procures or leads to the desired end, and the "evil"

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, Part I, Ch. vi; quoted from The English Works of Thomas Hobbes, ed. William Molesworth, 11 vols, 1839-45, III, 41-2. The Molesworth edition cited hereafter as Works. Subsequent references will be given after quotations in the text.



(or "unprofitable") that which fails to do this.

While the object of self-love per se may be self-preservation, self-enjoyment, pleasure, or any kind of worldly gratification, the object of rational self-love is always happiness, the summum bonum. Wisdom, in Hooker's terms, involves choosing particular goods "as Reason judgeth them the better for us, and consequently the more available to our bliss" (Laws, I.viii.1: Works, I, 225). The most general function of practical reason is to determine which courses of action are best fitted to satisfy our most general desire, the desire of happiness. As Aristotle says, we do not choose to be happy. Prudential prescriptions are practical ('do this', 'don't do that'), and are derived from an understanding of the profitability or unprofitability of particular actions or ways of life. To be prudent, according to Barrow, is "to understand, regard, and choose those things which good reason dictates best for us", "such things, as according to the dictates of right reason are truly best for us" ("Consideration", Works, I, 431, 440). In this kind of context, "reason" is effectively synonymous with prudence. Its objects are not moral good and evil (not, at least, in the sense postulated by Battestein and Miller), but pleasure and pain, the utile and the inutile, and -- ultimately -- happiness and misery. Its function is to analyze the objects of self-love. Barrow's use of the terms "good" and "evil" is generally in keeping with Locke's hedonistic definitions in the Essay:

Things...are Good or Evil, only in reference to Pleasure or Pain. That we call Good, which is apt to cause or increase Pleasure, or diminish Pain in us; or else to procure, or preserve us the possession of any other Good, or absence of any Evil. And on the contrary we name that Evil, which is apt to produce or increase any Pain, or diminish any Pleasure in us; or else to procure us any Evil, or deprive us of any Good. (II.xx.2, p. 229)

Happiness...in its full extent is the utmost Pleasure we are capable of, and Misery the utmost Pain... Now because Pleasure and Pain are produced in us, by the Operation of certain Objects...therefore what has an aptness to produce Pleasure in us, is that we call Good, and what is apt to produce Pain in us, we call Evil, for no other reason, but for its aptness to produce Pleasure and Pain in us, wherein consists our Happiness and Misery. (II.xxi.42, pp. 258-9)

Prudence, as Barrow understands it, is "a disposition of choosing what is good", and "good" in this sense. It therefore involves the exercise of



"sagacity, discerning things as they really are in themselves, not as they appear through the masks and disguises of fallacious semblance"; then comes "discretion", which consists in "prizing things rightly, according to their true nature and intrinsic worth", and subsequently "choosing things really good, and rejecting things truly evil": these are the principal "parts and instances" of prudence.<sup>48</sup>

Prudence begins with a "right valuation (or esteem) of things", for "as we value things, so are we used to affect them":

There be two sorts of things we converse about, good and bad; the former, according to the degree of their appearance so to us (that is, according to our estimation of them), we naturally love, delight in, desire, and pursue; the other likewise, in proportion to our opinion concerning them, we do more or less loathe and shun. ("Consideration", Works, I, 432)

The function of wisdom is to direct our esteem or loathing toward appropriate objects -- the truly "good" and the truly "bad". It does this in two ways, "by discovering their nature, and the effects resulting from them" ("Pleasantness", Works, I, 5-6: my emphases). The prudential evaluation of any particular object, however promising in its "nature", involves taking account of the consequences of pursuing and embracing this object. This chronological factor is a crucial element in the psychology of prudentialism. Our actions, as Locke points out, "carry not all the Happiness and Misery, that depend on them, along with them in their present performance; but are the precedent Causes of Good and Evil, which they draw after them, and bring upon us". And therefore "our desires look beyond our present enjoyments":

...because not only present Pleasure and Pain, but that also which is apt by its efficacy, or consequences, to bring it upon us at a distance, is a proper Object of our desires, and apt to move a Creature that has foresight; therefore things also that draw after them Pleasure and Pain, are considered as Good and Evil. (Essay, II.xxi.59, 61: pp. 273, 274)

Every particular object is thus capable of being "good" or "evil" in two distinct senses: in itself, and in its consequences. Every object is therefore also capable of being both "good" and "evil" (pleasant in itself but painful in its consequences), or vice versa. In the pursuit of

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<sup>48</sup> "Of the Virtue and Reasonableness of Faith" (cited hereafter as "Faith"), Works, II, 96-7. My emphases.



worldly goods, prudence always involves consideration of "the consequence of them to our advantage or damage" ("Consideration", Works, I, 443).

Locke's characterization of man as "a Creature that has foresight" brings us to another major function of prudence. Obviously, the calculation of consequential "advantage or damage" is necessarily dependent upon the exercise of foresight. This faculty is a primary and essential instrument of prudential reasoning. "It is the prerogative of human nature", says Barrow, "to be sagacious in estimating the worth, and provident in descrying the consequences of things" ("Repentance", Works, I, 457). Men, he says elsewhere, are "rational and provident creatures".<sup>49</sup> On another occasion, rationality and foresight are effectively conflated in the single phrase, "rational providence" ("Consideration", Works, I, 436). In Barrow's sermons, the intimate etymological connexions between the terms "prudence" and "providence" are quite clear.<sup>50</sup> As it happens, he rarely uses the term "prudent" (though "wise" usually signifies exactly this). But what we see in his characteristic usage is a strong kinship between "prudence" and "providence", not in the sense that they are interchangeable, but in the sense that the latter denotes an aspect of the former. The two essential constituents of prudence are on the one hand "sagacity" and "discretion" (whose functions are evaluative), and on the other hand "providence" or foresight, which in most practical cases is what makes prudential evaluation possible. For "prudent", the OED gives us "sagacious in adapting means to ends; careful to follow the most politic and profitable course". Barrow would argue that this is impossible without the "provident" part of prudence.

It is not surprising to find that Barrow sees "providence" as an aspect of Christian faith. Following a survey of the ways in which religious belief influences conduct by raising the passions of hope and fear, he concludes: "Such a general influence is faith, looking with a provident eye upon future rewards and consequences of things, apt to have upon our practice" ("Faith", Works, II, 102). Belief in the doctrine of a future judgment implies the habitual exercise of foresight. But this is merely a special extension of the secular functions of "rational providence". Even in this world, as Butler puts it, "pleasure and pain are the consequences of our actions, and we are endued by the Author of

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<sup>49</sup> "The Profitableness of Godliness" (cited hereafter as "Profitableness"), Works, I, 22.

<sup>50</sup> See the OED entries on "prudence", "prudent", "providence" and "provident"; and cf. Battestin, Providence, p. 164.



our nature with capacities of foreseeing these consequences": indeed, he continues,

...it is certain matter of universal experience that the general method of Divine administration is forewarning us, or giving us capacities to foresee, with more or less clearness, that if we act so and so, we shall have such enjoyments, if so and so, such sufferings, and giving us those enjoyments, and making us feel those sufferings, in consequence of our actions.<sup>51</sup>

In more than one sense, this is exactly the kind of "administration" that Fielding exercises over the world of Tom Jones. Jones is explicitly forewarned, on at least two occasions, of the consequences of loose living; but he fails to exercise his God-given "capacities", and is made to feel those consequences.<sup>52</sup> Sophia Western, on the other hand, is evidently a paradigm of "rational providence". Here, in conversation with Allworthy, she retrospectively vindicates her refusal to marry Blifil:

'...I assure you, Sir, nothing less than the certain Prospect of future Misery could have made me resist the Commands of my Father.' 'I sincerely believe you, Madam,' replied Allworthy, 'and I heartily congratulate you on your prudent Foresight, since by so justifiable a Resistance you have avoided Misery indeed.' (TJ, XVIII, ix, p. 953)

Here is a less obvious sense in which the heroine's prudence exceeds the hero's.<sup>53</sup> And here is proof, if proof were needed, that rational self-interest need not imply an attenuation of benevolence or any other of the more "exalted" virtues.<sup>54</sup> Who would not applaud Sophia's decision to put her own happiness before Blifil's?

Allworthy's quasi-tautological phrase, "prudent Foresight",

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<sup>51</sup> Analogy, Part I, Ch. ii, pp. 29, 31. Subsequent references will be abbreviated (e.g., I, ii, p. 29) and given after quotations in the text.

<sup>52</sup> The warnings are of course issued by Allworthy: see TJ, V, ii, pp. 215-6; V, vii, p. 244.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Hatfield, Language of Irony, pp. 183-8, on Fielding's idealization of Sophia: she is said to be "the model of the kind of prudence he is recommending in Tom Jones" (p. 183). This is right, though I think Hatfield persistently understates the basic connexion between prudence and self-interest.

<sup>54</sup> Sophia, as Hatfield puts it, is "the model of prudential good nature" (op. cit., p. 189)

crystallizes the practical kinship of prudence and providence. As one modern philosopher has put it, "the prudent man, par excellence, is the man who seeks to take care of his whole future, warding off all serious reverses of fortune to the limit of his capacity", and he does this by exercising the "distinctively human" faculty of "rational foresight".<sup>55</sup> In these terms, the career of Tom Jones is distinctively imprudent, as Fielding reminds us when he refers to Jones (somewhat archly) as a "Felo de se" (TJ, XVII, i, p. 875). Sophia, of course, is an exemplary foil for the erring hero's near-fatal short-sightedness.<sup>56</sup> It is in its providential function that prudence most obviously involves the application of experience. Here, Battestin is right in associating prudence with "the proper functioning of memory, intelligence, and foresight", which together enable us to "estimate the future consequences of present actions and events". In this context, also, Battestin's use of Titian's Allegory of Prudence is helpfully appropriate.<sup>57</sup> But it could be said that Sophia's prudent refusal to marry Blifil has little to do with first-hand experience. (It could be said that this refusal had less to do with "prudent Foresight" than with sheer intuitive disgust, but that is another matter.) Having never been married, Sophia cannot have been deterred by personal familiarity with what Fielding elsewhere calls "the ill Consequences of an imprudent Marriage" (Amelia, II, viii, p. 92). But she does have an observer's vicarious experience of imprudent marriages such as Mrs Fitzpatrick's, and indeed her own mother's.<sup>58</sup>

The intelligent application of vicarious experience is an important aspect of prudence for Fielding. As the pedantic Partridge declares,

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<sup>55</sup> (J. D. Mabbott and) H. J. N. Horsburgh, "Prudence", Aristotelian Society Supp. Vol. 36 (1962), 51-76 (pp. 68, 65). Cf. Mabbott's appeal to etymology: "By derivation a prudent man is one who looks to the future" (p. 51).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. the short-sightedness of Johnson's Savage, which is frequently spoken of as an aspect of his chronic imprudence: "it was not his custom to look out for distant calamities", and, like Jones, he often "disregarded all considerations that opposed his present passions, and... readily... hazarded all future advantages for any immediate gratifications", characteristically making "no provision" against misfortune. Lives, ed. Birkbeck Hill, II, 406, 426, 372.

<sup>57</sup> Providence, pp. 167-8, 188-92.

<sup>58</sup> See TJ, X, iii, pp. 534-5; X, vii, pp. 550-51; XI, iv-v, vii (Mrs Fitzpatrick); and VII, iv (the Western marriage).



"Felix quem faciunt aliena pericula cautum" (translated by Battestin, "Happy is he who learns caution from the dangers of others") (TJ, XII, vii, p. 646, p. 646 n.). This is infinitely the best way of acquiring cautionary experience. At the very centre of Amelia is an extensive but simple example of the way in which vicarious experience can supply the want of personal experience. The whole of Book VII is taken up with the history of Mrs Bennet, culminating in her violation at the hands of the anonymous peer. This is much more than a quasi-melodramatic interpolation. In effect, Mrs Bennet's narrative snatches Fielding's innocent heroine from the jaws of self-inflicted disaster. As Amelia herself says to her redeemer: "I look upon you...as my Preserver from the Brink of a Precipice; from which I was falling into the same Ruin, which you have so generously...disclosed for my Sake" (VII, vii, p. 296). Amelia was indeed on "the Brink of a Precipice" at the end of Book VI. It is surely for a very good reason that her hubristic insistence on going to the masquerade, in defiance of Booth's prudent suspicions, is implicitly analogized with the fatal hubris of Milton's Eve.<sup>59</sup> While Eve had to learn (too late) from the deadly consequences of her own mistake, Amelia's 'fall' is averted by her vicarious experience of the 'fall' of Mrs Bennet. It is this that allows her to act prudently, despite her innocence, in what is the central crisis of the novel.

"The remembrance of succession of one thing to another", writes Hobbes, "that is, of what was antecedent, and what consequent, and what concomitant, is called an experiment", and thus: "To have had many experiments, is that we call experience, which is nothing else but remembrance of what antecedents have been followed by what consequents". We can of course have no direct knowledge of the future, but "of our conceptions of the past, we make a future": "Thus after a man hath been accustomed to see like antecedents followed by like consequents, whensoever he seeth the like come to pass to any thing he had seen before, he looks there should follow it the same that followed then" (Human Nature, Ch. iv: Works, IV, 16-17). To make this kind of inference from the past to the future, from the observed to the unobserved, is for Hobbes the principal function of prudence:

Sometimes a man desires to know the event of an action; and then he thinketh of some like action past, and the events

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<sup>59</sup> See Amelia, VI, v-vi; and cf. Paradise Lost, IX, 192 ff.



thereof one after another; supposing like events will follow like actions. As he that foresees what will become of a criminal, re-cons what he has seen follow on the like crime before; having this order of thoughts, the crime, the officer, the prison, the judge, and the gallows. Which kind of thoughts, is called foresight, and prudence, or providence; and sometimes wisdom... (Leviathan, I, iii: Works, III, 14-15)

Similar analogies between past and present are what enable Amelia, "supposing like events will follow like actions", to infer the ruinous consequences of attending the masquerade -- to "make a future" of the past, as Hobbes puts it. This kind of inductive foresight is what constitutes the groundwork of prudent decision-making in everyday life. "The consequences of our actions are our counsellors", says Hobbes,<sup>63</sup> and these consequences are the proper objects of what Fielding calls "prudent Foresight". Even Amelia's feckless husband understands this much, as is evidenced by this autobiographical statement: "All my Prudence now vanish'd at once; and I would that Instant have gladly run away with Amelia, and have married her without the least Consideration of any Consequences" (Amelia, II, iii, p. 77). The "Consideration" of consequences is manifestly a large part of prudence for Fielding.<sup>64</sup> Inductive reasoning such as Hobbes calls "prudence, or providence" is dramatized most obviously in Fielding's representation of Black George's dilemma and its resolution (TJ, VI, xiii, pp. 319-20). Having, presumably, "this order of thoughts, the crime, the officer, the judge, and the gallows", George arrives at the fear which ultimately resolves his dilemma.

By far the safest source of cautionary experience, and of the prudence it confers, is the observed imprudence of others (as in the case of Amelia and Mrs Bennet), or the counsel of the experienced and the prudent.<sup>65</sup> If all else fails, however, there is a more painful method

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<sup>63</sup> Human Nature, Ch. xiii: Works, IV, 74.

<sup>64</sup> Note the terms of the prudential advice that Mrs Honour typically gives Sophia in Tom Jones: "I beg your La'ship to consider the Consequence before you undertake any rash Action" (VII, vii, p. 350); "For Heaven's Sake, Madam, consider what you are about, and whither you are going" (X, ix, p. 564).

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Hobbes, Human Nature, Ch. xiii: "The consequences of our actions are our counsellors... So in the counsel which a man taketh from other men, the counsellors alternately do make appear the consequences of the action..." (Works, IV, 74).



of acquiring "prudent Foresight": by making mistakes and suffering the consequences. There is, paradoxically, a sense in which prudence is bestowed by imprudence. But this road to wisdom would never be positively recommended -- certainly not by Richardson:

He is happy who is wise by other mens misfortunes, says the common adage: And why...will you, notwithstanding, pay for that wisdom which you may have at the cost of others?<sup>66</sup>

Fielding's flawed heroes tend to pursue wisdom the hard way, but for the sake of the reader, who is thus given an opportunity to acquire it more cheaply. As privileged spectators, we are given the chance to be "wise by other mens misfortunes". This is surely a principal didactic raison d'être for the follies, and the subsequent sufferings, of Tom Jones or Billy Booth.<sup>67</sup> It is palpably true, as Rawson argues, that "there is a much more compelling case for regarding 'benevolence' (or 'good nature') rather than prudence as the principal virtue celebrated in Tom Jones".<sup>68</sup> But this reflects the difference between positive and negative exemplification.<sup>69</sup> To suggest that Fielding has only a slight and reluctant regard for prudence is to ignore a major structural dimension of Tom Jones. This novel undoubtedly celebrates benevolence, but it can equally truly be said to lament imprudence.<sup>70</sup> Man, as Fielding says, was certainly "created a Social Animal", but "as he was likewise designed for Happiness, his All-wise Creator thought proper also to place in him the Passion of Self-love, in order to excite him to the Pursuit of his own

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<sup>66</sup> Samuel Richardson, Familiar Letters on Important Occasions, Routledge English Library ed., 1928, Letter cxliv, p. 179.

<sup>67</sup> See Fielding's argument in the latter part of TJ, X, i, on the value of the flawed hero. The aim seems to be to induce what Richardson would call "compassionate caution": see Pamela, Everyman's Library ed., 1914, II, 458 (Letter cii).

<sup>68</sup> "Order and Misrule", p. 505 (n. 16).

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Hatfield, Language of Irony, p. 182 (Jones is not "the exemplar of prudence in the novel": "He acquires prudence in the end, but through the greater part of the story he is rather the representative of imprudence").

<sup>70</sup> Rawson would question this, believing rather that "the imprudence of benevolent men is something Fielding often complains of in principle, whilst actually suffusing its manifestations in the novels with an overriding warmth of affectionate approval". Henry Fielding and the Augustan Ideal Under Stress, 1972, p. 238.

real Good". This, in itself, suggests that prudence is for Fielding much more than a (regrettably) necessary vice: ultimately, rational self-love is no less a fulfilment of divine "design" than any of the social virtues. To fail in "the Duty which we owe to ourselves" is to contradict the ends of Nature.

The prudential theme of Tom Jones is illuminated in many ways by the arguments of Butler's Analogy, a text which readers of Fielding could usefully study. Even in this world, as Butler says, "pleasure and pain are the consequences of our actions, and we are endued by the Author of our nature with capacities of foreseeing those consequences" (Analogy, I, ii, p. 29). It is in this sense that "in the present state, all which we enjoy, and a great part of what we suffer, is put in our own power":

Our happiness and misery are trusted to our conduct, and made to depend upon it. Somewhat, and, in many circumstances, a great deal too, is put upon us, either to do, or to suffer, as we choose. And all the various miseries of life, which people bring upon themselves by negligence and folly, and might have avoided by proper care, are instances of this, which miseries are beforehand just as contingent and undetermined as their conduct, and left to be determined by it. (Analogy, I, ii, p. 29; I, iv, p. 68).

This account of prudential responsibility is a fitting context in which to view Allworthy's characteristic advice to Tom Jones:

At all Seasons...when the good Man was alone with the Youth, especially when the latter was totally at Ease, he took Occasion to remind him of his former Miscarriages, but...only in order to introduce the Caution, which he prescribed for his future Behaviour; 'on which alone' he assured him, 'would depend his own Felicity...' (TJ, V, ii, p. 216)

However tautological it may seem, our first prudential obligation is to be prudent, to cultivate and exercise rational self-love. According to Locke, "the highest perfection of intellectual nature, lies in a careful and constant pursuit of true and solid happiness" (Essay, II.xxi.51, p. 266). The attainment of our true interest involves prudence, and the exercise of our "capacities of foreseeing" the consequences of our actions. As Butler puts it:

I know not that we have any one kind or degree of enjoyment, but by the means of our own actions. And by prudence and care we may, for the most part, pass our days in tolerable ease and quiet; or, on the contrary, we may, by rashness, ungoverned



passion, wilfulness, or even by negligence, make ourselves as miserable as ever we please. And many do please to make themselves extremely miserable, i.e., to do what they know beforehand will render them so. (Analogy, I, ii, pp. 29-30)

Again, this is typical of the kind of thinking which underlies Allworthy's advice to Jones. Here is his weighty 'death-bed' admonition to the rash youth:

'I am convinced, my Child, that you have much Goodness, Generosity and Honour in your Temper; if you will add Prudence and Religion to these, you must be happy: For the three former Qualities, I admit, make you worthy of Happiness, but they are the latter only which will put you in Possession of it.'  
(TJ, V, vii, p. 244)

Yoking together "Prudence and Religion" in this manner, Allworthy displays a characteristic kinship with the Latitudinarian divines, for whom religion (as an incomparably "profitable" way of life) was the ultimate function of practical wisdom. By faith, says Barrow, "we are informed...wherein our felicity doth consist, and how it is attainable": "In faith is exercised that prudence, which guideth and prompteth us to walk by the best rules, to act in the best manner, to apply the best means toward attainment of the best ends" ("Faith", Works, II, 86, 97). In this sense, religion embraces the highest form of a species of prudence that we all exercise in everyday life. Every man "acteth with...vigour answerable to his persuasion of things, that they are worthy his pains, and attainable by his endeavours":

What stirreth up the merchant to undertake tedious voyages over vast and dangerous seas...but a persuasion, that wealth is a very desirable thing, and that hereby he may acquire it? ...In like manner is faith the square and source of our spiritual activity... (II, 101)

Ultimately, the "prudence of faith" is "the only prudence considerable" (II, 97), since it constitutes a thorough and infallible understanding of the Good and the Profitable, of True Interest and the way to attain it. If heaven is the highest good, the summum bonum, it follows that a life of Christian virtue and piety is the only truly "profitable" life:

Man is a very busy and active creature, which cannot live and do nothing, whose thoughts are in restless motion, whose desires are ever stretching at somewhat, who perpetually will

be working either good or evil to himself: wherefore greatly profitable must that thing be, which determineth him to act well, to spend his care and pain on that which is truly advantageous to him; and that is religion only.  
 ("Profitableness", Works, I, 24)

Even if heaven were out of the question, however, the most prudent life would still be one consistent with biblical morality: "In fine, the precepts of religion are no other than such as...daily trial showeth conducive to our welfare in all respects: which, consequently, were there no law exacting them of us, we should in wisdom choose to observe, and voluntarily impose on ourselves" (I, 20: my emphasis). Dr Harrison displays a mastery of exactly the same logic in Amelia.<sup>71</sup>

Jones is slow to absorb Allworthy's advice, the value of which is surely demonstrated by subsequent events. As Barrow frequently insists, our first prudential obligation is to be prudent, to pursue happiness rationally. When a man "pursueth any course...prejudicial to himself", and "will not hearken to any advice, nor yield to any consideration diverting him from his purpose", he proceeds "without or against reason". And this kind of "self-will", as Barrow calls it, tends to drive men into practical errors, "although apparently contrary to their own interest and welfare, depriving them of the best goods, bringing on them most heavy mischiefs".<sup>72</sup> Irrational self-will of this kind is a dereliction of prudential duty:

We should never act without striving with competent application of mind to discern clearly some reason why we act; and from observing the dictates of that reason, no unaccountable cause should pervert us: blind will, headstrong inclination, impetuous passion, should never guide, or draw, or drive us to any thing; for this is not to act like a man, but as a beast; for beasts operate by a blind instinct indeed, but such as is planted in them by a superior wisdom, unerringly directing them to a pursuit of their true good: but man is left in manu concilii sui, is obliged...not to follow blind inclinations or instinct; but to act with serious deliberation and choice, to observe explicit rules and resolutions of reason. ("Self-Interest", I, 547)

The attainment of our "true good" involves rational self-direction. Unlike

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<sup>71</sup> In his remarks on forgiveness of enemies: see IX, viii, esp. pp. 391-2.

<sup>72</sup> "Of Self-Confidence, Self-Complacence, Self-Will, and Self-Interest" (cited hereafter as "Self-Interest"), Works, I, 546.



the beasts, man is made responsible for his own happiness or misery: he is accountable to himself by virtue of his capacity for "serious deliberation and choice".

Many of us fail in this responsibility. As Butler complains, "we see a great deal of misery in the world...which men bring upon themselves by their own behaviour": "human creatures are not only continually liable to go wrong voluntarily, but we see likewise that they often actually do so with respect to their temporal interests" (Analogy, I, ii, p. 34; I, iv, p. 65). We are quite as liable to desert our duty to ourselves as we are to abandon our duties to others: "men in fact as much and as often contradict that part of their nature which respects self, and which leads them to their own private good and happiness; as they contradict that part of it which respects society, and tends to public good" ("Upon Human Nature", 15 Sermons, I, 14). But why all this self-inflicted misery?

Is it really the result of consideration in mankind, how they may become most easy to themselves, most free from care, and enjoy the chief happiness attainable in this world? Or is it not manifestly owing either to this, that they have not cool and reasonable concern enough for themselves to consider wherein their chief happiness in the present life consists; or else, if they do consider it, that they will not act conformably to what is the result of that consideration: i.e. reasonable concern for themselves, or cool self-love is prevailed over by passion and appetite. (loc. cit.)

Even those who have properly and prudently considered "wherein their chief happiness...consists" have a manifest tendency to act in defiance of their own conclusions. We regularly desert the directions of "cool self-love". In short, "mankind have ungoverned passions which they will gratify at any rate", not only "to the injury of others", but also "in contradiction to known private interest" ("Upon Human Nature", 15 Sermons, I, 12).

According to Butler, there is often a radical tension between self-love and the "particular" passions:

There is indeed frequently an inconsistency or interfering between self-love or private interest, and the several particular appetites, passions, affections, or the pursuits they lead to... For nothing is more common, than to see men give themselves up to a passion or an affection to their known prejudice and ruin, and in direct contradiction to manifest and real interest, and the loudest calls of self-love... ("Upon the Love of Our Neighbour", 15 Sermons, XI, 8)

Self-love is "a regard to our own interest, happiness, and private good", and "belongs to man as a reasonable creature reflecting upon his own interest or happiness"; but apart from this "general desire of happiness", we also have "a variety of particular affections, passions, and appetites to particular external objects" (15 Sermons, XI, 8, 5). These "particular" desires "tend towards particular external things: these are their objects; having these is their end: in this consists their gratification: no matter whether it be, or be not, upon the whole, our interest or happiness" (XI, 8). The passions can therefore contradict the directions of self-love, and lead us away from our "manifest and real interest" for the sake of relatively trivial immediate gratifications. This kind of self-betrayal cannot properly be attributed to self-love. True self-love is "cool", or "reasonable", or "cool and reasonable" (I, 14; II, 11). To act in defiance of self-love is to act in defiance of nature in the highest sense. It is, says Butler, "manifest that self-love is in human nature a superior principle to passion": "So that, if we will act conformably to the economy of man's nature" (in cases where there is conflict or tension), "reasonable self-love must govern" (II, 11). Prudentialism hinges on a moral-psychological conflict between mere appetite or inclination and true self-love, between the passions and the duty which we owe to ourselves.

In general, these tensions reflect the basic chronological distinction between immediate or short-term interests (such as sensual pleasure) and future or long-term interests (such as good health or, ultimately, happiness per se). As R. F. Atkinson puts it, in a recent textbook of moral philosophy:

Prudence is neither simply a matter of going for what one wants nor simply a matter of subordinating one's wants to those of others (or to the requirements of morality, if that is different). It is rather the subordinating of occasional and less important wants to long-term, fundamental ones.<sup>73</sup>

In this sense, as Atkinson points out, "there does seem to be widespread recognition of what would once have been called the requirements of prudence", and we all have psychological experience of the kind of conflict postulated by Butler:

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<sup>73</sup> Conduct: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy, 1969, pp. 32-3.



People are enjoined not to smoke in order to avoid lung cancer, to work for their examinations, to live within their incomes, to make provision for possible illness and unemployment. Up to a point these are like moral requirements. It is possible to feel tempted to disregard them, to experience conflict and feel guilt, very much as in moral contexts. There seems to be the possibility of conflict between what (prudentially) ought to be done and what is wanted, and this in spite of the [fact] that the obligations of prudence are essentially to do what is necessary to get what one wants (or to avoid what must not be done if one is not to get what one does not want)...<sup>74</sup>

Fielding and the Anglicans would go further than this, and say that prudential obligations are "moral requirements", and that prudential temptation, conflict, and guilt are "moral" phenomena. The "Duty which we owe to ourselves" is no less a duty than any other, and generates exactly the same kinds of practical dilemma. And, as with every other obligation, it is possible to fail in this one. As Butler puts it, "there is a manifest negligence in men of their real happiness or interest in the present world, when that interest is inconsistent with a present gratification" ("Upon Human Nature", 15 Sermons, I, 15):

...there are some who have so little sense of it that they scarce look beyond the passing day; they are so taken up with present gratifications as to have, in a manner, no feeling of consequences, no regard to their future ease or fortune in this life, any more than to their happiness in another. Some appear to be blinded and deceived by inordinate passion... Others are not deceived, but, as it were, forcibly carried away by the like passions against their better judgment, and feeble resolutions too, of acting better. (Analogy, I, iv, p. 65)

Here is the kind of prudential conflict which Fielding dramatizes in the careers of Tom Jones and Billy Booth. Psychologically, it consists in a tension between prudence, or rational self-love, and what Butler calls "passionate or sensual selfishness" (15 Sermons, Preface, para. 35), which denotes merely the exercise and gratification of particular passions or appetites, regardless of the consequences. Butler's recognition of the power of "inordinate passion" to prevail over self-love sometimes finds expression in a typically Christian emphasis on the core of weakness in man:

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 32 (my emphasis).

Now when men go against their reason, and contradict a more important interest at a distance, for one nearer, though of less consideration: if this be...the case, all that can be said is, that strong passions, some kind of brute force within, prevails over the principle of rationality. ("Upon the Character of Balaam", 15 Sermons, VII, 10)

Butler and the Anglicans might have associated this "brute force" with original sin, viewing imprudence itself as a distinctive weakness of fallen man. But the same chronic tension between self-interest and the passions was later theorized by Hume in A Treatise of Human Nature. "Contiguous objects must", owing to the constitution of the human mind, "have an influence much superior to the distant and the remote". Distance, both in space and time, will diminish the active influence of any object, "yet the consequences of a removal in space are much inferior to those of a removal in time": "Talk to a man of his condition thirty years hence, and he will not regard you. Speak of what is to happen to-morrow, and he will lend you attention".<sup>75</sup> A "contiguous" object will necessarily operate "with more force than any object, that lies in a more distant and obscure light":

Tho' we may be fully convinc'd, that the latter object excels the former, we are not able to regulate our actions by this judgment; but yield to the solicitations of our passions, which always plead in favour of what is near and contiguous.

This, Hume adds, "is the reason why men so often act in contradiction to their known interest" (Treatise, III.2.vii, p. 535). Again:

There is no quality in human nature, which causes more fatal errors in our conduct, than that which leads us to prefer whatever is present to the distant and remote, and makes us desire objects more according to their situation than their intrinsic value. (p. 538)

As Hume says elsewhere, man tends generally to be "seduced from his great and important, but distant interests, by the allurements of present, though often very frivolous temptations": "This great weakness is incurable in

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<sup>75</sup> Treatise, Book II, Part 3, Sect. vii, pp. 428-9. Subsequent references will be abbreviated (e.g., II.3.vii, pp. 428-9) and supplied after quotations in the text.



human nature".<sup>76</sup> We are, as it were, constitutionally imprudent.

Among the Anglicans it was Locke who dealt most extensively with this "great weakness". In the Essay (Bk. II, Ch. xxi), he presents a lengthy and detailed challenge to the view that the human will is always moved by the greater apparent good. That this is not the case, he argues, "is visible in Experience. The infinitely greatest confessed good being often neglected, to satisfy the successive uneasiness of our desires pursuing trifles":

How many are to be found, that have had lively representations set before their minds of the unspeakable joys of Heaven, which they acknowledge both possible and probable too, who yet would be content to take up with their happiness here? and so the prevailing uneasinesses of their desires, let loose after the enjoyments of this life, take their turns in the determining their wills, and all that while they take not one step, are not one jot moved, towards the good things of another life considered as never so great. (Essay, II.xxi.38, 37, pp. 256, 255)<sup>77</sup>

And what is true of the "greatest confessed good" is also true of every other greater good. The fact is, says Locke, "a little burning felt pushes us more powerfully, than greater pleasures in prospect draw or allure"; and "how much soever Men are in earnest...in pursuit of happiness; yet they may have a clear view of good, great and confessed good, without being concern'd for it, or moved by it", especially "if they think they can make up their happiness without it" (II.xxi.34, 43, pp. 252, 260):

Convince a Man never so much, that plenty has its advantages over poverty; make him see and own, that the handsome conveniences of life are better than nasty penury: yet as long as he is content with the latter, and finds no uneasiness in it, he moves not; his will never is determin'd to any action, that shall bring him out of it... On the other side, let a Drunkard see, that his Health decays, his Estate wastes; Discredit and Diseases, and the want of all things, even of his beloved Drink, attends him in the course he follows: yet the returns of uneasiness to miss his Companions; the habitual thirst after his Cups...drives him to the Tavern, though he has in view the loss of health and plenty... 'Tis

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<sup>76</sup> "Of the Origin of Government", Essays Moral, Political and Literary (1741-2), ed. T. H. Green and T. H. Grose, 1882, I, 114. This edition cited hereafter as Essays.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Fielding's worldly innkeeper in JA, II, iii, pp. 99-100.

not for want of viewing the greater good: for he sees, and acknowledges it, and in the intervals of his drinking hours, will take resolutions to pursue the greater good; but when the uneasiness to miss his accustomed delight returns, the greater acknowledged good loses its hold, and the present uneasiness determines the will to the accustomed action... And thus he is, from time to time, in the State of that unhappy Complainer, Video meliora proboque, Deteriora sequor... (Essay, II.xxi.35, pp. 253-4)<sup>78</sup>

This kind of prudential conflict is a general and recurrent concern of Fielding's narratives. But it seems to me that Locke's drunkard has a particular relevance to Joseph Andrews. Certain aspects of Wilson's quasi-picaresque autobiography (III, iii) seem to give quite precise dramatic form to Locke's psychological thesis. Wilson is not incapable of making prudent resolutions and acting on them. On one occasion, he is under pressure to involve himself in a duel (for the sake of a mere 'eggshell):

...I weighed the Consequences on both sides as fairly as I could. On the one, I saw the Risk of this Alternative, either losing my own Life, or having on my hands the Blood of a Man with whom I was not in the least angry. I soon determined that the Good which appeared on the other, was not worth this Hazard. I therefore resolved to quit the Scene, and presently retired to the Temple, where I took Chambers. (JA, III, iii, p. 205)

Here, Wilson is a perfect model of prudence: his resolution is based on rational foresight and careful comparative evaluation, and the evasive action matches the resolution. On other occasions, however, Wilson falters. His sexual career in London is a catalogue of prudential (and indeed moral) errors. He takes up first with orange-wenches, and pays the price:

This Career was soon put a stop to by my Surgeon, who convinced me of the Necessity of confining myself to my Room for a Month. I resolved to quit all further Conversation with Beaus and Smarts of every kind, and to avoid, if possible, any Occasion of returning to this Place of Confinement. (p. 206)

But he soon relapses, and immediately receives another dose of the clap. After a second period of "Penance" (p. 206), he initiates another

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<sup>78</sup> Note that the Latin (from Ovid's Metamorphoses, vii, 20-21) is also quoted by Billy Booth in Amelia, as an authority for his view that "we reason from our Heads, but act from our Hearts" (VIII, x, p. 350).



disastrous affair, which culminates in a third visit to the surgeon (pp. 206-9). Wilson seems to have learned his lesson: "I now forswore all future Dealings with the Sex, complained loudly that the Pleasure did not compensate the Pain..." (p. 209). The resolution is prudent enough, but it does not prevent him falling into yet another calamitous affair, this one proving even more expensive than the others (the expenses include £3000 in legal damages). Twice he resolves explicitly to abstain from fornication, yet fails to act on these resolutions, and pays increasingly higher prices for his illicit pleasures. But why, when he is manifestly capable of acting prudently in other matters, did Wilson fail here?<sup>79</sup> In every case, his answer would be the same: "I was no sooner perfectly restored to Health, than I found my Passion for Women...made me very uneasy" (p. 206: my emphasis). As with Locke's drunkard, "the uneasiness to miss his accustomed delight returns", and "the greater acknowledged good loses its hold". Wilson's passion for women involves him in prudential conflict, and exemplifies the natural "weakness" which allows appetite to prevail over cool self-love. His career also dramatizes the power of prudential temptation, and the deplorable consequences of failing to overcome it.

For Butler, the concept of temptation is no less meaningful in prudential terms than it is in any other moral context. Our "present interest" (that is, our worldly interest) is "not forced upon us, so neither is it offered to our acceptance, but to our acquisition; in such sort, as that we are in danger of missing it, by means of temptations to neglect or act contrary to it" (Analogy, I, iv, p. 68). Prudential and moral temptation are precisely "analogous". If we are "in a state of trial with regard to a future world" (which demands virtue), we are also "in a state of trial in the like sense with regard to the present world" (which makes prudence necessary) (Analogy, I, iv, p. 62):

Natural government by rewards and punishments as much implies natural trial, as moral government does moral trial. The natural government of God here meant consists in his annexing pleasure to some actions, and pain to others, which are in our power to do or forbear... This necessarily implies that he has made our happiness and misery, or our interest, to depend in part upon ourselves; and so far as men have temptations to any course of action which will probably occasion them greater temporal inconvenience and uneasiness than satisfaction, so far their temporal interest is in danger from themselves, or they are in a state of trial with respect to it. Now...many run

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<sup>79</sup> Wilson displays a kind of "Idiotism" that Fielding was to deal with very critically in the True Patriot: see No. 31: Locke, p. 243.



themselves into great inconvenience, and into extreme distress and misery; not through incapacity of knowing better and doing better for themselves...but through their own fault. And these things necessarily imply temptation and danger of miscarrying in a greater or less degree with respect to our worldly interest or happiness. Every one...speaks of the hazards which young people run upon their setting out in the world; hazards from other causes than merely their ignorance and unavoidable accidents; and some courses of vice, at least, being contrary to men's worldly interest or good, temptations to these must at the same time be temptations to forego our present and our future interest. Thus in our natural or temporal capacity, we are in a state of trial, i.e., of difficulty and danger, analogous, or like to our moral and religious trial.  
(Analogy, I, iv, pp. 62-3)

Both "natural" and "moral" temptations are generated by the passions. Some men, says Butler, are driven to forsake their own present interest by dangerous "habits of vice and folly":

And the account of this...case is, that particular passions are no more coincident with prudence, or that reasonable self-love the end of which is our worldly interest, than they are with the principle of virtue and religion, but often draw contrary ways to one, as well as to the other; and so such particular passions are as much temptations to act imprudently with regard to our worldly interest as to act viciously.  
(Analogy, I, iv, pp. 63-4)

The general relevance of all this to Tom Jones is surely obvious. It is a particularly appropriate context in which to read Squire Allworthy's prudential sermons against fornication, especially the one addressed to Jenny Jones (the wrong woman, as it happens) (TJ, I, vii). According to Allworthy, this "Crime" is "very heinous in itself" as well as "very dreadful in its Consequences" (p. 51). In other words, it is no less vicious than it is imprudent. In dwelling almost exclusively on the manifold "dreadful" consequences, however, Allworthy pursues a classic strategy of prudential homiletics, appealing primarily to the putative offender's self-interest. The sermon culminates, naturally enough, in a reflection on the folly of sinful pleasures:

Can any Pleasure compensate these Evils? Can any Temptation have Sophistry and Delusion enough to persuade you to so simple a Bargain? Or can any carnal Appetite so overpower your Reason, or so totally lay it asleep, as to prevent your flying with Affright and Terror from a Crime which carries such Punishment always with it? (p. 52)



This paragraph features all the hallmarks of prudential pulpit oratory, even down to the ubiquitous economic metaphor. Here, the psychological opposition of "Reason" and "carnal Appetite" is the pivot not of a moral but of a prudential conflict. And the "Temptation" warned against is a temptation not to act viciously (though it is also this), but -- in Butler's words -- "to forego our present and future interest", "to act imprudently".<sup>80</sup>

Sexual incontinence is the most recurrent cautionary paradigm of imprudent conduct in Fielding's work. We are continually reminded that the pursuit of carnal satisfactions can be a very hazardous business. As Sigmund Freud puts it, "an unrestricted satisfaction of every need presents itself as the most enticing method of conducting one's life, but it means putting enjoyment before caution, and soon brings its own punishment".<sup>81</sup> This is exactly what Fielding's Anglican mentors were saying. "No one...can deny," according to Hoadly, "what too many know by conscious and sensible Experience, that there is a Pursuit of Pleasure... which, by natural Consequence, introduces a Scene of Pain and Bodily Uneasiness; as really Pain...as the Pleasure itself was Pleasure, which was the sole Cause of it". And quite apart from this "natural Consequence", the immoderate or extravagant pursuit of pleasure, "made eager by the present ungoverned Passions of the Pursuer", will in time "bring on such temporal Inconveniences, as change the Scene entirely from a short Scene of Rioting in Joy, to a long one of sensible Grief and Sorrow".<sup>82</sup> Fielding dramatizes the same lessons in Wilson's autobiographical narrative, where illicit sexual liaisons lead repeatedly to instructive doses of venereal disease. But the "Maladie Alamode", as Fielding characterized it elsewhere,<sup>83</sup> is only one of the hazards of carnal promiscuity. In Amelia, Booth's adulterous affair with Miss Mathews

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<sup>80</sup> For other references to prudential "Temptation" in Fielding, see, for instance, Amelia, I, viii, p. 53; VI, vii, p. 294; IX, viii, pp. 391-2. There is also of course Amelia's own temptation to attend the masquerade (VI, v-vi).

<sup>81</sup> Civilization and its Discontents, ed. and trans. James Strachey, New York, 1962, p. 24.

<sup>82</sup> Benjamin Hoadly, "Of the Love of Pleasure", Twenty Sermons, 1755, Sermon V, p. 89.

<sup>83</sup> A Journey from this World to the Next (cited hereafter as Journey), Ch. iii: Henley, II, 226-9.



generates a variety of punitively uncomfortable consequences, not least his own tortured sense of guilt.<sup>84</sup> The horrific climax of Mrs Bennet's history speaks for itself.<sup>85</sup> But it is in Tom Jones that sexual incontinence receives the fullest treatment. The wayward career of Fielding's hero hinges on three illicit sexual affairs. Whatever his view of the morality of fornication, Fielding's concern in this novel is principally with its hazards. Fornication may or may not be (in Allworthy's words) "very heinous in itself", but it is certainly "very dreadful in its Consequences" (TJ, I, vii, p. 51). Unlike Wilson, Jones is spared the "Maladie Alamode", but it could hardly be said that Fielding glamorizes sexual adventurism. The affair with Molly Seagrim results, directly and indirectly, in Jones's expulsion from Paradise Hall. The liaison with Mrs Waters alienates Sophia and, ultimately, raises the spectre of incest. (The mere fright is surely no mean punishment.) The engagement with Lady Bellaston further alienates Sophia and engenders a sequence of calamities, terminating in Jones's imprisonment on a charge of attempted murder. His various misdemeanours, "as is the Nature of Vice, brought sufficient Punishment upon him themselves" (TJ, XI, x, p. 618).

"For ill living now", warns Barrow, "we shall come hereafter to be sorry, if not with a wholesome contrition, yet with a painful regret" ("Consideration", Works, I, 458). This encapsulates the didactic essence of Tom Jones or Amelia, where Fielding consistently recommends virtue by dramatizing the calamitous consequences of vice. At the conclusion of Amelia, most notably, Fielding records the premature deaths of six of his principal characters, all killed, directly or indirectly, by their own vices: "The noble Peer and Mrs. Ellison", for instance, "have been both dead several Years, and both of the Consequences of their favourite Vices; Mrs. Ellison having fallen a Martyr to her Liquor, and the other to his Amours, by which he was at last become so rotten, that he stunk above

<sup>84</sup> See esp. Amelia, IV, ii, pp. 154-5; IV, iii, p. 161.

<sup>85</sup> Amelia, VII, esp. vii-viii. Mrs Bennet is of course "polluted" by her single adulterous encounter (VII, viii, p. 299), and subsequently passes on the infection to her innocent young husband, who soon after dies of "a Polypus in his Heart" (VII, ix, p. 302). It is difficult not to view Mr Bennet's premature demise as a further symptom of the sexually transmitted "pollution", even if only in a metaphorical sense. In any case, cf. Fielding's remarks on prostitution in CGJ, No. 57, which "in its Consequences...partakes of the Nature of the very worst of Poisonings" (Jensen, II, 71).



Ground" (Amelia, XII, ix, pp. 531-2). However complex in other respects, Fielding's novels have some of the simplicity of the cautionary tale. It has been suggested by Battestin that Fielding "sensed an analogy between his own practice as a comic novelist and that of Hogarth as a 'comic History Painter'" (Amelia, I, vi, p. 43, n. 1). It is no coincidence, as Battestin also points out, that Dr Harrison's parsonage is decorated with "the Prints of Mr. Hogarth, whom he calls a moral Satirist" (Amelia, III, xii, p. 144).<sup>86</sup> Amelia surely demonstrates that Fielding not only "sensed" but understood the analogy between his own narratives and Hogarth's pictorial sequences.<sup>87</sup> As early as the Champion, Fielding was applauding Hogarth's work for its moral power. Here (in the leader for 10 June 1740), he argues characteristically that "the force of example is infinitely stronger, as well as quicker, than precept", with the qualification that "we are much better and easier taught by the examples of what we are to shun, than by those which would instruct us what to pursue". He then recounts an anecdotal instance of this didactic homeopathy:

I have heard of an old gentleman, who, to preserve his son from conversing with prostitutes, took him, when very young, to the most abandoned brothels in town, and to so good purpose, that the young man carried a sound body into his wife's arms at eight and twenty.

Perhaps, I may be told with a sneer, that these wretched scenes have not always the same effect; and it may be, I believe, necessary for a young man to have his monitor with him, to prevent his being cheated with the outward and false appearance of gaiety and pleasure. On which account, I esteem the ingenious Mr. Hogarth as one of the most useful satirists any age hath produced. In his excellent works you see the delusive scene exposed with all the force of humour, and, on casting your eyes on another picture, you behold the dreadful and fatal consequence. I almost dare affirm that those two works of his, which he calls the Rake's and the Harlot's Progress, are calculated more to serve the cause of virtue... than all the folios of morality which have ever been written; and a sober family should no more be without them, than without the Whole Duty of Man in their house. (Henley, XV, 330-31)

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. the more fulsome compliment paid to Hogarth in the first edition of Amelia: Dr Harrison "says no Clergyman should be without all his Works, in the Knowledge of which he would have him instruct his Parishioners, as he himself often doth" (Wesleyan Amelia, Appendix VI, 144.25).

<sup>87</sup> For a useful account of the Fielding-Hogarth connexion, see Robert Etheridge Moore, Hogarth's Literary Relationships (1948), New York, 1969, Chs. iii-iv.



In some respects, Fielding's narratives are designed to do exactly what Hogarth's progresses do. They are dominated, at the structural level, by the cause-and-effect relation between the "delusive" pleasures of vice and its "dreadful and fatal consequence". In Amelia, the consequences of vice are particularly dreadful and fatal, and in this sense Fielding's last novel bears a special kinship with Hogarth's graphic works. But the same didactic 'progress' from pleasure (above all, sexual pleasure) to misery is incorporated in Joseph Andrews — Wilson's autobiography has strong Hogarthian elements<sup>88</sup> — and constitutes an important structural feature of Tom Jones, which might almost be described as a comic adaptation of The Rake's Progress. Both Fielding and Hogarth exploit chronological sequence as a means of insisting on moral causality, and underlining the loose-living protagonist's responsibility for his own ultimate misery. The "cause of virtue" is served by representing the wretched consequences of vice.

Fielding's reader is confronted with these consequences "to prevent his being cheated with the outward and false appearance of gaiety and pleasure". For vice, as we are warned in another Champion paper (24 January 1739/40), "cheats us with the appearances of good, while virtue only gives it us in reality": it "plays the courtier with us, it flatters, and promises, and deceives"; but, stripped of its "outward ornaments and appearances", vice "will appear a tawdry, painted harlot, within, all foul and impure, enticing only at a distance, the possession of her certainly attended with uneasiness, pain, disease, poverty, and dishonour" (Henley, XV, 168, 167). This emphasis on the disjunction between the appearance and the reality of vice is another favourite device of the Anglican moralists, and one later adopted by Fielding's Dr Harrison:

However pleasant it may be to the Palate, while we are feeding on it, it is sure to leave a bitter Relish behind it; and so far, indeed, it may be called a luscious Morsel, that the most greedy Appetites are soon glutted, and the most eager Longing for it is soon turned into Loathing and Repentance. I allow there is something tempting in its outward Appearance; but it is like the beautiful Colour of some Poisons, from which, however they may attract our Eyes, a Regard to our own Welfare commands us to abstain. (Amelia, IX, viii, p. 392)

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<sup>88</sup> Cf. Moore, op. cit., pp. 124-5; and Battestin, Moral Basis, pp. 122-3.



Here, Dr Harrison is concerned specifically with the "luscious Morsel" of revenge.<sup>89</sup> But the same argument is applied to all manner of vices by the Anglican divines. What should be noted is that the disjunction between 'appearance' and 'reality' is actually a disjunction between present and future. Vice is 'unmasked' by its own consequences: the pleasure of fornication, for instance, is "delusive" in the sense that it is "attended with" — followed by — "uneasiness, pain, disease" and the rest. The immediate pleasure of vice is thus the 'mask' or 'disguise' of future misery.<sup>90</sup>

The passions, then, sexual or otherwise, generate temptations to forsake our own true interest. As Butler says, they place men as much "in danger of voluntarily foregoing their present interest or good as their future":

Thus mankind having a temporal interest depending upon themselves, and a prudent course of behaviour being necessary to secure it, passions inordinately excited...towards such objects, at such times or in such degrees as that they cannot be gratified consistently with worldly prudence, are temptations — dangerous, and too often successful, temptations — to forego a greater temporal good for a less; i.e., to forego what is, upon the whole, our temporal interest for the sake of a present gratification.  
(Analogy, I, iv, p. 64)

We are tempted to abandon both our future (or eternal) and our present (or temporal) interest "by the very same passions, excited by the very same means". Prudence, no less than morality and religion, therefore "renders self-denial necessary" (loc. cit.). We are constantly "in danger of missing" our true interest, "and without attention and self-denial must and do miss it": indeed, "the voluntarily denying ourselves many things which we desire, and a course of behaviour, far from being always agreeable to us, are absolutely necessary" if we are to enjoy the

<sup>89</sup> The phrase is from Robert South's sermon on I Samuel 25:32-3, "Prevention of Sin an Invaluable Mercy", to which Harrison alludes rather slightly. See Battestin's footnote on this passage (p. 391, n. 3).

<sup>90</sup> Fielding's metaphors are in keeping with the use of masks in the emblematic tradition: see Maren-Sofie Røstvig, "Tom Jones and the Choice of Hercules", in Røstvig, ed., Fair Forms: Essays in English Literature from Spenser to Jane Austen, Cambridge, 1975, pp. 147-77, esp. pp. 160, 168-9, and Plate 4. Røstvig relates this particularly to the confrontation between Tom Jones and Lady Bellaston at the masquerade (TJ, XIII, vii).

greatest possible happiness in this world (Analogy, I, iv, pp. 68, 67).

That certain kinds of self-denial are prudentially "necessary" is another obvious lesson of Wilson's autobiography in Joseph Andrews. Wilson learns this the hard way, finding himself regularly "forced to do Penance" for his mistakes (III, iii, p. 206). This of course is euphemistic slang, but penitence is another moral concept that is quite at home in a prudential context. Towards the end of Tom Jones, Mrs Miller urges the imprisoned hero to "be wise enough to take Warning from past Follies" (XVII, v, p. 894). What she means, more precisely, is that Jones should take warning from the consequences of his "Follies". And in a later conversation with Mrs Waters, this is exactly what he resolves to do:

He...lamented the Follies and Vices of which he had been guilty; every one of which, he said, had been attended with such ill Consequences, that he should be unpardonable if he did not take Warning, and quit those vicious Courses for the future. He lastly concluded with assuring her of his Resolution to sin no more, lest a worse Thing should happen to him. (TJ, XVII, ix, p. 911)

A "worse Thing" happens only a few pages later, when Partridge raises the "incest" alarm, and Jones seems to be going the way of Oedipus. It is at this point that Jones experiences a true prudential anagnorisis. As Butler observes, virtue and prudence may be two quite different things, but we are naturally "formed so as to reflect very severely upon the greater instances of imprudent neglects and foolish rashness", whether in ourselves or in others:

In instances of this kind, men often say of themselves with remorse, and of others with some indignation, that they deserved to suffer such calamities, because they brought them upon themselves, and would not take warning. (Dissertation, para. 6: 15 Sermons, p. 151)

This is exactly the kind of "penitential Behaviour" displayed by the impetuous hero of Tom Jones (XVII, ix, p. 911). With the "incest" scare, he feels what Barrow calls "that stinging remorse, which doth adhere to reflections upon past follies" ("Repentance", Works, I, 460):

'Sure,' cries Jones, 'Fortune will never have done with me, till she hath driven me to Distraction. But why do I blame Fortune? I am myself the Cause of all my Misery. All the dreadful Mischiefs which have befallen me, are the Consequences only of my own Folly and Vice.' (TJ, XVIII, ii, pp. 915-6)



It transpires, of course, that Jones is innocent of incest, as he is of murder, but Fielding is surely making a serious point. For all Jones knew at the time, Mrs Waters might have been his mother, and Fitzpatrick might have been fatally wounded. In either case his "penitential Behaviour" would have been ineffectual because too late.<sup>91</sup> But this "stinging remorse" is the last of Jones's punishments. Having made his point, Fielding releases the penitent from the consequences of his "Follies and Vices". These prison scenes could be said to dramatize the genesis of prudence. As Jones explains to Allworthy, soon after the eleventh-hour reversal of his fortunes:

'...I thank Heaven I have had Time to reflect on my past Life, where, though I cannot charge myself with any gross Villainy, yet I can discern Follies and Vices more than enough to repent and be ashamed of; Follies which have been attended with dreadful Consequences to myself, and have brought me to the Brink of Destruction.' (TJ, XVIII, x, p. 959)

In the light of bitter experience, Jones is able to foresee the probable consequences of further irregularity, and very prudently resolves to mend his ways. Every man's future is largely determined by his own past, but the prudent man's future is also determined by an understanding of that past. Here are Fielding's final remarks on the improved character of his hero:

Whatever in the Nature of Jones had a Tendency to Vice, hath been corrected... He hath also, by Reflexion on his past Follies, acquired a Discretion and Prudence very uncommon in one of his lively Parts. (TJ, XVIII, xiii, p. 981)

Jones has at last begun to think about his own "true Interest". Unless we suppose that Fielding was always indifferent to the fate of his own hero, or that Jones's approach to "the Brink of Destruction" was in fact nothing of the kind, it seems to me that we must regard this prudential reformation as the culmination of Fielding's principal didactic theme.

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<sup>91</sup> Cf. Butler, Analogy: "If, during the opportunity of youth, persons... have been guilty of folly and extravagance up to a certain degree, it is often in their power...to retrieve their affairs, to recover their health and character, at least in good measure; yet real reformation is in many cases of no avail at all towards preventing the miseries, poverty, sickness, infamy, naturally annexed to folly and extravagance exceeding that degree. There is a certain bound to imprudence and misbehaviour, which, being transgressed, there remains no place for repentance in the natural course of things" (I, ii, pp. 35-6).



### CHAPTER III

#### VIRTUE, INTEREST, AND WISDOM: THE PRUDENTIAL SYLLOGISM

"To pursue that which is most capable of giving him Happiness", says Fielding, "is indeed the Interest of every Man" (CGJ, No. 44: Jensen, II, 9). It cannot be said too emphatically that "Interest" was not a dirty word for Fielding or his Anglican contemporaries. In the typical vocabulary of Latitudinarian pulpit oratory, the words "interest" and "profit" are among the most conspicuous. "Profit" could be said to be Isaac Barrow's homiletic shibboleth, the key word in a rhetorical idiom dominated by economic metaphors. His sermons, many of which are characteristically preoccupied with demonstrating that virtue and "profit" are one and the same thing, feature a recurrent hortatory appeal to self-interest. Like Fielding, Barrow believes "the Passion of Self-love" (TP, No. 25: Locke, p. 203) to be entirely natural and proper, and thinks it neither possible nor desirable to suppress or eradicate it. As a moralist, he is concerned not about the exercise but about the misdirection of this "invincible principle of self-love" ("Future Judgment Reasonable", Works, II, 376):

No man doth undertake or prosecute anything, which he doth not apprehend in some order or degree conducing to that which all men under a confused notion regard and tend to, which they call happiness, the highest good, the chiefest desirable thing. But in their judgments about this thing, or the means of attaining it, as men dissent much; so of necessity most of them must be mistaken. ("Profitableness", Works, I, 24: my emphasis)

All men are self-lovers,<sup>1</sup> but few can be said to love themselves wisely. According to Fielding, likewise, few are "capable of judging, or rightly pursuing their own Happiness" (or "Interest") ("An Essay on Conversation", Miscellanies I, p. 124).<sup>2</sup> In the True Patriot, he vents a fear that the principle of self-love has been practically inverted by the chronically

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<sup>1</sup> As Butler puts it, "every man in everything he does, naturally acts upon the forethought and apprehension of avoiding evil or obtaining good" (Analogy, I, ii, p. 31).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Whichcote, Select Sermons, I, vi: "The most vile and profligate Wretches that are, who are most opposite to that which is their true Happiness, they are not against Happiness itself; but they mistake about it, and erroneously substitute something else in the Room of it" (p. 142).



imprudent majority:

NOTwithstanding the universal Desire of Happiness which Nature hath implanted in the Mind of every Man, such are the Mistakes both in Opinion and Practice, and so far are the Actions of the Generality of Mankind from having any visible Tendency towards their own real Good, that one is sometimes tempted to predicate of the human Species, that Man is an Animal which industriously seeks his own Misery.  
(TP, No. 6: Locke, p. 75)

Most men, as Barrow says, "do aim and shoot at a mere shadow of profit", at "that which little conduceth to the perfection of their nature, or the satisfaction of their desire" ("Profitableness", Works, I, 24). Most spend their time "scraping, scrambling, scuffling for particular interest" (that is, "interest" too narrowly defined), pushed on by their "high esteem and passion for, and greedy appetite of wealth, of honours, of corporeal pleasures" ("Love", Works, I, 236). The common man is firmly attached to "the World", Benjamin Hoadly's (Pauline) collective term for this profane triad:

...it is most evident that by the World [as used in I Corinthians 7:31], we are to understand, whatever this World contains in it; whatever it can boast of as on any Account desirable; and particularly, whatever there is in it, that Men are seen to think it most worth their while to pursue after, and to obtain. All this may be reduced to these three, Riches, Honour, and Pleasure; the three great Masters of the Affections, and Actions, of Those who think most of this World.<sup>3</sup>

According to Barrow, "that which takes the chief place; which the world most dotes on" is "secular state and grandeur, might and prowess, honour and reputation", "all the objects of human pride and ambition". Coming a close second is material wealth, "that great and general idol...in the possession of which men commonly deem the greatest happiness doth consist". A third man "placeth all his happiness in sensual enjoyment", enthralled by the "great witch", pleasure ("Consideration", Works, I, 433, 435, 438, 435). These are the chosen idols of "vulgar opinion": these are what constitute "the profit the world so greedily gapes after" ("Pleasantness", Works, I, 5).

Despite the implied contemptus mundi, the Latitudinarian Anglicans were certainly not ascetics. What they challenged and condemned was the

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<sup>3</sup> "Of the true Use of this World", Twenty Sermons, IV, p. 68.



mistaken and idolatrous supposition that happiness is directly proportionate to material wealth, secular honour, or sensual gratification, that "interest" is uniquely constituted by these things. Much of Fielding's writing challenges the same supposition. "Human happiness is surely placed in being rich", he declares, posing ironically as Man of the World (Champion, 26 January 1739/40: Henley, XV, 172).<sup>4</sup> His "MODERN GLOSSARY", which satirizes the impoverished values of the beau monde, defines "HAPPINESS" in one word: "Grandeur" (CGJ, No. 4: Jensen, I, 156). And in Tom Jones he glances critically at "those modern Epicures, who place all Felicity in the abundant Gratification of every sensual Appetite" (XV, i, p. 783). Fielding and the Anglicans persistently attempt to discredit these definitions of happiness or "interest". This does of course reflect a simple practical purpose: if you can demonstrate that the profane triad does not constitute unalloyed felicity, you may succeed in suppressing the vices of avarice, ambition and debauchery. But it also reflects a confident belief that these definitions are demonstrably false, a genuine conviction that happiness cannot be measured in terms of riches, grandeur or sensual pleasure, and that the pursuit of happiness in the acquisition or enjoyment of these things (and these things alone) is invariably self-defeating.

The assault on mistaken definitions of interest takes two distinct forms. There is, first, a specifically Christian challenge, which depends heavily on appeals to revelation. At its simplest, this argument centres on evaluative comparisons between the good things of this world and the infinitely better things of the next. This comparative strategy can be found everywhere in Barrow's sermons.<sup>5</sup> Religion is recommended as "a project...very feasible and probable to succeed, in pursuance whereof assuredly we might obtain great profit", which will "exceedingly turn to account, and bring in gains unto us unspeakably vast; in comparison whereto all other designs...are very unprofitable or detrimental, yielding but shadows of profit, or bringing real damage to us" ("Profitableness", Works, I, 9: my emphases). When compared with the eternal and infinite benefits of religion, secular goods can be dismissed, in quasi-Platonic fashion, as mere "shadows" of the "true profit" yielded by piety (I, 15).

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Fielding's characterization of Nightingale Senior, the definitive "Man of the World", in TJ, XIV, viii, pp. 771-2.

<sup>5</sup> See especially his two sermons on "The Consideration of Our Latter End" (Works, I, 430-39, 440-49), particularly the second.



By devoting ourselves to the pursuit of such things,

...what do we gain? what, but a little flashy and transient pleasure, instead of a solid and durable peace; but a little counterfeit profit, instead of real wealth; but a little smoke of deceitful opinion, instead of unquestionably sound honour; shadows of imaginary goods, instead of those which are most substantial and true... ("Repentance", Works, I, 463)

Fielding's Parson Adams is employing a conventional homiletic device when he declares that "the greatest Gain in this World is but Dirt in comparison of what shall be revealed hereafter" (JA, II, iii, p. 100). In the Champion (19 April 1740), Fielding asks: "Is there a man on earth fool enough to prefer an entertainment or a feast to sixty years long, uninterrupted felicity? How weak is this comparison to illustrate the immense distance between the trifling, short enjoyments of this world and eternity...". Deliberately labouring the self-evident, Fielding puts together a didactic syllogism in which one premiss is that "eternal and infinite happiness is infinitely preferable to that which is very confined in its degree, and very short in duration" (Henley, XV, 285, 286).<sup>6</sup>

The same vast disjunction is a major premiss of Barrow's argument against secular values, and against the faulty vocabulary that goes with them. Piety, Barrow insists, is no "enemy to profit". Nothing, indeed, could be further from the truth: "Piety doth virtually comprise within it all other profits, serving all the designs of them all" ("Profitableness", Works, I, 9, 13). Barrow concedes with typical shrewdness that wealth, honour and pleasure do indeed constitute the summum bonum, but at the same time redefines these desiderata in Christian terms, concluding that the pious man enjoys them all in an infinitely higher degree than the worldly man, and is therefore incomparably happier:

The pious man is in truth most honourable... He is dignified by most illustrious titles, as son of God, a friend and favourite to the sovereign King of the world, an heir of

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Addison, Spectator, No. 575 (2 August 1714): "The Question we are all concerned in is this, In which of these two Lives it is our chief Interest to make our selves happy? or, in other Words, Whether we should endeavour to secure to our selves the Pleasures and Gratifications of a Life which is uncertain and precarious, and at its utmost Length of a very inconsiderable Duration; or to secure to our selves the Pleasures of a Life which is fixed and settled, and will never end?" The Spectator, ed. Donald F. Bond, Oxford, 1965, IV, 566. All subsequent references are to this edition.



heaven, a denizen of the Jerusalem above: titles far surpassing all those which worldly state doth assume...

The pious man also doth enjoy the only true pleasures; hearty, pure, solid, durable pleasures...in comparison whereto all other pleasures are no more than brutish sensualities, sordid impurities, superficial touches, transient flashes of delight; such as...are tinged with sourness and bitterness, have painful remorse or qualms consequent. (I, 13)

Only the pious man enjoys true honour, and true pleasures; and he alone is truly rich:

He that hath it [piety] is ipso facto vastly rich, is entitled to immense treasures of most precious wealth; in comparison whereto, all the gold and all the jewels in the world are mere baubles. He hath interest in God, and can call him his, who is the all, and in regard to whom all things existent are less than nothing... All the inestimable treasures of heaven (a place infinitely more rich than the Indies) are his, after this moment of life, to have and to hold for ever... Piety therefore is profitable, as immediately instating in wealth... (I, 13)

In this sense, wealth, honour and pleasure "do in the best kind and highest degree result from piety, and indeed only from it": set against the "true profit" yielded by religion, "all other profits...are but imaginary and counterfeit, mere shadows and illusions", and "whoever fancieth any true profit without piety" is "extremely mistaken, and in all his projects will be lamentably disappointed" (I, 14, 15). The touchstone of revelation thus exposes the relative worthlessness of secular goods, and proves the world's working definitions of "profit" or "interest" to be fatuously misguided.<sup>7</sup>

Barrow exploits the clash between secular and Christian values as a fertile source of rhetorical paradoxes. It allows him to argue that the devoted pursuit of "bare worldly wealth (that which usurpeth the name of profit here)" (I, 15) is in reality the certain road to poverty. The vocabulary of the world is deliberately turned on its head. Possession becomes dispossession:

If we are ambitious of having a property in somewhat, or affect to call any thing our own, 'tis only by nobly giving that we can accomplish our desire; that will certainly

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. the argument of Hoadly's "Of the true Use of this World", Twenty Sermons, IV. See esp. pp. 83-4.



appropriate our goods to our use and benefit: but from basely keeping, or vainly embezzling them, they become not our possession and enjoyment, but our theft and our bane.<sup>8</sup>

Wealth becomes poverty. We shall find, eventually, that

...to die rich, as men are wont improperly to speak, is really to die most poor; that to have carefully kept our money, is to have lost it utterly; that...to have been wealthy, if we have been illiberal and unmerciful, will be no advantage or satisfaction to us after we are gone hence; yea, it will be the cause of huge damage and bitter regret to us. ("Bounty", Works, I, 301-2)

The only way to keep our riches is to give them away, "according to the exigencies of humanity and charity":

By thus ordering our riches, we shall render them benefits and blessings to us; we shall...truly die rich, and in effect carry all our goods along with us, or rather we have thereby sent them before us; having, like wise merchants, transmitted and drawn them by a most safe conveyance into our country and home; where infallibly we shall find them, and with everlasting content enjoy them. (I, 302)

And so on. Similar metaphors and similar paradoxes are not of course uncommon in the Bible. But Barrow's extended use of these devices in "The Duty and Reward of Bounty to the Poor" could in many ways be said to typify the homiletic methods of Latitudinarian Anglicanism. The central, paradoxical redefinition of wealth and poverty is a fundamental premiss of Barrow's assertion that virtue (here, charity) and religion alone are truly "profitable". It also constitutes the basis of the economic metaphors to which he is so addicted. It allows him to address the world in the language of the world — to condemn the pursuit of "wealth" while encouraging the pursuit of wealth, to condemn the "profit"-motive while appealing to the profit-motive. The mercantile economy itself is Christianized:

The way to gain abundantly is, you know well, to trade boldly; he that will not adventure any thing considerable, how can he think of a large return?... 'Tis so likewise in the evangelical negotiations; if we put out much upon score of conscience or charity, we shall be sure to profit much.

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<sup>8</sup> "The Duty and Reward of Bounty to the Poor" (cited hereafter as "Bounty"), Works, I, 290.



Liberality is the most beneficial traffick that can be; it is bringing our wares to the best market; it is letting out our money into the best hands: we thereby lend our money to God, who repays with vast usury; an hundred to one is the rate he allows at present, and above a hundred millions to one he will render hereafter; so that if you will be merchants this way, you shall be sure to thrive, you cannot fail to grow rich most easily and speedily... ("Bounty", I, 305)

Given his paradoxical premises, Barrow can represent the whole Christian universe in the language of mercantilism. In terms of this vast economic metaphor, God becomes the Banker,<sup>9</sup> the Christian becomes a "merchant", and charity becomes a kind of "traffick". In God's good market-place, the liberal Christian's investment in the poor man's pocket yields nothing less than salvation: "for the goods he hath sold and delivered, he shall bona fide receive his bargain, the hidden treasure and precious pearl of eternal life" (I, 309: alluding to Matthew 13:45-6). This is the distinctive idiom of Latitudinarian pulpit oratory. Christianity is addressed to the bourgeoisie in their own language, and made to appeal directly to the profit-motive.<sup>10</sup>

In a sense, Barrow is attempting to make his congregation truly prudent. In his sermons, all the elements and functions of prudence are at one time or another represented in terms of the economic metaphor. To evaluate goods and evils wisely is "to assign every thing its due price". We are urged to "tax the things concerning us, whether good or bad, relating to this life, or to our future state", and to "judge truly concerning them, what their just price is, how much of affection, care, and endeavour they deserve to have expended on them". We are exhorted in particular to "examine...whether the most valued things in this world deserve that estimate which they bear in the common market" ("Consideration", Works, I, 432, 433). The prudent man, perceiving and understanding the infinite superiority of heavenly over worldly

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Dryden, The Hind and the Panther, I, 148-9: "Faith is the best ensurer of thy bliss; / The Bank above must fail before the venture miss." The Poems and Fables of John Dryden, ed. James Kinsley, 1962, p. 358.

<sup>10</sup> On this aspect of Latitudinarianism, cf. Jacob, The Newtonians and the English Revolution, Ch. i, esp. pp. 50 ff. Jacob takes a rather black view of the appeal to interest, evidently failing to take account of the crucial distinction between secular and Christian "profit", and therefore concluding that the Anglicans were defending or rationalizing the market economy per se (see esp. p. 54). But I think there was more than a streak of satiric irony in their appropriation of mercantile terminology.



commodities, will gladly exchange them:

Experiencing that our trade about these petty commodities turns to small account, and that in the end we shall be nothing richer thereby; reason will induce us, with the merchant in the Gospel, to sell all that we have (to forego our present interests and designs) for the purchasing that rich pearl of God's kingdom, which will yield so exceeding profit... (I, 442: alluding to Matthew 13:46)

The wisest "traders", by a long way, are those who thus agree to "exchange brittle glass for solid gold; counterfeit glistening stones for genuine most precious jewels; a garland of fading flowers for an incorruptible crown of glory; a small temporary pension for a vastly rich freehold" (I, 444). This is infinitely the best bargain we can make, since the "price" of the goods we acquire is infinitely exceeded by their value. Any other bargain we make will be a poorer one than this. But if, vice versa, the value of the goods we acquire is infinitely exceeded by their "price", we are consummately "unwise and perverse traders" (I, 444). The "price" of a particular end or good is constituted not only by the "care" and "endeavour" expended in attaining it, but also by the consequences of embracing it: the "price" of sin, therefore, apart from all its worldly penalties, is eternal torment. Sin is the bad bargain par excellence: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matthew 16:26).<sup>11</sup> The good Christian, on the other hand, is the most prudent of "traders". Prudence always buys or sells at a profit.

Religion, then, is "an employment most beneficial to us: in pursuing which...we do not, like those in the Prophet, spend our labour for that which satisfieth not, nor spend our money for that which is not bread" ("Profitableness", Works, I, 25: alluding to Isaiah 55:2). But material riches are not only comparatively worthless. They are also "the root of all evils unto us, and the greatest obstructions of our true happiness, rendering salvation almost impossible, and heaven in a manner inaccessible to us": to be rich, if we are not also rich in the truer sense, is therefore "a great disease" ("Bounty", Works, I, 304). Worldly self-aggrandisement, at the expense of the Christian virtues, is directly contrary to our "true happiness": "for commensurate to our works shall

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Hooker's use of this text to illustrate the laws of practical wisdom: Laws, I.viii.5: Works, I, 228-9.



our rewards be; the fewer our good works are in the course of the present life, the smaller shall be the measures of joy, of glory, of felicity, dispensed to us hereafter" ("Repentance", Works, I, 459). Every sin of omission committed for the sake of "counterfeit profit" diminishes our store of "real wealth": while we postpone reformation, or defer our acts of charity, "we let our interest lie dead by lingering" and "our spiritual estate doth thereby hugely suffer; every minute contracteth a damage, that...will amount to an immense sum" (I, 463, 459). The less good we do in this world, the less we can expect in the next: "so much time as we spend in disobedience, so much of reward do we forfeit" (I, 459). But, as Fielding warns in the Champion, "by pursuing the delights of sin ...we not only forfeit eternal happiness, but shall suffer eternal misery" (19 April 1740: Henley, XV, 286). It is in this sense that the sinner "doth not know his true Interest" (CGJ, No. 44: Jensen, II, 9).

According to Barrow, virtue and piety are the highest functions of practical wisdom, since these are "our main concernment, our only way to happiness; the necessary condition of our attaining salvation": any deviation from the uniquely profitable way of godliness is therefore also a deviation from the way of prudence; and a life of sin is in the same sense coequal with downright folly, because "disobedience is the certain road to perdition; that which...assuredly will throw us into a state of eternal sorrow and wretchedness" ("Repentance", Works, I, 450). Any degree of attachment to sin implies a commensurate degree of folly, even derangement. Sin is "the certain road" to hell, with all its exquisite torments:

And what wise man, what man in his right senses, would for one minute stand obnoxious to them? Who, that anywise tendereth his own welfare, would move one step forward in so perilous and destructive a course? (I, 451: my emphases)

If...we mean to be saved (and are we so wild as not to mean it?) if we do not renounce felicity (and do we not then renounce our wits?) to become virtuous, to proceed in a course of obedience, is a work that necessarily must be performed... (I, 450: my emphases)

This characteristic inference from sin or vice to folly or madness is logically dependent on the causal connexion between sin and misery. All conduct which leads directly to misery is, by definition, foolish. If sin is "extremely dangerous and destructive", it is also "very foolish": in turn, it can be inferred that the sinner must be "mad or senseless"



(I, 456, 451). If the price of immoderate pleasure, honour, or wealth is damnation, it follows that the voluptuous, the ambitious, and the avaricious are "downright fools and madmen". In terms of the economic metaphor, they make "a very disadvantageous bargain", they are consummately "unwise and perverse traders" (I, 445, 444).

We find the same logic everywhere in Fielding's work, most explicitly in the journalism. Here, in the Covent-Garden Journal, he applies it specifically to adultery:

In that First and most perfect Table of Law, which God himself was pleased to divulge among the Jews; Adultery is among the ten Articles expressly forbidden; and in this Table it follows immediately after the Crime of Murder, to which it was equalled in its Punishment: for in Leviticus [12:10] we read. The Man that committeth Adultery, even he that committeth Adultery shall surely be put to Death. Well therefore might the wise Author of the Proverb say, Whoso committeth Adultery lacketh Understanding. (CGJ, No. 67: Jensen, II, 116)<sup>12</sup>

Fielding adds a touch of sardonic humour to the conventional logic by lending to his second biblical text the force of ironic understatement, but his reasoning is the same as Barrow's: if adultery leads to death, the adulterer is a fool. Since the "foolish" is that which leads to misery, Fielding's argument would hold true even if the adulterer himself were ignorant of the threatened punishment, or declined to take the threat seriously. The folly of sin becomes much more conspicuous, however, if the sinner knows the commandment, knows what the punishment is, and believes that the punishment will be forthcoming. In the context of religion, sinful practice implies either infidelity or folly. Here, in the Champion leader for 19 April 1740, Fielding reflects on the implications of vicious living among the clergy (or, rather, a minority of the clergy), "who...may in a manner be said to have Heaven and Hell continually before their eyes":

It is...impossible that these (if they are endowed with a steady faith and a moderate understanding) should advisedly, knowingly, and deliberately, forfeit the former, and risk the latter. Is there a man on earth fool enough to prefer an entertainment or a feast to sixty years long, uninterrupted felicity? How weak is this comparison to illustrate the immense distance between the trifling, short enjoyments of this world

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. the logic of Dr Harrison's letter against adultery in Amelia, X, ii, pp. 413-6.

and eternity; and can we believe that any man would be mad enough, would be fool enough, deliberately to prefer the former of these to the latter, unless he doubted, nay very greatly doubted, whether the offer in reversion depended on as much certainty as that in possession...

What then can the most candid man conclude of a clergyman, whom he beholds pursuing the very measures which the Gospel shows him lead to the incurring eternal misery, and avoiding that road which would conduct him to infinite happiness, unless but that he is an idiot or an unbeliever? (Henley, XV, 285-6: my emphases)

Since faith combined with genuine practical "understanding" would naturally generate a prudent obedience to God's laws, it can be confidently inferred that the sinful believer is an idiot.

The same psychological inference is a favourite of Barrow's. Any man "being thoroughly persuaded" of the prospect of a future judgment, "and anywise considering it, he cannot surely but accuse himself of extreme folly and madness if he doth not provide for that account, and order all his practice with a regard thereto" ("Future Judgment Reasonable", Works, II, 383). "Infinitely stupid and obdurate we must be", if such a persuasion "doth not produce these effects": "if we do not accordingly choose to demean ourselves, how infinitely careless are we of our own good, how desperately bent to our own ruin!" We are "infinitely mad", we are "extremely enemies, and injurious to ourselves", we are "monstrously sottish or wild", if we believe in heaven and hell but go on sinning.<sup>13</sup> Whether it be owing to "stupidity, that we do not apprehend the importance of the affair", or to "improvidence, that we do not attend to the danger of persisting in sin", vicious practice is in one way or another attributable to imprudence ("Repentance", Works, I, 457).

According to Barrow, prudence (or rational self-love) will always dictate virtue. Given that obedience to God is our "true interest", that

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<sup>13</sup> "Life Everlasting" (from "A Short Explication of the Remaining Articles of the Creed"), Works, II, 418, 419. Cf. JW, IV, xiii, where the Newgate ordinary treats Fielding's hero to the same lessons: "had I the eloquence of Cicero, or of Tully, it would not be sufficient to describe the pains of hell or the joys of heaven... Who then would, for the pitiful consideration of the riches and pleasures of this world, forfeit such inestimable happiness! such joys! such pleasures! such delights? Or who would run the venture of such misery, which, but to think on, shocks the human understanding? Who, in his senses, then, would prefer the latter to the former?" (All this sounds very much like Barrow, barring the ordinary's ignorance of the fact that Cicero and Tully are names for the same man.) "Ay, who indeed?", replies Wild, "I assure you, doctor, I had much rather be happy than miserable. But \* \* \* \* " (Henley, II, 191-2).



which "will in the final event prove most beneficial to us" ("Self-Love", Works, I, 536, 535), true self-love will always generate obedience. This recurrent lesson of Latitudinarian homiletics can be represented in simple syllogistic terms:

1. Prudence determines and dictates the most profitable way of life.
2. Virtue is the only truly profitable way of life.
3. Ergo: Prudence dictates the practice of virtue.

We might call this the Prudential Syllogism. It lies at the very heart of Latitudinarian Anglican thinking. "Duty and interest are perfectly coincident", says Butler, "for the most part in this world, but entirely and in every instance if we take in the future, and the whole": if we appreciate this, "if we understand our true happiness", therefore, self-love "does in general perfectly coincide with virtue; and leads us to one and the same course of life" ("Upon Human Nature", 15 Sermons, III, 8-9: my emphasis). Or, as Butler puts it in the Analogy:

...self-love, considered merely as an active principle leading us to pursue our chief interest, cannot but be uniformly coincident with the principle of obedience to God's commands, our interest being rightly understood; because this obedience, and the pursuit of our own chief interest, must be in every case one and the same thing... (I, v, p. 89)

The Prudential Syllogism is implicit in much of Fielding's writing, and becomes almost explicit in the Champion (22 January 1739/40):

Was there no future state, it would be surely the interest of every virtuous man to wish there was one; and supposing it certain, every wise man must naturally become virtuous. (Henley, XV, 163)

In the context of Christian faith, self-love necessarily implies virtue: "so little cause is there for moralists to disclaim this principle", remarks Butler (Analogy, I, v, p. 80, n. 1). It was certainly not disclaimed by Fielding. In Joseph Andrews, for instance, we find a very Barrowesque appeal to this "principle". Adams is outraged by a pack of slanderous lies he has just heard, concerning a neighbour of the innkeeper. The innkeeper, in turn, is surprised by Adams's righteous indignation: "surely out of love to one's self, one must speak better of

a Friend than an Enemy", he suggests.<sup>14</sup>

'Out of love to your self, you should confine yourself to Truth,' says Adams, 'for by doing otherwise, you injure the noblest Part of yourself, your immortal Soul. I can hardly believe any Man such an Idiot to risque the Loss of that by any trifling Gain, and the greatest Gain in this World is but Dirt in comparison of what shall be revealed hereafter.'  
(JA, II, iii, pp. 99-100)

The lesson and the idiom are entirely typical of Adams's Anglican models. The implied contrast between 'true' and 'false' species of self-love is one to which I shall return.

According to Barrow, the good Christian's prospective gains in the next world are also a considerable source of felicity in the present. Obedience to God is a necessary condition of happiness in this world: it is "the certain means of our present security and comfort" as well as of "our final salvation and happiness"; it is "that unto which all real blessings here", as well as "all bliss hereafter", are "inseparably annexed"; in short, "it is a gross absurdity in nature, that a man should be happy without being good" ("Repentance", Works, I, 450). Disobedience, on the other hand, is the equally certain road to present misery. Our happiness or misery in this world depends upon obedience or disobedience precisely because our future and eternal fate depends upon it. Christian belief, particularly belief in the certainty of a future judgment, involves the passions of hope and fear — the active constituents of the Christian conscience. If these passions fulfil their primary end, and conspire to induce obedience, this obedience will in turn generate or reinforce the hope of reward. If, on the other hand, religious hopes and fears are prevailed over by baser impulses, and disobedience results, this disobedience will in turn generate or reinforce the fear of punishment. A sense of desert redoubles the force of the passion, which subsequently functions as a reward or a punishment in itself. It is through these uniquely potent passions that the doctrine of future rewards and punishments is internalized. Barrow's summary account of the value of belief in this doctrine can usefully be quoted here:

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Mrs Honour's twisted notions of self-love in TJ, VII, vii, p. 350. Apparently, she has only half understood the "Parsons".



In fine, there is no consideration able to promise so much efficacy toward the rousing our passions, or duly ordering and setting them upon religious practice. It especially is apt to set on work those two grand engines and mighty springs of activity, hope and fear; and with them to raise their respective companions, joy and grief: for how, if we have been very culpable in the transgression or neglect of our duty, can we reflect on this point without being seized with an hideous dread of coming to so strict a trial, of falling under so heavy a sentence? how can we think of it without a bitter remorse? Hard as rocks surely we must be, if such thoughts do not pierce us; utterly dead and senseless must our hearts be, if they do not feel the sting of such considerations...

If, on the other hand, we are conscious to ourselves of having seriously and carefully endeavoured to please God, and obey his commandments, how can we think of it without a comfortable hope of finding mercy and favour in that day!<sup>15</sup>

Joy and grief are the "respective companions" of hope and fear. This is commonplace seventeenth-century psychology. According to Hobbes, "Hope is expectation of good to come, as fear is the expectation of evil"; and all expectation, no less than "sense", involves "pleasure or pain present".<sup>16</sup> In the psychology of Leviathan, "Pleasure...or delight, is the apparence, or sense of good; and molestation, or displeasure, the apparence, or sense of evil". Hobbes distinguishes two principal kinds of pleasure and displeasure:

Of pleasures and delights, some arise from the sense of an object present; and those may be called pleasure of sense ... Of this kind are all onerations and exonerations of the body; as also all that is pleasant, in the sight, hearing, smell, taste, or touch. Others arise from the expectation, that proceeds from foresight of the end, or consequence of things; whether those things in the sense please or displease. And these are pleasures of the mind of him that draweth those consequences, and are generally called JOY. In the like manner, displeasures are some in the sense, and called PAIN; others in the expectation of consequences, and are called GRIEF.<sup>17</sup>

The foresight of future pleasures or pains of "sense" gives rise to a present pleasure or pain "of the mind". Locke's definitions of hope and

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<sup>15</sup> "The Certainty and Circumstances of a Future Judgment from Revelation" (cited hereafter as "Future Judgment Certain"), Works, II, 397.

<sup>16</sup> Human Nature, Chs. ix, viii: Works, IV, 44, 35.

<sup>17</sup> Leviathan, I, vi: Works, III, 42-3.



fear embrace these mental "companions":

Hope is that pleasure in the Mind, which every one finds in himself, upon the thought of a probable future enjoyment of a thing, which is apt to delight him.

Fear is an uneasiness of the Mind, upon the thought of future Evil likely to befall us. (Essay, II.xx.9-10, p. 231)

(In Locke's vocabulary, "uneasiness" signifies a combination of pain, or displeasure, and the desire to be rid of it.)<sup>18</sup> Hope and fear, though directly relative to the future, involve a certain present feeling of pleasure or pain, joy or grief: hope, or the expectation of happiness, is itself a species of happiness; fear, or the expectation of pain, is itself a species of misery. "By these two Passions", as Addison says, "we... suffer Misery, and enjoy Happiness, before they are in Being".<sup>19</sup>

The psychological transposition of expectation into experience, of hope and fear into joy and grief, is prominently featured in Barrow's lengthy account of "the immense profitableness of piety" ("Profitableness", Works, I, 10). The inner well-being of the good Christian is uniquely complete. Piety, says Barrow, "yieldeth to the practiser all kind of interior content, peace, and joy; freeth him from all kinds of dissatisfaction, regret, and disquiet": if we observe the godly man, "we shall perceive him to have a cheerful mind and composed passions; to be at peace within, and satisfied with himself"; study the sinner, on the other hand, and "you will find his mind galled with sore remorse, racked with anxious fears and doubts, agitated with storms of passion and lust..., jarring with others, and no less dissatisfied with himself" (I, 20, 19, 20). Again and again, Barrow contrasts the "vexations and disquiets which sin produceth" with the "pure satisfaction and delight" of piety (I, 14, 13). To repent and apply ourselves to obedience "is in effect nothing else but, from a present hell in trouble, and the danger of a final hell in torment, to be translated into a double heaven; one of joyful tranquillity here, another of blissful rest hereafter" ("Repentance", Works, I, 463). The lesson could hardly be stated more clearly than this:

Happiness, whatever it be, hath certainly an essential coherence with piety. These are reciprocal propositions, both of them infallibly true. He that is pious is happy; and, He that is happy is pious. ("Profitableness", Works, I, 24)

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<sup>18</sup> See the Essay, II.xx.6, II.xxi.31.

<sup>19</sup> Spectator, No. 471 (30 August 1712): Bond, ed., IV, 166.



Christian felicity is in many respects a function of hope. The pious man's "joyful tranquillity here" is explicitly dependent upon the promise of "blissful rest hereafter": all his "performances of duty and of devotion are full of pure satisfaction and delight here", and very largely because he believes that "they shall be rewarded with perfect and endless joy hereafter" (I, 13). His happiness, in other words, consists in the expectation of happiness — and "what is more delicious than hope?" ("Pleasantness", Works, I, 2). Faith, when combined with self-conscious obedience, will generate "a cheerful tranquillity of mind, and peace of conscience, in regard to our future state; that which St. Paul calleth all joy and peace in believing; which the apostle to the Hebrews termeth the confidence and rejoicing of hope" ("Faith", Works, II, 105: alluding to Romans 15:13, Hebrews 3:6). The pious man enjoys the "continual feast of a good conscience", and the main course at this feast is "the satisfaction resulting from...the hopes and anticipation of everlasting bliss", from "foretastes" of immortality ("Profitableness", Works, I, 13, 25).

Barrow can speak of a confident expectation, an "assured hope of reward" (I, 25), precisely because he views scripture as a kind of legal contract between God and man, a compendium of prescribed duties and sanctions.<sup>20</sup> Given the unambiguous terms of that contract, and the indubitable trustworthiness of God's word, the obedient Christian can reasonably expect to receive the promised reward. The pious man has "a good title to" the "perfect and endless joy" of heaven. This being so, "how can he be otherwise than extremely pleased, than fully content?"

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<sup>20</sup> Barrow frequently talks of revelation as if it were some kind of legal document, in which God has kindly set out the precise terms and conditions of salvation, the quid pro quo of duties and rewards: "By it we are fully acquainted with the will and intentions of God, relating both to our duty and our recompense; what he requireth from us, and what he designeth for us; upon what terms he will proceed with us..." ("Faith", Works, II, 86). We are offered salvation "upon just, and fit, and withal very easy terms", all of which "conditions" are clearly published in the Gospel ("Of Justifying Faith", Works, II, 121). In terms of the economic metaphor, we can actually make ourselves God's creditors by fulfilling these various "conditions": we can "lay an engagement on him to do us good"; God permits us "to reckon him obliged" by our good works, and "to write him our debtor; engaging his own word and reputation duly to repay, fully to satisfy us" ("Bounty", Works, I, 289). The contract is binding, on both sides. In these terms, the obedient Christian may regard salvation not as a gift, nor even merely as a reward, but as a right. All this casts serious doubt on Donald Greene's argument for the essential continuity of Latitudinarian moral theology with the Articles of the Church (particularly XI-XIII, on faith and works): see "Latitudinarianism and Sensibility", pp. 164-9.



(I, 21). He "hath an interest in goods incomparably most precious", he "hath a right to immense and endless felicity, the which eminently containeth all the goods we are capable of; he is possessed thereof in hope and certain reversion" (note the legal term): in this sense, "if he be pious, he cannot be wretched" (I, 24). He enjoys the solid self-satisfaction of the investor who knows that his capital is earning the highest possible rate of interest. Only the pious man "knoweth...that he consulteth his own best interest and welfare" (I, 23).

Fielding echoes these sentiments in the Champion (22 January 1739/40), defending the doctrine of immortality on the grounds that it furnishes the good man with "delightful hopes", with an inexhaustible "spring of pleasure":

What a glorious, what a rapturous consideration must it be to the heart of man to think the goodness of the great God of nature concerned in his happiness? How must it elevate him in his own opinion? How transported must he be with himself? What ecstatic pleasure must he feel in his mind, when he presumes that his ways are pleasing to the all-powerful Creator of the universe? How transporting must be the thought that he is looked on with favour by the mighty Being, in whose will is all goodness and benevolence, and in whose power is all existence and all happiness? If this be a dream, it is such a one as infinitely exceeds all the paltry enjoyments this life can afford. (Henley, XV, 163-4)

This fulsome account of the "exquisite raptures" of religion (XV, 165) is typical of Fielding at this period. In Jonathan Wild one finds the very same thoughts expressed in the same grandiloquent terms by the faultlessly pious Heartfree (III, x: Henley, II, 128). For Fielding, as much as for Barrow, the happiness of the good man is consummated — on this side of the grave, at least — in the context of faith, and consists fundamentally in the "ecstatic imagination" of his expected future happiness (Champion, 4 March 1739/40: Henley, XV, 230).

On the other hand, as Barrow says, the "hideous dread" of future punishment is a misery, a "grief", in itself: "the danger of a final hell in torment" generates "a present hell" of fear and psychological anguish. The sinner, however wealthy, powerful or honourable in the eyes of the world, is in fact "subject to the worst evils": "he wanteth the love and favour of God, he wanteth peace and satisfaction of conscience, he wanteth...security concerning his final welfare" ("Profitableness", Works, I, 24). Without this ultimate "security", there can be no authentic, inward happiness: "It cannot be, that any man should enjoy any perfect



quiet, without acting so as to get some good hope of avoiding those dreadful mischiefs, which religion threateneth to the transgressors of its precepts" (I, 22). The pleasure of sin, Barrow insists, is an ignis fatuus: "How can a man enjoy any satisfaction, or relish any pleasure, while sore remorse doth sting him, or solicitous doubts and fears do rack him?" (I, 20). Even the professed sceptic, for all his bravado, is secretly subject to this radical anxiety:

To be in the least obnoxious to eternal torments, if men would think upon it as men (that is, as rational and provident creatures), could not but disturb them. And indeed so it is in experience; for whatever they say, or seem, all atheists and profane men are inwardly suspicious and fearful; they care not to die, and would gladly escape the trial of what shall follow death. (I, 22)

Again, this is a lesson dramatized by Fielding in Jonathan Wild, where Heartfree's pious self-enjoyment is diametrically contrasted with Wild's relentless self-oppression. Even Wild's histrionic indifference to morality and religion is shaken by an irrepressible eruption of fear. His soliloquy at sea, ostensibly giving expression to an heroic contempt of death, is actually an inept attempt to explain away his sub-heroic fears (note the ironic significance, in this context, of Wild's profanities): "D--n it, a man can die but once! what signifies it?... I never was afraid of anything yet, nor I won't begin now; no, d--n me, won't I. What signifies fear? I shall die whether I am afraid or no: who's afraid then, d--n me?" (II, xi: Henley, II, 89). Wild's self-inflicted misery, like the "present hell" suffered by Barrow's sinner, manifests itself continually as fear, which (as Fielding says elsewhere) "all the Wise agree is the most wretched of human Evils" (Miscellanies I, Preface, p. 11).

In Joseph Andrews, on the other hand, Fielding alludes to "a common Assertion that the greatest human Happiness consists in Hope" (II, iv, p. 106). Addison, for one, had asserted just this in the Spectator, declaring that "no kind of Life is so happy as that which is full of Hope, especially when the Hope is well grounded, and when the Object of it is of an exalted kind".<sup>21</sup> And there is no more "exalted" object than a benevolent deity. Religion, Barrow insists, is "the only mother of true, sober alacrity and tranquillity of mind", the only spring of authentic "inward content and pleasure" ("Profitableness", Works, I, 20). Mere

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<sup>21</sup> No. 471: Bond, ed., IV, 167.

secular hopes are inevitably ill-grounded. As Barrow warns, the man who places all his hope in worldly riches is doomed to disappointment. In reality, "riches do consist, not in what one enjoyeth at present (for that can be but little), but in a presumed ability to enjoy afterward what he may come to need or desire; or in well-grounded hopes that he shall never fall into want or distress":

How can that man be rich, who hath not any confidence in God, any interest in him, any reason to expect his blessing? yea, who hath much ground to fear the displeasure of him, in whose hand all things are, and who arbitrarily disposeth of all?  
(I, 15)

Godliness is "the only profitable thing, according to just esteem" (I, 15):

It is...piety alone, which, by raising hopes of blessings and joys incomparably superior to any here, that cannot be taken from us, can lay any ground of true content, of substantial and positive content; such as consisteth not only in removing the objects and causes of vexatious passions, but in employing the most pleasant affections (love, hope, joy) with a delightful complacence upon their proper and most noble objects. (I, 22)

Barrow argues insistently that the highest happiness in this world is conferred by faith. This is not to deny the pains and tribulations of mortality. But religious hope alone can "make the stoical paradox good, and cause the wise man to smile in extremity of torment" ("Pleasantness", Works, I, 3). The Christian remedy of affliction is not reason but hope: "for he that is persuaded...that blessing is his portion, and that an eternal heritage of joy is reserved for him; what ease must he find in his conscience, what comfort must possess his heart!" ("Faith", Works, II, 105). Precisely the same sentiment is voiced by Fielding's Heartfree, in the midst of his severest troubles: "what a ravishing thought, how replete with ecstasy, must the consideration be, that Almighty Goodness is by its own nature engaged to reward me!" (JW, III, x: Henley, II, 128). Wild himself, for all his matchless "greatness", does not of course enjoy this particular psychological comfort. The predator is in every respect less happy than his prey, but not least in his expectations of futurity.

Most of the time, however, Wild seems successfully to avoid thinking about his ultimate destination. And here, perhaps, lies the practical weakness of Anglican views about the punitive functions of fear. For Barrow, the good or bad Christian conscience is the highest in a set of



rewards and punishments annexed to the practice of virtue or vice in this world. The psychology of faith adds one more dimension to the coincidence of virtue and interest, and serves to confirm the Prudential Syllogism. But hope and fear are subjective, psychological phenomena — dependent not so much on the reality of eternal rewards and punishments as on a firm persuasion of their reality. The theological redefinition of "profit" or "interest" is ultimately weakened by the same disability. In the context of genuine faith, virtue and religion self-evidently constitute the most profitable modus vivendi. But even those who cherish some kind of Christian belief are perfectly capable of suppressing or suspending it whenever this seems convenient. When Parson Adams declares that "the greatest Gain in this World is but Dirt in comparison of what shall be revealed hereafter", his host retorts with the flippant confession that he is "for something present":

'And dost not thou...tremble,' cries Adams, 'at the Thought of eternal Punishment?' 'As for that, Master,' said he, 'I never once thought about it: but what signifies talking about matters so far off? the Mug is out, shall I draw another?' (JA, II, iii, p. 100)

Despite his professions of faith, this man's attachment to the good things of this world is so strong that he simply avoids thinking about the next. Until he finds himself in extremis, Jonathan Wild wears the same psychological blinkers. Barrow's preaching, for all its potent appeals to hope and fear, to self-love, would be effectively disarmed by this kind of "stupidity" and "improvidence".<sup>22</sup> Atheism would be even more disarming.

As long as the real existence of heaven and hell is taken for granted, the definition of man's "true interest" in terms of Christian virtue and piety makes irrefragable sense: if we accept the theological premises, we are compelled to accept the whole syllogism. But the argument obviously loses all its persuasive force outside the context of faith. The atheist or the sceptic, more or less unmoved by appeals to revelation, will very probably tend to define "interest" or happiness exclusively in terms of the secular triad. If it were not for religion, complains Butler, most men would probably do the same:

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<sup>22</sup> Barrow's terms: see above, p. 77.

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Take a survey of mankind: the world in general, the good and bad, almost without exception, equally are agreed, that were religion out of the case, the happiness of the present life would consist in a manner wholly in riches, honours, sensual gratifications; insomuch that one scarce hears a reflection made upon prudence, life, conduct, but upon this supposition. ("Upon Human Nature", 15 Sermons, I, 14)

Most men can be persuaded by Christianity that virtue and interest will ultimately coincide; but even these tend to suppose that their true and eternal interest can be secured only by sacrificing what they take to be their real worldly interests. In the common man, there is a tension between the acquired religious belief that virtue will be rewarded hereafter, and the deep-rooted common-sense supposition that virtue is without reward in this world. In this sense, life is generally experienced as a conflict between two incompatible notions of "interest" and, more radically, between what Barrow calls a "high esteem and passion for, and greedy appetite of wealth, of honours, of corporeal pleasures", and "those two grand engines and mighty springs of activity, hope and fear", which are aroused by the promises and threats of revelation ("Love", Works, I, 236; "Future Judgment Certain", Works, II, 397). Given this psychic scenario, virtue tends to be experienced as painful self-sacrifice in the face of strong temptation.

The Anglican moralists are typically devoted to the task of refuting the premises of this unnecessary conflict. They, and indeed Shaftesbury, seek in various ways to demonstrate that virtue and interest are coincident even in this world. Fielding directs this argument not only against the stubborn prejudices of the common man, but also against the counter-arguments of a certain "set of philosophers who have, it seems... found out, that virtue is the greatest evil, and that the surest and indeed only way to human happiness is utterly to pluck up by the roots that useless and pernicious weed, which every where obstructs men in all desirable pursuits" (Champion, 22 January 1740: Henley, XV, 161-2).<sup>23</sup> In their "war against virtue", these "philosophers" have first "endeavoured to ridicule and extirpate all our expectations of any future reward in another life; and secondly, they have represented it as directly incompatible with our happiness and advancement in this" (p. 163). This kind of thinking is for Fielding the most formidable of all the enemies

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<sup>23</sup> I suspect that Fielding is using the term "philosophers" ironically, as a label for the fashionable free-thinking libertines, whose idea of "philosophy" is merely the rationalization of unbridled hedonism. Cf. his treatment of the "Rule of Right-men" in JA, III, iii, pp. 212-3.



of morality. In response, with Shaftesbury and the Anglicans, "he everywhere teaches this moral":

That the greatest and truest happiness which this world affords, is to be found only in the possession of goodness and virtue; a doctrine, which as it is undoubtedly true, so hath it so noble and practical a tendency, that it can never be too often or too strongly inculcated on the minds of men. (Journey, Introduction: Henley, II, 213)

This "moral", which can indeed be found everywhere in Fielding's work, is not only "practical" — not only a useful rhetorical ploy: it is "undoubtedly true" that the moral and the prudential are naturally coincident.

Fielding's "doctrine" was ubiquitous in the work of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century moralists. But it also had an extensive and respectable pedigree.<sup>25</sup> One of the most relevant paradigms can be found in Book III of Cicero's De Officiis, which is taken up with a lengthy demonstration that "there can never be such a thing as a conflict between expediency [utilitas] and moral rectitude [honestas]" (III, ii, 9). It is "beyond question", Cicero declares, "that expediency can never conflict with moral rectitude" (III, iii, 11). The fact is that "nothing can be expedient which is not at the same time morally right"; honestas and utilitas are "naturally inseparable": "People overturn the fundamental principles established by Nature, when they divorce expediency from moral rectitude" (III, xxx, 110; III, iii, 11; III, xxviii, 101). Book III of De Officiis is an important classical paradigm of Butler's view that virtue and interest are "perfectly coincident" ("meaning by interest, happiness and satisfaction") ("Upon Human Nature", 15 Sermons, III, 9, 8). The same view is argued at almost Ciceronian length in Shaftesbury's Inquiry. It is one of the distinctive messages of Latitudinarian homiletics, and indeed of Fielding's major writings.

The contrary view, to which Cicero attributes all vice and crime (De Officiis, III, viii, 36), cannot of course be refuted by appealing to revelation: the doctrine of a future judgment is an impotent irrelevance in this controversy. Fielding and the Anglicans are compelled to argue from experience. Butler's manifest admiration for Shaftesbury — a deist and an eloquent critic of Anglican prudentialism — would be harder to

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<sup>25</sup> Apart from De Officiis, see also Plato's Republic, I, 347e-354c; II, 357a-367e; IX, 576b-592b.



understand were it not for this exigency. Butler's Preface to his Fifteen Sermons contains an explicit tribute to Shaftesbury, for having "shewn beyond all contradiction, that virtue is naturally the interest or happiness" and that "vice is naturally the misery of mankind in this world" (Preface, paras. 26, 30). The argument of the Inquiry is thought incontrovertible precisely because its premises are uniquely empirical: the coequality of virtue and interest is proved by appealing only to the evidence of experience. The empirical argument does however follow essentially the same pattern as its theological counterpart. The moralists' first task is to demonstrate that the world's typical definitions of interest or happiness are in themselves mistaken and indefensible — to prove that happiness is not constituted solely by material wealth, secular honours, or sensual pleasures. The empirical argument also resembles the theological in its emphasis on the punitive consequences of pursuing these things immoderately and at all costs. Avarice, ambition, and unbridled pleasure-seeking are declared to be naturally as well as theologically self-defeating.

It should be said again that the Latitudinarian Anglicans were not promoting any kind of asceticism. Like Fielding, who finds it "difficult ...to account for the merit of abstaining from the moderate use of those good things which the Almighty bounty hath bestowed on us" (Champion, 8 January 1739/40: Henley, XV, 142), Hoadly would not wish to deny that these "good things" are legitimate components of happiness in this world:

Nor is the Nature of this World, or of Man, so framed, as that we must suppose that Riches, Honour, or Pleasure, are not good Things; or, that all Desire of them, is sinful. Far from it. This World is our Habitation at present. It is our House of Entertainment, in our Passage to another. The three great Entertainments that it sets before Us, are Riches, Honour, and Pleasure. They cannot but be accounted Goods... by all who carry human Nature about them, and live in such a State as this is.<sup>26</sup>

Barrow, despite his occasional flights of contemptus mundi, is equally ready to grant a natural, and divinely ordained, "correspondence" between the physical senses and the good things of this world. God's intentions can be inferred from the plenitude of his gifts:

He by making so rich a provision for the sustenance of our lives and satisfaction of our appetites, by framing our

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<sup>26</sup> "Of the true Use of this World", Twenty Sermons, IV, p. 70.



bodies to relish delight, and suiting so many accommodations in wondrous correspondence to our senses, hath sufficiently intimated it to be his pleasure, that we should in reasonable measure seek and enjoy them... ("Self-Love", Works, I, 535)

The key phrase here is "in reasonable measure". God expects not self-denial but moderation. And if a man seeks happiness merely in "the abundant Gratification of every sensual Appetite" (TJ, XV, i, p. 783), "he will...much fail therein", warns Barrow: "for in lieu thereof he shall find care and trouble, surfeiting and disease, wearisome satiety and bitter regret" ("Profitableness", Works, I, 15). "When the Pleasures of Sense...are made the Measures of all Good, and a Man comes to place supreme Happiness in them", as Hoadly puts it, they will soon "break in upon his own Health, and Life": for all the enchantments of sensual pleasure, a life of immoderate pleasure-seeking is directly contrary to "our own true Interest".<sup>27</sup> The same is true of avarice and ambition.

There is a general disjunction between the ends and the consequences of vice, and one which the Anglicans often represent in terms of the economic metaphor. Like Barrow, Fielding likes to criticize the world in its own language. The disjunction between vicious pleasure and its miserable consequences is frequently transposed into economic terms and becomes an instructive discrepancy between 'value' and 'price'.<sup>28</sup> The pleasures of vice are argued to be very expensive. Fielding's Dr Harrison concedes, for instance, that the brief satisfaction of revenge may be a "luscious Morsel", but one which "must be allowed...to cost us often extremely dear" (Amelia, IX, viii, p. 392). In "the grand Market of the World", every pleasure has a price (TJ, VI, iii, p. 283); but the most expensive of all in the world of Fielding's novels seems to be the pleasure of fornication. In Amelia, Miss Mathews regrets having paid so high a price for her affair with Hebberts:

Two Months I passed in this detested Commerce, buying, even then, my guilty, half-tasted Pleasures at too dear a Rate, with continual Horror and Apprehension; but what have I paid since, what do I pay now, Mr. Booth? O may my Fate be a Warning to every Woman to keep her Innocence, to resist every Temptation, since she is certain to repent of the foolish Bargain. (I, viii, p. 53)

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<sup>27</sup> Op. cit., pp. 78-9. Pleasure, warns Hoadly, is "a fatal Evil, in the End, to Many!" (p. 75).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Barrow's theological version of this strategy: see above, p. 74.



The price of fornication for the single woman is generally far higher than it is for her paramour, as Allworthy emphasizes in his sermon to Jenny Jones:<sup>29</sup> "For by the Laws of Custom the whole Shame, with all its dreadful Consequences, falls entirely upon her" (TJ, I, vii, p. 53). Amelia suggests that the price of adultery is even higher, and certainly more "dreadful". (Compared with Mrs Bennet's wretched "Bargain", Booth could be said to escape lightly, and this perhaps suggests again that the market is weighted in favour of the male.) Adulterous or not, fornication is represented again and again as a "simple...Bargain" (TJ, I, vii, p. 53). Even the relatively harmless pleasures of Tom Jones are manifestly purchased "at too dear a Price" (TJ, VI, iii, p. 283). The price of a pleasure is its consequences;<sup>30</sup> and, as we have seen, Fielding appears to be particularly preoccupied with computing and displaying the price of sexual gratification.

The self-injurious and self-defeating character of fixated hedonism is a ubiquitous theme of contemporary Anglican homiletics. Hoadly's sermon "Of the Love of Pleasure" is a valuable paradigm.<sup>31</sup> Hoadly begins by insisting that he is not going to offer any recommendation of ascetic self-denial, in contempt of his congregation's favourite pleasures: "I am going to be an Advocate for Pleasure; and to shew you, as well as I can, how you may enjoy it more effectually...even in this Life, than you can possibly hope to do in any other Method". Far from denying his flock any sensual gratifications, Hoadly wishes only to deny them the miseries of intemperance: "This is all the Mortification you shall hear of, from Me ....: A Mortification! which will, I am confident, mortify and kill only the Pains, and Uneasinesses of Life; but enliven and prolong the Pleasures

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<sup>29</sup> Though, as Fielding says later, much of this sermon of Allworthy's "may be applied to the Men, equally with the Women" (IV, xi, p. 193).

<sup>30</sup> The price of some pleasures can also be measured in terms of the trouble taken to procure them. In Amelia. Mrs Bennet reflects on his anonymous Lordship's "horrid" scheme to seduce her: "Wicked and barbarous it was to the highest Degree, without any Question; but my Doubt is, whether the Art or Folly of it be the more conspicuous: For however delicate and refined the Art must be allowed to have been, the Folly, I think, must, upon a fair Examination, appear no less astonishing: For to lay all Considerations of Cruelty and Crime out of the Case, what a foolish Bargain doth the Man make for himself, who purchases so poor a Pleasure at so high a Price!" (VII, vi, p. 293).

<sup>31</sup> Twenty Sermons, V, pp. 85-102. Subsequent references supplied after quotations in the text.



of it" (p. 86). This ironic (and positively anti-ascetic) redefinition of "Mortification" — as a maximization of sensual enjoyment — is important. Hoadly is going to be "an Advocate for Pleasure", and by this he means "the Pleasures of Sense" (p. 87).

There are "Two different, or contrary, Methods of pursuing these Pleasures", says Hoadly (p. 87). The method to be recommended is moderation. The other, generally but mistakenly favoured by the world, is unbridled self-indulgence, and Hoadly begins by advertising the various disadvantages of this alternative. "Those who have entered, without Reason or Moderation, into this Field of Pleasure" will tell you what the consequences are: there is the "Pain and Bodily Uneasiness" which, "by natural Consequence", results from physical self-abuse; there are the "temporal Inconveniences" occasioned by "the Excess of Extravagance" (particularly financial ruin); and when a "Pursuit of Pleasure" is "founded upon a Scheme of Dishonour",<sup>32</sup> it is "always accompanied by uninterrupted Cares; carried on with numberless Anxieties" and "naturally followed by Uneasinesses, which outweigh all the Remembrance, and efface every Image, of what was once thought Pleasure": these are "such Effects ...as change the sweetest Honey into the bitterest Gall; even in the Minds of those who think of this Life only" (pp. 88-90). On top of all this, the ruthless pleasure-seeker is very likely to find himself suffering the "inward Distress" of remorse (p. 91). Such are the wages of intemperance. But "to observe the opposite Maxims of pursuing, and enjoying, the same Good" — the maxims of moderation and restraint — makes "the Pursuit of Pleasure, entirely different, in every Circumstance, and Consequence, from the former". Licence is attended with a host of painful or ruinous consequences, all of which are escaped by the man of "Reason and Moderation" (pp. 91-2).

Hoadly's next step is to consider "on which Side, the Advantage lies, even in the Point of Pleasure itself" (p. 93). Here he employs the commonplace economic metaphor, which is in this instance unusually extended:

Now, in the stating of This, we must imitate the Men of worldly Business, in the Method of stating their Profit or Loss... If never so many of the particular Articles in their Account are real Profit, but yet have themselves been the Occasions of Loss or Disadvantage, more than proportionable

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<sup>32</sup> Hoadly appears to mean something quite specific by this phrase — perhaps the seduction or rape of an innocent, since his language seems too strong for mere fornication, even adultery: see, e.g., p. 90.



to it; the Sum of such an Account cannot be Profit; and if the Balance at the End be Loss; it is small Comfort to them, and little Matter of Boasting, that there are in it particular Articles of Gain, and those, perhaps, very considerable. It is from the Total Amount, that they judge: as That alone, by which their Condition in Business must be determined.

And thus it must be in the Case of Pleasure. (p. 93)

In terms of this metaphor, the debauchee is manifestly engaged in an unprofitable business. "Put down, if you please, all the Gratifications of Sense, you can think of" (p. 93). "But be just in not deceiving yourselves" —

Put into the Account every known evil Consequence under the Notion of Pain, the opposite of Pleasure; and then it must come out thus. If the total Amount of such a Pursuit of Pleasure, be really found, as it must be, to be Pain, of the several sorts before mentioned, naturally produced by it; and this more than sufficient to counter-balance every Article of Pleasure in it: the Man of Pleasure himself, to whom the Name is now appropriated, the Man who pretends to study and follow after Pleasure as his great Good, must be found, at last, not to understand what it is truly to enjoy Pleasure itself; nay, frequently to destroy his own Purposes, by shortening and ruining his own Pleasures. (pp. 93-4)

On the contrary, the Man of Virtue, who...enjoys the Pleasures of Sense under those Rules which make them sit perfectly easy upon his Mind, his Body, his Estate, his Reputation, must be acknowledged, in the Whole...far to exceed the Other at the Close of the Account; and to triumph just as much over Him, in Pleasure itself, as he does in Virtue, Innocence, and Honour. (pp. 94-5)

It is thus "undeniable", says Hoadly, "that the Man of Virtue enjoys Pleasure, more sincere, i.e. more free from the Mixture of any of those Pains and Evils which are its natural Consequences to others; and with much more Security of continuing so to do; than the Man of Pleasure can pretend to do" (p. 95). Even Epicurus, that "great Doctor of Pleasure in the Heathen World", "saw plainly the Importance of Virtue, in order to the Enjoyment of Pleasure itself". Hoadly concedes that Epicurean teaching, "by unhappily placing the Chief Good of Man in Pleasure, not strictly explained, led his rash Followers into the most intemperate Pursuits of their own Unhappiness, under that Notion"; but insists that these pseudo-Epicureans acted in defiance of their Mentor's own example, wilfully misinterpreting his principal doctrine. "I only just mention this", continues Hoadly in apologetic tones, "to shew that even He, who studied Pleasure only, put the Virtue of Temperance...into the very



Composition of Pleasure itself" (p. 96). (Fielding makes a similar point in Tom Jones when he distinguishes the "antient Epicureans" from "those modern Epicures, who place all Felicity in the abundant Gratification of every sensual Appetite") (XV, i, p. 783).

The "modern Epicures", as Fielding calls them, consistently defeat their own purposes. According to Hoadly, they are victims of their own failure to appreciate the all-important distinction between pleasure and happiness:

The great Mistake in this Matter, amongst the Men of Pleasure, seems to lye in this, that they do not make Pleasure, and Happiness, two distinct Considerations: or rather, that they never inquire after Happiness, but are only for ever seeking after particular Instances of sensible Pleasure, and ready to fall in with every Invitation to them. Whereas Pleasure and Happiness stand, even in common Discourse, for two so different Things, that no One, by a Man of Pleasure understands you to mean a Happy Man; but rather, a Man who disregards Happiness for the Sake of particular Instances of Pleasure. (p. 97)

In general, the so-called Man of Pleasure "enjoys Pleasure, without being in a State of Happiness" (p. 97). Indeed, he tends to lose his own happiness in the very pursuit of pleasure. This is what Butler means when he argues that "there is a manifest negligence in men of their real happiness or interest in the present world, when that interest is inconsistent with a present gratification; for the sake of which they... are the authors and instruments of their own misery and ruin" ("Upon Human Nature", 15 Sermons, I, 15). The Men of Pleasure, Hoadly concludes, "have, by their passionate ungoverned Love of Pleasure, shewn that they have no Knowledge of what Happiness is; and are quite Strangers to their own greatest Good":

They, who pursue it [pleasure] to the Hurt or Ruine of their own Honour, Reputation, Estate, Health, and Families, are unjust to their own Interests, by being, truly, Lovers of Pleasure more than Lovers of Themselves, in that Sense in which they ought to be so; exposing Themselves, for the sake of a present violent Passion, to the Loss of every thing dear in this World; even of all their own Happiness, which can never subsist, but under the Direction of Virtue. (pp. 98, 100)

"Lovers of Pleasure more than Lovers of Themselves, in that Sense in which they ought to be so": in typical Anglican manner, Hoadly thus conflates vice with imprudence, viewing the ruthless pursuit of sensual



gratification as a breach of what Squire Allworthy calls "the Duty which we owe to ourselves" (TJ, XVIII, x, p. 960). If it had been published earlier, one would perhaps be tempted to suspect that Fielding had Hoadly's sermon in mind when he mapped out the imprudent career of Tom Jones, who, if not "for ever seeking after particular Instances of sensible Pleasure", is certainly "ready to fall in with every Invitation to them". But there is in any case no need to speculate about direct influence of this kind. Hoadly's argument was virtually formulaic. When Allworthy concludes his sermon against fornication by assuring Jenny Jones that "there is more Pleasure, even in this World, in an innocent and virtuous Life, than in one debauched and vicious" (TJ, I, vii, p. 53), he is voicing a commonplace moral. Like Hoadly, many other moralists of the period asserted this to be "a Rule demonstrable, from Nature and Experience" (Twenty Sermons, p. 99). Many believed the very passions of the so-called Man of Pleasure to be self-destructive. Whichcote had long since declared that "INORDINATE APPETITE IS A PUNISHMENT TO ITSELF": "Intemperance and Wantonness...bring our Bodies to noisom, filthy, loathsom Diseases; sometimes even to Rottenness... Those that live in these Vices, sin against their own Bodies".<sup>33</sup> A large section of Shaftesbury's Inquiry is devoted to proving that "BY HAVING THE SELF-PASSIONS TOO INTENSE OR STRONG, A CREATURE BECOMES MISERABLE" (II.2.ii, 219). These passions (which include avarice and ambition, among others, as well as the physical appetites) are perfectly natural and, if "moderate, and within certain Bounds", equally innocuous; but, "being in an extreme degree", they become "vitious and ill", not only with respect to society but "also with respect to the private Person, and are to his own disadvantage as well as that of the Publick" (II.2.ii, 221).

According to Shaftesbury, this is demonstrably true of immoderate physical appetites, of "Luxury, and what the World calls PLEASURE": "Satiety, perpetual Disgust, and Feverishness of Desire, attend those who passionately study Pleasure" — that is, those for whom "TO live well, has no other meaning...than to eat and drink well" (II.2.ii, 230; II.2.i, 205, 201). Happiness does not consist in any kind of sensual gratification; but "however fashionably we may apply the Notion of good Living",

'Tis plain, that by urging Nature, forcing the Appetite, and inciting Sense, the Keeness of the natural Sensations is

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<sup>33</sup> Select Sermons, I, v, pp. 113, 117. See also I, v, p. 119; II, iii, pp. 230-31; II, vi, pp. 281-2, 293, et passim.



lost. And tho thro Vice or ill Habit the same Subjects of Appetite may, every day, be sought with greater Ardour; they are enjoy'd with less Satisfaction... The Palls or Nauseatings which continually intervene, are of the worst and most hateful kind of Sensation. Hardly is there any thing tasted which is wholly free from this ill relish of a surfeited Sense and ruin'd Appetite. So that instead of a constant and flowing Delight afforded in such a State of Life, the very State it-self is in reality a Sickness and Infirmary, a Corruption of Pleasure, and destructive of every natural and agreeable Sensation. (Inquiry, II.2.ii, 230, 232)

The intemperate enjoyment of sensual pleasures actually destroys the body's capacity to experience pleasure, and is ultimately productive of pain and disgust. Butler argues likewise that enjoyment has its natural limits, beyond which the pleasure-principle is invariably self-defeating:

Every one of our passions and affections has its natural stint and bound, which may easily be exceeded; whereas our enjoyments can possibly be but in a determinate measure and degree. Therefore such excess of the affection, since it cannot procure any enjoyment, must in all cases be useless; but is generally attended with inconveniences, and often is downright pain and misery... ("Upon the Love of Our Neighbour", 15 Sermons, XI, 9)

These commonplace views are echoed by Fielding in the Champion (24 January 1739/40), where it is argued that the virtuous (that is, temperate) man is best equipped to enjoy sensual pleasures. Temperance, Fielding insists, must not be confused with self-denial. The one does not necessarily imply the other:

Virtue forbids not the satisfying our appetites, virtue forbids us only to glut and destroy them. The temperate man tastes and relishes pleasure in a degree infinitely superior to that of the voluptuous. The body of the voluptuous man soon becomes impaired, his palate soon loses its taste, his nerves become soon unbraced and unfit to perform their office: whereas, the temperate body is still preserved in health, its nerves retain their full tone and vigour, and convey to the mind the most exquisite sensations. The sot soon ceases to enjoy his wine, the glutton his dainties, and the libertine his women. The temperate man enjoys all in the highest degree, and indeed with the greatest variety: for human nature will not suffice for an excess in every passion, and wherever one runs away with a man, we may generally observe him sacrificing all the rest to the enjoyment of that alone. The virtuous and temperate man only hath inclination, hath strength; and...hath opportunity to enjoy all his passions. (Henley, XV, 168)



Quite apart from this psycho-physiological law of diminishing returns, there are, as Shaftesbury points out, various punitive long-term consequences of intemperance: "As to the Consequences of such an Indulgence; how fatal to the Body, by Diseases of many kinds, and to the Mind, by Sottishness and Stupidity; this needs not any explanation" (Inquiry, II.2.ii, 233). "Luxury, Riot, and Debauch" are in every sense "contrary to real Interest, and to the true Enjoyment of Life" (II.2.ii, 234). The same arguments apply equally to sexual appetite. To every other pleasure, Shaftesbury notes, "there is a Measure of Appetite belonging, which cannot possibly be exceeded without prejudice to the Creature, even in his very Capacity of enjoying Pleasure"; it is therefore highly improbable, he infers, that there is no "certain Limit or just Boundary of this other Appetite of the AMOROUS kind" (II.2.ii, 236). As with intemperance of other kinds, Shaftesbury distinguishes three principal penalties of sexual incontinence — the destruction of the "very Capacity of enjoying Pleasure", the deleterious physical and mental effects, and the considerable damage to social and financial "Interest":

...were both these Sensations to be experimentally compar'd; that of a virtuous Course which belong'd to one who liv'd a natural and regular Life, and that of a vitious Course which belong'd to one who was relax'd and dissolute; there is no question but Judgment wou'd be given in favour of the former, without regard to Consequences, and only with respect to the very Pleasure of Sense it-self. (II.2.ii, 238)

AS to the Consequences of this Vice, with respect to the Health and Vigour of the Body; there is no need to mention any thing. The Injury it does the Mind, tho less notic'd, is yet greater... (239)

WHAT the Disadvantages are of this Intemperance, in respect of Interest, Society, and the World; and what the Advantages are of a contrary Sobriety, and Self-Command, wou'd be to little purpose to mention. 'Tis well known there can be no Slavery greater than what is consequent to the Dominion and Rule of such a Passion... And it will from hence appear, "That there is no Passion, which in its Extravagance and Excess more necessarily occasions Disorder and Unhappiness. (240)

It is perhaps no coincidence that the various calamities which befall the hero of Tom Jones are occasioned, directly or indirectly, by his own weakness for pleasures of the flesh. Whether his irregular sexual career damages his "very Capacity of enjoying Pleasure", or diminishes the "Health and Vigour" of his manly parts, we cannot know, but it seems unlikely that Fielding would want to disappoint Sophia. (Unlike Wilson,



Jones is spared a liaison with the "Maladie Alamode".) At the end of the novel, his mind too is as sound as ever, and more mature. But "in respect of Interest, Society, and the World" Jones's promiscuity has brought him to the very brink of total ruin. It is only by virtue of the eleventh-hour comic reversal that Jones redeems his reputation and his estate, not to mention his beloved Sophia. The natural appetites can be very dangerous. As Shaftesbury himself concludes: "These Affections, as Self-interesting as they are, can often, we see, become contrary to our real Interest. They betray us into most Misfortunes, and into the greatest of Unhappinesses, that of a profligate and abject Character" (Inquiry, II.2.ii, 250).<sup>34</sup> Jones learns the truth of this the hard way.

It is palpably fatuous to pursue happiness in "the abundant Gratification of every sensual Appetite" (TJ, XV, i, p. 783). And many others, those whom Fielding calls "the busy Part of Mankind" ("An Essay on Nothing", Miscellanies I, p. 189), are lovers of money or power more than lovers of themselves. Avarice and ambition, which together constitute "the great Business which the World espouses" (CGJ, No. 69: Jensen, II, 130), are no less self-defeating than intemperance. "Even in this World", writes Fielding, "it is surely much too narrow to confine a Man's Interest merely to that which loads his Coffers" (CGJ, No. 44: Jensen, II, 9). Typically, Fielding is echoing the Anglican moralists. Hoadly concedes that the disadvantages of affluence may not always be self-evident, but "GOD sees, what We do not always see, that the Happiness of a Man, the present Happiness, is so far from being certainly promoted by the Abundance of what He possesseth, that it is too commonly utterly destroyed, and confounded, by it".<sup>35</sup> Whoever dotes on material riches, says Barrow, "is more truly and properly styled a miserable man, than a happy or blessed one: for is he not indeed miserable...who confides in that which will deceive and disappoint him?" ("Consideration", I, 435). "In pursuit of worldly things", as Whichcote put it, "there is certain Care, and very uncertain Success" (Select Sermons, I, v, p. 123). For Barrow, this is as true of "secular state and grandeur, might and prowess, honour and reputation", as it is of riches: all "the objects of human pride and

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Sophia's remarks on Jones's "Profligacy of Manners" in TJ, XVIII, x, p. 962.

<sup>35</sup> "Of the true Use of this World", Twenty Sermons, IV, p. 74. Cf. the lessons of the dialogue between Parson Adams and the itinerant Roman Catholic priest in JA, III, viii, pp. 252-3.



ambition" are "a lie", "a show without a substance". Worthless in themselves, rank and power are generally acquired or defended at the expense of happiness. This kind of greatness brings with it more pains than pleasures: "the care and pains in maintaining it, the fear and jealousy of losing it, the envy, obloquy and danger that surround it, the snares it hath in it...do more than countervail whatever either of imaginary worth or real convenience may be in it" ("Consideration", Works, I, 433-4). The "power and dominion, which men so impatiently struggle for", are in fact "most evil to them that enjoy them; requiring tedious attendance, distracting care, and vexatious toil; attended with frequent disappointment, opprobrious censure, and dangerous envy; having such real burdens, and slavish encumbrances, sweetened only by superficial pomps" ("Pleasantness", Works, I, 5). Despite their meretricious attractions, the objects of ambition and avarice are in this sense "less valuable than mere emptiness, and nothing itself" ("Consideration", Works, I, 433).

The same point is made in Fielding's "Essay on Nothing", which pays ironic homage to "Nothing" as the one great end of man's most heroic pursuits:

Ambition, the greatest, highest, noblest, finest, most heroic and godlike of all Passions, what doth it end in? — Nothing. What did Alexander, Caesar, and all the rest of that heroic Band, who have plundered, and massacred so many Millions, obtain by all their Care, Labour, Pain, Fatigue, and Danger? — Could they speak for themselves, must they not own, that the End of all their Pursuit was Nothing?

Again, What is the End of Avarice? Not Power, or Pleasure, as some think, for the Miser will part with a Shilling for neither: not Ease or Happiness; for the more he attains of what he desires, the more uneasy and miserable he is... Shall we say, then, he pursues Misery only? that surely would be contradictory to the first Principles of Human Nature. May we not therefore, nay, must we not confess, that he aims at Nothing?

Nothing is thus "the End of our two noblest and greatest Pursuits" (Miscellanies I, pp. 188, 189). The same satiric irony clearly underlies Fielding's treatment of Jonathan Wild, which illustrates "the common fate of great men", and exposes "the labours and pains, the cares, disquietudes, and dangers which attend their road to greatness" (JW, IV, xv: Henley, II, 207, 205).<sup>36</sup> Wild's "most powerful and predominant

<sup>36</sup> In the context of a very different overall thesis, and apparently without the benefit of Fielding's essay, Bernard Harrison has also noted that the ultimate goal of Wild's pursuits is "nothing": see The Novelist as Moral Philosopher, pp. 131-8, esp. p. 137.



passion" is ambition (IV, xv: Henley, II, 201) — with avarice surely coming a close second — and to this drive he eventually sacrifices everything and everyone, including himself. His "cares" and "disquietudes" are essentially of two kinds. First, he must support the burden of continuous dissatisfaction. By its very nature, his predominant passion can never be satisfied: Wild displays "that great aversion to satisfaction and content which is inseparably incident to great minds" — that "restless, amiable disposition", that "noble avidity which increases with feeding", which is "the first principle or constituent quality of these our great men" (I, xiv: Henley, II, 45). This self-perpetuating "avidity" is what makes Wild, in Shaftesbury's terms, a "Self-Oppressor" (Inquiry, II.2.ii, 241). It is comparable with the restless insatiability which characterizes what the Inquiry calls the "COVETING or AVARITIOUS TEMPER":

...that known Restlessness of covetous and eager Minds, in whatever State or Degree of Fortune they are plac'd; there being no thorow or real Satisfaction, but a kind of Insatiableness belonging to this Condition. For 'tis impossible there shou'd be any real Enjoyment, except in consequence of natural and just Appetite. Nor do we readily call that an Enjoyment of Wealth or of Honour, when thro Covetousness or Ambition, the Desire is still forward, and can never rest satisfy'd with its Gains. (Inquiry, II.2.ii, 243)<sup>37</sup>

In this respect, the good-natured and pious Heartfree is — despite his victimization at the treacherous hands of Wild — more content than his oppressor. His willingness to "rest satisfy'd" with his inconsiderable lot is a significant measure of his distance from "greatness". As he himself argues, "the hind may be more happy than the lord, for his desires are fewer, and those such as are attended with more hope and less fear" (JW, III, ii: Henley, II, 102).

Fear is the second major source of Wild's disquietude. His vain attempts to satisfy his "noble avidity" involve him in all kinds of predation and treachery, including the gulling and betrayal of Heartfree, and Wild knows very well what he deserves from his victims. Here, the punitive quality of guilt is derived from what Barrow calls "fear, suspicion, jealousy of mischief designed against us: the which passions have torment..., racking us with anxious expectation of evil" ("Motives

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<sup>37</sup> The moral is of course an ancient one. Cf. Ecclesiastes 5:10: "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase."



and Arguments to Charity", Works, I, 252). In abusing and exploiting his friends and confederates, Wild has created a multitude of potentially deadly enemies, and he knows it:

...our hero...was a living and strong instance that human greatness and happiness are not always inseparable. He was under a continual alarm of frights, and fears, and jealousies. He thought every man he beheld wore a knife for his throat, and a pair of scissors for his purse. As for his own gang particularly, he was thoroughly convinced there was not a single man amongst them who would not, for the value of five shillings, bring him to the gallows. These apprehensions so constantly broke his rest, and kept him so assiduously on his guard to frustrate and circumvent any designs which might be formed against him, that his condition, to any other than the glorious eye of ambition, might seem rather deplorable than the object of envy or desire. (JW, III, xiii: Henley, II, 138)

In more than one respect, Wild seems to represent what Shaftesbury calls "that Passion which breaks into an enormous PRIDE and AMBITION", and in this sense exemplifies "the Mischief and Self-Injury of immoderate Desires, and conceited fond Imaginations of personal Advantage in such things as Titles, Honours, Precedencys, Fame, Glory":

THIS...is obvious, that as the Desires of this kind are rais'd, and become impetuous, and out of our command; so the Aversions and Fears of the contrary part, grow proportionably strong and violent, and the Temper accordingly suspicious, jealous, captious, subject to Apprehensions from all Events... And hence it may be concluded, "That all Rest and Security as to what is future, and all Peace, Contentedness and Ease as to what is present, is forfeited by the aspiring Passions of this emulous kind; and by having the Appetites towards Glory and outward Appearance thus transporting and beyond command." (Inquiry, II.2.ii, 244, 245)

This "enormous PRIDE and AMBITION" is naturally incapable of enjoying its own ends. Fielding makes a similar point in the Champion (10 June 1740), suggesting that there cannot be "a more instructive lesson against that abominable and pernicious vice, ambition, than the sight of a mean man, raised by fortunate accidents and execrable vices to power", suffering all the miseries of ill-gotten dominion — the sight of one

who knows that he is justly hated by his whole country, who sees and feels his danger; tottering, shaking, trembling; without appetite for his dainties, without abilities for his women, without taste for his elegances, without dignity in



his robes, without honour from his titles, without authority from his power, and without ease in his palace, or repose in his bed of down. (Henley, XV, 331-2)

Moderate ambition is however perfectly compatible with wisdom and virtue. In fact, virtue alone can guarantee the enjoyment of rank, honour and power:

The virtuous man...enjoys his preferment with a security of mind, with safety, and with honour. Whereas the man, who by base and dishonest means hath raised himself to power, stands as it were on a pinnacle, exposed to every wind, fearful and disquieted within, hated and pursued without. His power seldom lasting, always uncertain, and generally sure to end in ruin and dishonour. (Champion, 24 January 1739/40: Henley, XV, 167)

Ruthless ambition is psychologically and consequentially self-defeating. This is another important sense in which "virtue and interest are not...as repugnant as fire and water" (loc. cit.).<sup>38</sup> The virtuous alone are capable of enjoying the ends pursued (misguidedly) by the vicious. Jonathan Wild drives home the ironically understated view that "greatness and happiness are not always inseparable".<sup>39</sup> However convincing the appearance of "greatness" he presents to the world (and it is much less convincing than he supposes), Wild is in fact an inveterate and implacable "Self-Oppressor". Fielding's ironic didacticism confronts the reader with the simple but insistent proposition that vice and happiness are naturally "as repugnant as fire and water". This is as true of avarice as it is of ambition, and for similar reasons.<sup>40</sup> "And yet these two are the great Business which the World espouses", complains Fielding, and "to the Pursuit of which it assigns the Appellation of Wisdom" (CGJ, No. 69: Jensen, II, 130). With sardonic irony, Fielding can thus conclude that "it

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<sup>38</sup> This is also an important sense in which, for Cicero, honestas and utilitas are naturally indivisible: see De Officiis, III, xx-xxi, esp. 84-5.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. W. R. Irwin, The Making of JW, pp. 64-79, esp. p. 78; and Miller, Essays, p. 53, on the "tragic comedy" of "greatness".

<sup>40</sup> See the Champion, 27 & 29 December 1739 (Henley, XV, 121-9), and 24 January 1739/40 (Henley, XV, 168); Journey, Ch. xi (Henley, II, 261-2); "An Essay on Nothing", Miscellanies I, pp. 188-9; TP, No. 6 (Locke, p. 75).



becomes a wise Man to regard Nothing with the utmost Awe and Adoration; to pursue it with all his Parts and Pains; and to sacrifice to it his Ease, his Innocence, and his present Happiness" ("Essay on Nothing": Miscellanies I, p. 189). Clearly there is something wrong with the world's definition of wisdom. Avarice and ambition, self-defeating as they are, can hardly be consistent with true wisdom. History, says Fielding, abounds with "Examples of the Misery, the Folly, and indeed the Absurdity of these Pursuits":

In solemn Truth, there is nothing more ridiculous than the Labours of either Avarice or Ambition; and for this Reason especially that those who undergo them, undergo them to no Purpose. (CGJ, No. 69: Jensen, II, 128, 129: my emphasis)

The "ridiculous" side of Jonathan Wild's exploits has been expansively analyzed by C. J. Rawson.<sup>41</sup> But in these terms it could be said that the villain of Tom Jones is no less "ridiculous". It is surely significant that Blifil's leading passions are "Avarice and Ambition, which divided the Dominion of his Mind between them" (TJ, VI, iv, p. 284). He is a paradigm of the worldly wisdom which Fielding defines with brilliant concision in his "MODERN GLOSSARY":

WORTH. Power. Rank. Wealth.  
WISDOM. The Art of acquiring all Three.  
(CGJ, No. 4: Jensen, I, 157)

The seriousness with which Fielding regarded the abuse of this word becomes more clear in another Covent-Garden Journal leader (No. 69: Jensen, II, 125-30). This is a mordant dissertation on "a kind of silly Fellows...to whom the common Voice gives the Appellation of Wise Men":

It is scarce, I think, necessary to premise, that by Wise Men here I do not understand Persons endowed with that Wisdom of which Solomon was possessed, which he tells us is more eligible than Gold...

Neither do I mean that Wisdom here which was the Deity of the antient Philosophers, which Seneca says, is superior to all the Efforts of Fortune...

By Wisdom here, I mean that Wisdom of this World, which St. Paul expressly tells us is Folly; that Wisdom of the

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<sup>41</sup> Henry Fielding and the Augustan Ideal Under Stress (cited hereafter as Augustan Ideal), Chs. iv, vi. I do however find it difficult to accept that Fielding's ridicule is "genial" and "affectionate" (pp. 104, 105).

Wise, which...is threatned with Destruction: Lastly, I here intend that Wisdom in the Abundance of which...there is much of Grief; which, if true, would be alone sufficient to evince the extreme Folly of those who covet and pursue such Wisdom. (pp. 125-6)

In defining this "worldly or mock Wisdom", Fielding also draws on Horace,<sup>43</sup> and concludes that "the two great Characteristics of this Wisdom" are avarice and ambition: together these vices constitute "the very highest Perfection and as it were Quintessence of this Kind of Wisdom" (p. 126).<sup>44</sup> Thus, "by a Wise Man is generally meant...a Man who is pursuing the direct Road to Power or Wealth, however dirty or thorny it may be". Neither his "Frauds and Villainies" nor his "Labours" are ever "taken into Account, or in the least considered as any Objections to his Wisdom"; but these things should be taken into account, since

however wise a Man may be who outwits and over-reaches others, he seems not much to deserve that Name who outwits and over-reaches himself; and this, I am afraid, is always the Case with the most absolute Slaves of either of these Passions, that is to say, with the wisest of Men. (p. 127)<sup>45</sup>

The Wise Man tends to "make a Fool of himself", in other words, and "this is perhaps the highest Degree of worldly Cunning" (p. 127). This is Fielding's real point — that the wisdom of the so-called Wise Man is folly. Like Barrow, he proves his point primarily by reference to the consequences of avarice and ambition, to the 'price' of worldly wisdom:

Divines...have taken great Pains to prove that the Man who sacrifices his Hopes in another World to any Acquisitions in this, however wise he may call himself or may be called by others, is in Reality a very silly Fellow. These have endeavoured to shew us, that a Rascal gibbeted up as it were on the Mount of Ambition, or a Wretch wallowing in the Mire of Avarice, is in Truth a Fool, and will be convinced of his

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<sup>43</sup> Specifically, Satires, I, iv, 25-6.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Battestin on the twinning of these two vices in "the humanist tradition": TJ, VI, iv, p. 284, n. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Julian's account of his wretched experiences in the character of an avaricious Jew, in Journey, Ch. xi. For example: "I was not only too cunning for others — I sometimes overreached myself"; "I never had one moment of ease while awake, nor of quiet when in my sleep. In all the characters through which I have passed, I have never undergone half the misery I suffered in this..." (Henley, II, 261-2).



Folly when it is too late.

But if there are any Persons who...still guide their Opinion by the old Proverb of a Bird in the Hand, &c. and conclude that those are wisest who make sure of the present World, yet all must, I think, confess that he is a Fool who gives up both; who without any Prospect or Hopes of a future Reward, takes care to be at present as miserable as he possibly can.

Now that this is the Case with the Slaves of Ambition and Avarice, is so very manifest, that it seems an Affront to the human Understanding to endeavour to prove it.  
(pp. 127-8)

But Fielding does go on to offer proofs, beginning with a lengthy quotation from "the excellent Dr Barrow",<sup>46</sup> and following this with a series of historical exempla. Even if we suppose it "certain that there is no other World", the Wise Man, "the Wretch who spends his Days in Cares and Misery that he may die greater or richer than other Men, is the silliest Fellow in the Universe" (p. 130).

In the light of all this, it is surprising to find that some readers of Tom Jones have had difficulty explaining Fielding's repeated attribution of "prudence" to Blifil.<sup>47</sup> Hutchens, for instance, has noted that "the words 'prudence', 'prudent', and 'prudential' are used unfavorably three times as often as they are used favorably" (i.e. they are frequently applied to unsympathetic characters, and cannot therefore be terms of approval); but she finds nothing straightforwardly ironic in these usages: "These unfavorable uses are, of course, ironic; but they do not belong to the simple, direct-reverse type of irony, in which an obviously imprudent person would be called prudent. In practically all of them, the word retains its literal meaning". This "literal meaning" is not clearly explained, but the argument leads naturally to the conclusion that Blifil himself is literally "the most 'prudent' character in the novel": it is indeed "one of the larger ironies of the novel that part of the task of the hero is to acquire one of the chief traits of the villain". This astonishing suggestion is dictated by Hutchens's rather odd theory of "connotative irony".<sup>48</sup> Battestin notes that the "meanings" of

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<sup>46</sup> From "The Duty and Reward of Bounty to the Poor", Works, I, 294.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, TJ, III, ix, p. 144; IV, v, p. 165. Blifil is of course only one of many persons and practices honoured with the epithet "prudent" in Tom Jones. For a comprehensive collation of these usages, see Hutchens, "'Prudence' in TJ: A Study of Connotative Irony", *passim*. See also Hatfield, Language of Irony, pp. 189-91.

<sup>48</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 496, 501.



prudence in Tom Jones are "curiously ambivalent": "according to the context...prudence is either the fundamental vice, subsuming all others, or the essential virtue of the completely moral man. It exists...in malo et in bono".<sup>49</sup> How any one quality can be a "fundamental vice" and an "essential virtue" is not made very clear. Battestin distinguishes elsewhere between "false prudence and true", but fails to draw the obvious logical conclusion — that "false" prudence is not a species of prudence at all (no more than a counterfeit banknote is a banknote), but actually a species of its inverse, folly; and Battestin therefore fails to appreciate the full implications of Fielding's ironic strategies.<sup>50</sup> In a critique of Battestin's essay, Rawson complains that the term "prudence" is "often used pejoratively in Tom Jones", that in fact "the majority of usages...is pejorative", and that Battestin does not adequately face this fact.<sup>51</sup> But Rawson himself does not see anything ironic in these usages, and therefore naturally has difficulty accounting for the fact that prudence is "positively recommended as a good thing" in Tom Jones: for Rawson, as for Battestin, prudence apparently exists in malo et in bono.<sup>52</sup>

To suppose that Blifil is in any true sense "prudent" is to perpetuate this kind of paradox. As Fielding says in the Covent-Garden Journal, the avaricious or ambitious man, "however wise he may call himself or may be called by others, is in Reality a very silly Fellow". In these terms, Blifil is clearly the most imprudent or unwise character in Tom Jones. In calling him "prudent" Fielding is, as it were, drawing on his modern glossary, ironically mimicking the "common Voice" which "gives the Appellation of Wise Men" to fools and madmen. In the language of the world, Blifil is "prudent". But in the language of scripture, of Anglican homiletics, and of Horatian satire, he is "a very silly Fellow". Viewed in this light, Fielding's ironies are surely quite straightforward. They are complicated only in the sense that they reflect on the "common Voice" as much as on Blifil and his brethren.

Fielding had already rehearsed this ironic strategy in A Journey from

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<sup>49</sup> Providence, p. 166.

<sup>50</sup> See Providence, pp. 170-72 (I quote from p. 171).

<sup>51</sup> "Order and Misrule", p. 484.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 485. According to Rawson, Tom Jones explores "not only good forms of prudence but evil ones too" (p. 486). Cf. "Fielding and Smollett", pp. 278-9.



this World to the Next. In Chapter xvi, "The history of the Wise Man", Julian relates his earthly experiences in a character closely related to Blifil's. "Fortune had now allotted me a serious part to act", he begins: "I had even in my infancy a grave disposition, nor was I ever seen to smile; which infused an opinion into all about me, that I was a child of great solidity".<sup>54</sup> This reputation for "solidity" continues at school: "I could never be persuaded to play with my mates", he recalls, and "the solemnity of my carriage won so much on my master, who was a most sagacious person, that I was his chief favourite, and my example on all occasions was recommended to the other boys". But at the end of his schooling, a tension between his celebrated wisdom and his own well-being begins to materialize:

I had now obtained universally the character of a very wise young man, which I did not altogether purchase without pains; for the restraint I laid on myself in abstaining from the several diversions adapted to my years, cost me many a yearning: but the pride which I inwardly enjoyed in the fancied dignity of my character, made me some amends.

This tension (surely also implicit in Fielding's treatment of young Blifil) becomes extreme and inescapable when Julian "unfortunately" falls in love with Ariadne, a young lady of great beauty, grace, intelligence and goodness. Frank and impetuous courtship is not, "unhappily", consistent with Julian's great wisdom. However:

My passion at length grew so violent, that I began to think of satisfying it. As the first step to this, I cautiously enquired into the circumstances of Ariadne's parents... Upon examination, her fortune...was not sufficient to justify my marriage with her, in the opinion of the wise and prudent. I had now a violent struggle between wisdom and happiness, in which, after several grievous pangs, wisdom got the better. I could by no means prevail with myself to sacrifice that character of profound wisdom, which I had with such uniform conduct obtained, and with such caution hitherto preserved. (my emphasis)

In effect, Julian very wisely conquers the temptation to embrace happiness. He is now "in a worse condition than before": "My days I now passed with the most irksome uneasiness, and my nights were restless and sleepless". He suffers all the "pangs" of prudent self-deprivation. Finally Ariadne is

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<sup>54</sup> This and all subsequent quotations are from Henley, II, 275-81.

married to one of his neighbours — "and I had the mortification of seeing her make the best of wives, and of having the happiness, which I had lost, every day before my eyes". The miseries of "profound wisdom" continue when Julian finds himself a more prudent match:

If I suffered so much on account of my wisdom, in having refused Ariadne, I was not much more obliged to it for procuring me a rich widow, who was recommended to me by an old friend, as a very prudent match, and, indeed, so it was; her fortune being superior to mine, in the same proportion as that of Ariadne had been inferior. I therefore embraced this proposal...

But, prudent as this lady was, she made me miserable... The only comfort I received, in the midst of the highest torments, was from continually hearing the prudence of my match commended by all my acquaintance.<sup>55</sup>

Appropriately enough, continues Julian, "my wisdom at last put an end to itself; that is, occasioned my dissolution". Having inherited a fortune from a geographically distant relative, Julian is anxious to go and claim it; but the time is mid-winter, Julian is in his "grand climacteric", and has "just recovered of a dangerous disease". "I advised with a grave and wise friend, what was proper to be done", says Julian, and he "told me... that common prudence absolutely required my immediate departure":

I was immediately determined by this opinion. The duty of a wise man made an irresistible impression, and I took the necessity for granted, without examination. I accordingly set forward the next morning; very tempestuous weather soon overtook me; I had not travelled three days before I relapsed into my fever, and died.

This fatal tension between "the duty of a wise man" and his own well-being is consummated in Julian's failure to gain admittance to Elysium: he is "cruelly disappointed" when Minos declares that this place "was never designed for those who are too wise to be happy". From beginning to end, and beyond, Julian's life has been "a violent struggle between wisdom and happiness".

The point is, of course, that Julian's "profound wisdom" was an imposture, as he himself well knew: "it is, I believe, most certain that

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<sup>55</sup> Note Blifil's projected "prudent" marriage to the wealthy Methodist widow: TJ, XVIII, xiii, pp. 979-80. It can surely be inferred that Blifil will be no happier than Julian, especially given Fielding's jaundiced view of Methodism. Cf. Hodges, "NE and TJ", p. 229.



very few wise men know themselves what fools they are more than the world doth."

To sum up my history in short...my whole life was one constant lie; and happy would it have been for me, if I could as thoroughly have imposed on myself, as I did on others: for reflection, at every turn, would often remind me I was not so wise as people thought me; and this considerably embittered the pleasure I received from the public commendation of my wisdom.

Julian knew his "profound wisdom" and "prudence" to be foolish, precisely because they involved an unnatural contempt for his own happiness. Like Blifil, he was more interested in the "reputation of wisdom" than the substance. And in a world where "wisdom" signifies only material self-interest, or a morose contempt for social and sensual pleasures,<sup>56</sup> but where happiness involves a great deal more, the acquisition of a reputation for "wisdom" involves what Julian calls a "struggle between wisdom and happiness" and, ultimately, the sacrifice of happiness. The "Wise Man" is by definition the miserable man.

The same point is made in Jonathan Wild, where Fielding frequently pays tribute to his hero's "great and commendable prudence", and the "vast... compass of his understanding" (II, ii: Henley, II, 56, 57). Wild, apparently, experiences the same "struggle between wisdom and happiness": "Let me...hold myself contented with this reflection, that I have been a wise though unsuccessful, and am a great though an unhappy man" (II, iv: Henley, II, 67: my emphases). The point is underlined when Fielding ironically laments the frustration of Wild's attempts to escape the gallows: "our hero was, notwithstanding his utmost caution and prudence, convicted, and sentenced to a death which...we cannot call otherwise than honorable" (IV, xii: Henley, II, 189). Wild's great "wisdom", "prudence", and "understanding" are all aspects of the spurious wisdom which Fielding later defined in the Covent-Garden Journal. If Wild were less "wise" in this sense, he might have been happier (though also of course less "great"). At one point, the Great Man himself seems to recognize (in his own perverted way) that vice doesn't pay, castigating himself for having deprived Heartfree of all his wealth, which has now fallen into other hands:

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<sup>56</sup> In public, at least, Julian was a doctrinal "anticarnalist", again in defiance of his own private inclinations (Henley, II, 279). Cf. Fielding's comments on the private pursuits of "the gravest Men" in TJ, V, v, pp. 230-31.

How unhappy is the state of PRIGGISM! How impossible for human prudence to foresee and guard against every circumvention!... Better had it been for me to have observed the simple laws of friendship and morality than thus to ruin my friend for the benefit of others. I might have commanded his purse to any degree of moderation: I have now disabled him from the power of serving me. Well! but that was not my design... (JW, II, iv: Henley, II, 66)

Lamenting the fallibility of "human prudence" in one sense (cautious providence), Wild goes on to make a truly prudent observation: that "the simple laws of friendship and morality" can be more consistent with self-interest than the more complicated laws of vice and betrayal. This insight is qualified by contextual irony — not least by Wild's prompt self-exoneration — but the observation itself stands out as one entirely free from simple irony. Fielding's point is that Wild's "design" was, and remains, inconsistent with "the simple laws of friendship and morality", and therefore inconsistent with his own true interest.

Fielding and the Anglicans would have vigorously denied that there can be any such thing as a "struggle between wisdom and happiness". True practical wisdom or prudence (as opposed to "mock Wisdom") consists in an understanding and pursuit of our true interest. Any tension, therefore, between "wisdom" and happiness is in effect a proof that this "wisdom" is spurious. This is the lesson of "The history of the Wise Man", one of the lessons of Jonathan Wild, and surely the ultimate lesson of Blifil's "prudent" progress through Tom Jones. Blifil's typical activities — most of which are directly fuelled by avarice and ambition — are radically inconsistent with true wisdom. This passage from the True Patriot is surely pertinent:

The wicked Man in Scripture is called a Fool. The sacred Writers, who penetrated into all the Depths of Human Nature by Inspiration, do not compliment such a Person with the Epithets of able, artful, cunning and politic; Titles which would satisfy many of us better than those of good or virtuous; they declare openly and bluntly, that Wickedness is Folly, and that Knave and Fool are synonymous Terms. (No. 17: Locke, p. 153)<sup>57</sup>

The recurrent ironic application of the epithet "prudent" to Blifil can

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men", Miscellanies I, pp. 174-5, on "the Character of Knave and Fool".



usefully be read in the context of the homiletic tradition to which Fielding here refers, and ultimately in the context of the Old Testament literature in which that tradition was rooted. Fielding, like Barrow, returns again and again to the lessons of the wisdom books. It is here that the quintessential elements (and indeed the favourite texts) of Anglican prudentialism can be found: "Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil" (Proverbs 3:7); "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments" (Psalms 111:10); "Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law" (Psalms 119:34); "And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding" (Job 28:28). Wisdom, godliness and happiness are indivisible:

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that  
getteth understanding.

For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise  
of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.

She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou  
canst desire are not to be compared with her.

Length of days is in her right hand: and in her left hand  
riches and honour.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are  
peace.

She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and  
happy is every one that retaineth her. (Proverbs 3:13-18)

Here, with the introduction of economic similes and metaphors, the ancestry of Barrow's prudential rhetoric becomes unmistakable. These, too, are among the most appropriate biblical contexts in which to read much of Fielding's work. Proverbs 3:17 appears to be one of his favourite texts.<sup>59</sup> Heartfree alludes to it in his prison soliloquy, arguing that the "road" to heaven, "if we understand it rightly, appears to have so few thorns in it, and to require so little labor and fatigue from those who shall pass through it, that its ways are truly said to be ways of pleasantness, and all its paths to be those of peace" (JW, III, ii: Henley, II, 101-2).<sup>60</sup> The road to damnation, however, is "all craggy with rocks, full...of boggy grounds, and everywhere beset with briars", and thus "impossible to pass through...without the utmost danger and difficulty" (Journey, Ch. v:

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<sup>59</sup> Also the text for Barrow's sermon on "The Pleasantness of Religion", Works, I, 1-18.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Champion, 24 January 1739/40: Henley, XV, 169.



Henley, II, 234).<sup>61</sup> This is the Choice of Hercules made very easy. The sinner, who endures misery in this world to secure his damnation in the next, is doubly foolish.

The equivalence of "Wickedness" and "Folly" is one of Barrow's most cherished themes. In the "holy style", he reminds us, "wisdom, and virtue, or piety, are terms equivalent; and a fool doth signify the same with a vicious or impious person" ("Faith", Works, II, 88). Barrow's reasoning is predictable:

All sin is foolish upon many accounts; as proceeding from ignorance, error, inconsiderateness, vanity; as implying weak judgment and irrational choice; as thwarting the...best rules of wisdom; as producing very mischievous effects to ourselves, bereaving us of the chief goods, and exposing us to the worst evils. What can be more egregiously absurd, than...to provoke by our actions sovereign justice and immutable severity; to oppose almighty power, and offend immense goodness...? ...What greater madness can be conceived, than to deprive our minds of all true content here, and to separate our souls from eternal bliss hereafter; to gall our consciences now with sore remorse, and to engage ourselves for ever in remediless miseries? Such folly doth all sin include: whence, in scripture style, worthily goodness and wisdom are terms equivalent; sin and folly do signify the same thing.<sup>62</sup>

Given this general equation, Barrow feels that if any "practice" can be "proved extremely sinful, it will thence sufficiently be demonstrated no less foolish" ("Slander", Works, I, 171). Slander, for instance, is "full of uncharitableness, full of all wickedness", and "consequently full it is of folly" (I, 173). This sermon is an especially useful context in which to view the bogus "prudence" of Fielding's most villainous villain. For Blifil, slander is a "prudent" activity, in the sense that it furthers his ruthless schemes of social and economic self-aggrandisement. For Barrow, on the other hand, it epitomizes the folly of sin. The slanderer purchases his gratifications (such as they are) at far too high a price:

The slanderer is plainly a fool; because he maketh wrong judgments and valuations of things, and accordingly driveth on silly bargains for himself, in result whereof he proveth a great loser. He means by his calumnious stories either to vent some passion boiling in him, or to compass some design

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. the road of "greatness" in JW, I, xiv. And see Miller, Essays, pp. 51-3, on the two roads of goodness and greatness.

<sup>62</sup> "The Folly of Slander" (cited hereafter as "Slander"), Works, I, 170.



which he affects, or to please some humour that he is possessed with: but is any of these things worth purchasing at so dear a rate? (I, 173)<sup>63</sup>

Whatever his short-term gains might be, "assuredly he that useth such courses will himself be the greatest loser" (I, 173). The ultimate price of slander is damnation. And even if the slanderer's ends were half-respectable, his activities would be counter-productive:

The slanderer is plainly a fool, because he useth improper means and preposterous methods of effecting his purposes. As there is no design worth the carrying on by ways of falsehood and iniquity; so is there scarce any...which may not more surely, more safely, more cleverly be achieved by means of truth and justice. Is not always the straight way more short than the oblique and crooked? Is not the plain way more easy than the rough and cragged? Is not the fair way more pleasant and passable than the foul? (I, 174)

Slander is very poor policy, at best. But it is much worse. The slanderer is "a very fool, as bringing many great inconveniences, troubles and mischiefs on himself", even in this world (I, 174). And in the end, he "doth banish himself from heaven and happiness, doth expose himself to endless miseries and sorrows":

If slander perhaps here may avoid detection, or scape deserved punishment; yet infallibly hereafter, at the dreadful day, it shall be disclosed, irreversibly condemned, inevitably persecuted with condign reward of utter shame and sorrow.

Is not he, then, he who, out of malignity, or vanity, to serve any design, or soothe any humour in himself or others, doth by committing this sin involve himself into all these great evils, both here and hereafter, a most desperate and deplorable fool? (I, 176)

In the light of all this, Blifil's "prudence" can be seen for what it is. Barrow's treatment of slander is typical of a more general assault on worldly notions of "wisdom" and "folly". At the final judgment, Barrow repeatedly insists, these worldly definitions will (like secular definitions of "profit" or "interest") be turned completely topsy-turvy. On this day, "the great wisdom of those who before all things

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<sup>63</sup> It is perhaps worth recalling Fielding's own fondness for the metaphor of the "silly bargain": see, for instance, TJ, I, vii, pp. 51-3; Amelia, I, viii, p. 53; VII, vi, p. 293; TP, No. 17: Locke, p. 153.



choose to be good and to serve God, and the extreme folly of those who scorn and neglect piety, shall be most evidently apparent":

The poor, the meek, the simple, who rather choose to suffer than do wrong, shall there find a certain patronage and a full redress; that strict abstinence from wrong, which here may pass for simplicity shall then be approved for the best wisdom; and this overreaching craft, which now men are so conceited of, will then appear wretched folly, when all ill-gotten profits with shameful regret shall in effect be refunded, yea shall bring grievous damages and sore penalties for them: in fine, then it will be most evident, that he who injureth another doth indeed chiefly hurt himself; he that cheateth his neighbour doth really gull himself... ("Future Judgment Certain", Works, II, 386, 394: my emphases)<sup>64</sup>

Viewed in the light of the doctrine of eternal rewards and punishments, "the greatest simplicity may justly be deemed the truest wisdom", and "the deepest policy, used to compass or to conceal bad designs, will in the end appear the most downright folly" ("Consideration", Works, I, 449). All this is to some extent equally applicable to the "final judgment" with which Fielding concludes Tom Jones, where Jones's "simplicity" (so despised by the "prudent" Blifil) is indeed "approved for the best wisdom", and Blifil's "overreaching craft" is exposed as "wretched folly". If prudence is an ability "to discern the most suitable, politic, or profitable course of action" (OED), Blifil manifestly does not have it. All his "prudent" schemes terminate in virtual disinheritance, in banishment, and in utter humiliation. At the end of the novel, we do learn that Blifil has parliamentary and matrimonial aspirations which may well be fulfilled (TJ, XVIII, xiii, pp. 979-80). But this is not necessarily inconsistent with the demands of poetic justice. It certainly indicates the continuing dominion of avarice and ambition, and therefore suggests strongly that Blifil will continue to pursue his own misery. Unlike Jones, he has learned nothing from the consequences of his vices and follies. And in retrospect it is surely impossible to argue that Blifil was ever genuinely prudent. His continuing self-inflicted misery is in a sense what constitutes the unseen inverted commas attached to his "prudence".

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. Butler, "Upon Human Nature" (15 Sermons, III, 9): "they who have been so wise in their generation as to regard only their own supposed interest, at the expense and to the injury of others, shall at last find, that he who has given up all the advantages of the present world, rather than violate his conscience and the relations of life, has infinitely better provided for himself, and secured his own interest and happiness" (my emphases).



As the most wicked of Fielding's creations, Blifil is also the most foolish.

To return to the Prudential Syllogism. Fielding and the moralists insist again and again that a fixated or immoderate attachment to the secular triad (wealth, honour, pleasure) is directly contrary to "our own true Interest",<sup>65</sup> even in this world. In themselves, the good things of this world are perfectly harmless. But when they are "made the Measures of all Good, and a Man comes to place supreme Happiness in them",<sup>66</sup> they become potently destructive. Butler thinks this self-evident. Hence his impatience with those who obstinately cherish what are indefensible notions of "interest":

Take a survey of mankind: the world in general, the good and bad, almost without exception, equally are agreed, that were religion out of the case, the happiness of the present life would consist in a manner wholly in riches, honours, sensual gratifications... Yet on the contrary, that persons in the greatest affluence of fortune are no happier than such as have only a competency; that the cares and disappointments of ambition for the most part far exceed the satisfactions of it; as also the miserable intervals of intemperance and excess, and the many untimely deaths occasioned by a dissolute course of life: these things are all seen, acknowledged, by every one acknowledged; but are thought no objections against, though they expressly contradict, this universal principle, that the happiness of the present life consists in one or other of them. Whence is all this absurdity and contradiction? Is not the middle way obvious? Can anything be more manifest, than that the happiness of life consists in these possessed and enjoyed only to a certain degree; that to pursue them beyond this degree, is always attended with more inconvenience than advantage to a man's self, and often with extreme misery and unhappiness. Whence then, I say, is all this absurdity and contradiction? ("Upon Human Nature", 15 Sermons, I, 14)

There is no need to choose between the extremes of worldliness and asceticism. In the "middle way" of moderation, riches, honours and sensual gratifications can be perfectly consistent with "the happiness of life". In this way alone is it possible to enjoy them.

Fielding, like Butler, would not want to deny that these are good things. In the Champion, for instance, asceticism is viewed — with some hostility — as an arms-supplier in the "war against virtue" (22 January

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<sup>65</sup> Hoadly's phrase: Twenty Sermons, p. 79.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 78.



1739/40: Henley, XV, 163). Virtue, Fielding complains, has been scurrilously misrepresented, not least by a certain tradition of Christian teaching:

Several of the philosophers, as well as primitive fathers, and some modern divines, have dressed her up in such disagreeable colours, have represented her to be of so rigid a nature, and so difficult to be attained, that they have frightened the weaker and more indolent part of mankind from her embraces... (Champion, 24 January 1739/40: Henley, XV, 166)

Those who contend that vice is "infinitely preferable to virtue" have, ironically, been aided and abetted by the Christian rigorists, who have taught that "thirst and hunger, whips and chains, were the only boons which virtue bestowed on her admirers", that in this world at least "her favour was the sure road to misery, and that those in whom she most delighted, she made most unhappy" (loc. cit.). The ascetics, in other words, have colluded with the free-thinking cynics in arguing virtue to be "contrary to our worldly interest" (Henley, XV, 168). Fielding is implacably opposed to this view.<sup>67</sup> Believing that physical, social and economic well-being are important and legitimate components of happiness in this world, he sees no reason why virtue should exclude them. In fact, the virtuous alone are truly capable of enjoying these desiderata, while the vicious may possess them in greater abundance but find no happiness in them. Vice may well be the most effective instrument of outward self-aggrandisement, but the inward losses are always in direct proportion to the outward gains. Applying the Prudential Syllogism in entirely secular terms, Fielding concludes that virtue "is always the result of wisdom, as happiness will be always the result of virtue" (loc. cit.).

This is the principal burden of Fielding's "Digression concerning true Wisdom" in Tom Jones (VI, iv, pp. 282-3). Certain critics have repeatedly insinuated that there was something recondite about Fielding's notion of prudence or practical wisdom. According to Battestin (whom I single out here only because his work is so influential), the "concept of prudence" in Tom Jones is "deliberately complex, as significant yet as elusive as the meaning of wisdom itself": Fielding's overall "moral purpose" in that

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. George H. Wolfe, "Lessons in Evil: Fielding's Ethics in The Champion Essays", in Donald Kaye, ed., A Provision of Human Nature: Essays on Fielding and Others in Honor of Miriam Austin Locke, Alabama, 1977, pp. 65-81 (pp. 75-6).



novel "was nothing less than the definition of Wisdom".<sup>68</sup> This kind of grandiose mystification can be sustained only by ignoring Fielding's one explicit definition of "Wisdom" (Battestein ignores it — and in an essay entitled "Fielding: The Definition of Wisdom"): <sup>69</sup>

True Wisdom then, notwithstanding all which Mr. Hogarth's poor Poet may have writ against Riches, and in Spite of all which any rich, well-fed Divine may have preached against Pleasure, consists not in the Contempt of either of these. A Man may have as much Wisdom in the Possession of an affluent Fortune, as any Beggar in the Streets; or may enjoy a handsome Wife or a hearty Friend, and still remain as wise as any sour Popish Recluse, who buries all his social Faculties, and starves his Belly while he well lashes his Back.

To say Truth, the wisest Man is the likeliest to possess all worldly Blessings in an eminent Degree: For as that Moderation which Wisdom prescribes is the surest Way to useful Wealth; so can it alone qualify us to taste many Pleasures. The wise Man gratifies every Appetite and every Passion, while the Fool sacrifices all the rest to pall and satiate one.

It may be objected, that very wise Men have been notoriously avaricious. I answer, not wise in that Instance. It may likewise be said, that the wisest Men have been in their Youth, immoderately fond of Pleasure. I answer, they were not wise then.

Wisdom, in short, whose Lessons have been represented as so hard to learn by those who never were at her School, only teaches us to extend a simple Maxim universally known and followed even in the lowest Life, a little farther than that Life carries it. And this is not to buy at too dear a Price.

Now, whoever takes this Maxim abroad with him into the grand Market of the World, and constantly applies it to Honours, to Riches, to Pleasures, and to every other Commodity which that Market affords, is, I will venture to affirm, a wise Man... For he makes the best of Bargains, since in Reality he purchases every Thing at the Price only of a little Trouble, and carries home all the good Things I have mentioned, while he keeps his Health, his Innocence, and his Reputation, the common Prices which are paid for them by others, entire and to himself.

I can see no good reason why this important "Digression", written "in Defiance of all the barking Critics in the World" (p. 282), should have been so widely neglected by Fielding's modern critics. The definition itself calls for little comment, however. What "true Wisdom" amounts to,

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<sup>68</sup> Providence, pp. 176, 165.

<sup>69</sup> Miller considers this "Digression" briefly, viewing it as an instance of possible Senecan influence, but does not relate it to Fielding's overall moral outlook: see Essays, p. 260 (and cf. Battestein, TJ, VI, iv, p. 282, n. 1).



here, is a straightforward secularized version of the Christian prudence recommended by Barrow.<sup>70</sup> The wise man is the one who buys his satisfactions at the right price.<sup>71</sup>

Virtue, then, involves not self-denial but "Moderation"; and "Moderation" is the surest method of enjoying "all worldly Blessings". In these terms, virtue is palpably consistent with our "true Interest" (TJ, Dedication, p. 7) — virtue, in this sense, is in effect the same thing as "true Wisdom". But "Moderation", essentially a private accomplishment, is by no means the whole of virtue. For Fielding and the Anglicans, the better part of virtue is charity or benevolence. While it is a relatively easy matter to prove that moderation is the most profitable method of self-gratification (for this, as Hoadly says, is "a Rule demonstrable from Nature and Experience"), it is a rather different and altogether more difficult matter to prove that benevolence is our "true Interest" in this world, not least because truly empirical premises are hard to establish.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, Fielding and the moralists consistently claim that this is the case, and in making this claim they are consciously and deliberately challenging a deep-rooted and widespread prejudice. Since the World tends to define and measure "Interest" in terms of hard sterling, it is not surprising that benevolence, above all other virtues, is supposed to be fundamentally inconsistent with the imperatives of self-love. It is generally "imagin'd", complains Shaftesbury, "that there is a plain and absolute Opposition" between the "private" and "publick" affections, that "the pursuing the common

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<sup>70</sup> See above, pp. 73-4.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Aristotle, NE, III, xi, 8, on the temperate man: "such pleasures as conduce to health and fitness he will try to obtain in a moderate and right degree; as also other pleasures so far as they are not detrimental to health and fitness, and not ignoble, nor beyond his means. The man who exceeds these limits cares more for such pleasures than they are worth."

<sup>72</sup> The penalties of intemperance, and the corresponding rewards of moderation, are palpable and visible, to those who have eyes to see; and the moralists can therefore make effective appeals to common experience. In the case of benevolence, Fielding cannot appeal to the experience of Everyman, since — as he himself points out — the pleasures and satisfactions of benevolence are inaccessible and unintelligible to any but the man who already possesses a benevolent heart: see TJ, VI, i, esp. pp. 271-2; and cf. JW, III, x: Henley, II, 127. For an interesting philosophical perspective on this didactic Catch-22, see Harrison, The Novelist as Moral Philosopher, pp. 59-62.



Interest or publick Good thro the Affections of one kind, must be a hindrance to the Attainment of private Good thro the Affections of another":

For it being taken for granted, that Hazards and Hardships, of whatever sort, are naturally the Ill of the private State; and it being certainly the Nature of those publick Affections to lead often to the greatest Hardships and Hazards of every kind; 'tis presently infer'd, "That 'tis the Creature's Interest to be without any publick Affection whatsoever."

THIS we know for certain; That all social Love, Friendship, Gratitude, or whatever else is of this generous kind, does by its nature take place of the self-interesting Passions, draws us out of ourselves, and makes us disregarding of our own Convenience and Safety. So that according to a known way of reasoning on Self-Interest, that which is of a social kind in us, shou'd of right be abolish'd. Thus Kindness of every sort, Indulgence, Tenderness, Compassion, and, in short, all natural Affection shou'd be industriously suppress'd, and, as mere Folly, and Weakness of Nature, be resisted and overcome; that, by this means, there might be nothing remaining in us, which was contrary to a direct Self-End; nothing which might stand in opposition to a steady and deliberate Pursuit of the most narrowly confin'd Self-Interest. (Inquiry, II.1.i, 132-3)

Shaftesbury's impatience with this "known way of reasoning" is shared by Butler, who likewise complains that "there is generally thought to be some peculiar kind of contrariety between self-love and the love of our neighbour, between the pursuit of public and of private good; insomuch that when you are recommending one of these, you are supposed to be speaking against the other" ("Upon the Love of Our Neighbour", 15 Sermons, XI, 2).

The latter is a supposition apparently cherished by some of Fielding's modern readers, who tend to speak of benevolence and self-love (or prudence) as if they were moral and psychological opposites.<sup>73</sup> According

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<sup>73</sup> M. Irwin is typical when he speaks of a "basic antithesis of charity and self-interest" in Tom Jones (The Tentative Realist, p. 85). Cf. Smith, "Fielding and Mandeville", where the same antithesis is implicit throughout. Hussein argues that Fielding's "basic criteria for the excellence or depravity of man, in the last analysis, hinge upon the antithesis of self-love and benevolence" ("The Eighteenth-Century Concept of the Good Man", p. 192); but he is inconsistent on this point (see pp. 207-211), and so are most of Fielding's modern critics. See, for instance, W. R. Irwin, The Making of JW, Ch. ii, esp. pp. 59-64, 68-9; Dudden, II, 685-6 (replicates Irwin's insights and inconsistencies); and Battestin, Moral Basis, pp. 19, 53, 70-72. In "Professor Empson's Tom Jones", N&Q, 204 (1959), 400-404, Rawson notes that "self-love and



to Battestin, for instance, Fielding believed that "self-love was as powerful as social, and more generally to be met with": "For every Tom Jones, he implies, there is a Blifil".<sup>74</sup> Battestin seems to be alluding to the Essay on Man (particularly III, 317-8); but, while finding Pope's terms useful, he effectively denies Pope's principal contention — that self-love and social are naturally "the same". It is true that Tom Jones is "no-body's Enemy but his own", and that Blifil is "strongly attached to the Interest only of one single Person" (TJ, IV, v, p. 165), and at first sight this seems to lend plausibility to Battestin's logic. But certain distinctions are necessary. In saying that Jones is "no-body's Enemy but his own", Fielding is telling us not one but two things: first, that Jones is benevolent and therefore virtuous; but also, second, that he is his own enemy. Battestin's reasoning implies that this distinction is unnecessary, that being benevolent somehow involves being one's own enemy. At the very least, the antithetical formula implies that self-love and social are mutually exclusive. Battestin is not alone in this. The same critical (or rather ethical) syndrome is reflected in Bernard Harrison's study of Tom Jones. As a philosopher, Harrison has his own ethical axe to grind, and the following passage seems to me to say more about the author's own philosophical leanings than about Fielding's novel:

Friendship, and morality in general, is intrinsically alien to the calculation of self-interest... The goodhearted man, by taking pleasure in the happiness of others, commits himself to ends whose pursuit may conflict with his own happiness, and which he is not free to barter off against other satisfactions in the general post of self-interested calculation... He behaves, in fact, like a fool...

In short, the goodhearted man has cut himself off from

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social are, to some natures at least, the same" in Tom Jones (p. 402), and anticipates some of my own reasoning on this question. The main points of this essay are carried over into Rawson's later work (e.g., "Fielding and Smollett", pp. 276-8), but they sit uneasily with his more general emphasis on tensions and oppositions between prudence and benevolence. The same kind of inconsistency is more notable in Ehrenpreis, who has some very useful things to say about the coincidence of self-love and social (Fielding:TJ, pp. 7, 25, 35-8), but in the same breath talks about a moral opposition between the "mean impulses of self-love" and the "noble motives of benevolence" (p. 36, my emphases). As with many other critics, Ehrenpreis's historical insights appear to be subverted by an inveterate (and incongruous) modern prejudice against all forms of self-interest, which is generally taken for the moral "antithesis" of benevolence.

<sup>74</sup> Introduction to (the one-vol.) Wesleyan TJ, p. xxiii.



prudence, if prudence means the rational calculation of self-interest.<sup>75</sup>

This is part of a misguided attempt, on Fielding's behalf, to disown Bishop Butler's view of the relation between the moral and the prudential. Like Battestin and Rawson, Harrison sees tension or opposition where Fielding and the Anglicans see coincidence. Mabbott, another academic philosopher, furnishes a perfect example of the kind of moral thinking that lies behind these readings:

Not all planning for the future would count as prudence. A millionaire's careful disposition of his charitable benefactions would not do so. Prudence is normally taken to concern only the private interests of the agent. A man does not show prudence by...giving to the poor.<sup>76</sup>

These assumptions are replicated in slightly different terms by Horsburgh (Mabbott's co-author): "self-interested behaviour, however enlightened, is expected to further one's interests partly at the expense of other people's"; it is "expected to produce conflicts of interest".<sup>77</sup> This is the ethical heart of the matter.

What would these philosophers make of the following recommendation of almsgiving, from one of Barrow's most celebrated sermons (and one of Fielding's favourites)?

Thus to employ our riches is really the best use they are capable of; not only the most innocent, most worthy, most plausible, but the most safe, most pleasant, most advantageous, and consequently in all respects most prudent way of disposing them. ("Bounty", Works, I, 302: my emphasis)

It could of course be objected that this argument is ultimately dependent on theological premises, and particularly on the doctrine of future rewards and punishments. To an extent, this is true, but the objection itself confirms that modern, secular notions of self-interest are inconsistent with those of Barrow or Fielding, both orthodox Anglican believers. This discrepancy is perhaps inescapable. But even if religion

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<sup>75</sup> The Novelist as Moral Philosopher, p. 123.

<sup>76</sup> Mabbott and Horsburgh, "Prudence", p. 57 (my emphasis).

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

were left out of the question, neither Barrow nor Fielding would accept the proposition that self-love and social are natural opposites. Both would argue (against many of their modern readers) that prudence and benevolence are coincident even in this world. According to Barrow, charity is in fact the "truest" manifestation of self-love:

The practice of charity is productive of many great benefits and advantages to us: so that to love our neighbour doth involve the truest love to ourselves...<sup>78</sup>

...the more or less we love others, answerably the more or less we love ourselves; so that charity and self-love become coincident, and both run together evenly in one channel. ("Love", Works, I, 230)

Far from being antithetical, self-love and social are in practice (as Pope argued later) "the same". The putative conflict of interests is categorically denied. This is not to argue that self-love and social are literally (that is, psychologically) "the same", which would indeed be difficult to accept. The essential point is that their ends coincide.<sup>79</sup> That self-love and social are psychologically distinct is, according to Butler, no kind of argument for their disagreement:

Every man is to be considered in two capacities, the private and public; as designed to pursue his own interest, and likewise to contribute to the good of others. Whoever will consider, may see, that in general there is no contrariety between these; but that from the original constitution of man, and the circumstances he is placed in, they perfectly coincide, and mutually carry on each other. ("Upon Compassion", 15 Sermons, V, 1)

I must...remind you that though benevolence and self-love are different; though the former tends most directly to public good, and the latter to private: yet they are so perfectly coincident, that the greatest satisfactions to ourselves depend upon our having benevolence in a due degree; and that self-love is one chief security of our right behaviour towards society. ("Upon Human Nature", 15 Sermons, I, 6)

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<sup>78</sup> "Motives and Arguments to Charity" (cited hereafter as "Motives"), Works, I, 251.

<sup>79</sup> A failure to accommodate this crucial distinction may account for Harrison's acutely unsympathetic account of Butler's ethics, and of what he calls "Standard Benevolism" (see above, pp. 19-20). In turn, this would also account for his attempt to dissociate Fielding from "Standard Benevolism" (a class which includes Shaftesbury's ethics): see The Novelist as Moral Philosopher, Chs. v-vi.



One could quote much more from Butler to the same effect.<sup>80</sup> And it should be said that Butler's greatness as a moral philosopher has very little to do with originality. His work, though impressive in itself, is essentially a philosophical endorsement of ideas and beliefs which were commonplaces of contemporary Anglican homiletics. That "the greatest satisfactions to ourselves depend upon our having benevolence in a due degree" was a recurrent message of Latitudinarian pulpit oratory. It was also a principal contention of Shaftesbury's Inquiry. To be "well affected towards the Publick Interest and one's own", argues Shaftesbury, "is not only consistent, but inseparable" (II.1.i, 135). While the man of moderation enjoys more, and purer, sensual pleasures than the so-called Man of Pleasure, the benevolent individual enjoys additional pleasures and satisfactions of an entirely different order, and of a kind totally inaccessible to the sensualist. In "the main Sum of Happiness", says Shaftesbury, "there is scarce a single Article, but what derives it-self from social Love, and depends immediately on the natural and kind Affections" (II.2.i, 178). The very operation of these affections in the heart of the good-natured individual generates "a more intense, clear, and undisturb'd Pleasure, than those which attend the Satisfaction of Thirst, Hunger, and other ardent Appetites... No Joy, merely of sense, can be a Match for it": in short, "the CHARM of kind Affection is superiour to all other Pleasure" (II.2.i, 168, 170). In this respect, there are definite continuities between Shaftesbury's Inquiry and the moral psychology of Latitudinarian homiletics. The "communication of benefits to others", says Barrow, is "accompanied with a very delicious relish upon the mind of him that practises it; nothing indeed carrying with it a more pure and savoury delight than beneficence": it is in this sense (to quote a celebrated phrase) that "a man may be virtuously voluptuous, and a laudable epicure, by doing much good" ("Bounty", Works, I, 299).<sup>81</sup> The hero of Tom Jones is apparently just such a "laudable epicure".<sup>82</sup> Having seen Enderson's family preserved by his charities,

<sup>80</sup> For Butler's most sustained assault on the notion that benevolence and self-love are naturally at odds, see "Upon the Love of Our Neighbour", 15 Sermons, XI, *passim*.

<sup>81</sup> Also quoted by Fielding in CGJ, No. 29: Jensen, I, 308.

<sup>82</sup> Barrow's "epicurean" metaphor is of course quite in keeping with the imagery of food and eating which is so ubiquitous in Tom Jones: see Timothy D. O'Brien, "The Hungry Author and Narrative Performance in Tom Jones", SEL, 25 (1985), 615-32, esp. pp. 618-20. As O'Brien implies, Jones's moral goodness is in a sense a kind of "good taste" (p. 619).



Mrs Miller "began to pour forth Thanksgivings...and concluded with saying, she doubted not but such Goodness would meet a glorious Reward":

Jones answered, 'He had been sufficiently rewarded already. Your Cousin's Account, Madam,' said he, 'hath given me a Sensation more pleasing than I have ever known... If there are Men who cannot feel the Delight of giving Happiness to others, I sincerely pity them, as they are incapable of tasting what is, in my Opinion, a greater Honour, a higher Interest, and a sweeter Pleasure, than the ambitious, the avaritious, or the voluptuous Man can ever obtain.' (TJ, XIII, x, p. 728)

It is perhaps worth considering in what sense beneficence can be said to be a pleasurable activity. According to Barrow, this has much to do with the quintessentially social nature of the human animal, and particularly with the sympathetic energies of "good nature" ("Motives", Works, I, 249). "Good-Nature", as Fielding says, "is that benevolent and amiable Temper of Mind which disposes us to feel the Misfortunes, and enjoy the Happiness of others" ("Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men", Miscellanies I, p. 158). It is in this sense a natural disposition to comply with the Pauline injunction, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Romans 12:15). It is, as Barrow says, "a kind of natural charity" ("Love", Works, I, 235):

The very constitution, frame, and temper of our nature, directeth and inclineth us...to mercy and pity: the very same bowels, which in our own want do by a lively sense of pain inform us thereof, and instigate us to provide for its relief, do also grievously resent the distresses of another, admonishing us thereby, and provoking us to yield him succour. Such is the natural sympathy between men (discernible in all, but appearing most vigorous in the best natures), that we cannot see, cannot hear of, yea, can hardly imagine the calamities of other men, without being somewhat disturbed and afflicted ourselves. As also nature, to the acts requisite toward preservation of our life, hath annexed a sensible pleasure, forcibly enticing us to the performance of them; so hath she made the communication of benefits to others to be accompanied with a very delicious relish upon the mind of him that practises it... ("Bounty", Works, I, 299: my emphasis)

Good nature is constituted essentially by a quasi-physiological "sympathy", a spontaneous and involuntary tendency to weep with them that weep and rejoice with them that do rejoice. And this "natural sympathy between men" is for Barrow the principal source of the social pleasures:



Hence doth nature so strongly affect society, and abhor solitude; so that a man cannot enjoy himself alone, or find satisfaction in any good without a companion: not only for that he then cannot receive, but also because he cannot impart assistance, consolation, and delight in converse: for men do not affect society only that they may obtain benefits thereby; but as much or more, that they may be enabled to communicate them; nothing being more distasteful than to be always on the taking hand: neither indeed hath any thing a more pleasant and savoury relish than to do good; as even Epicurus, the great patron of pleasure, did confess. ("Motives", Works, I, 249)

Happiness itself is a social concept.<sup>83</sup> This strong mutual dependence of man and man, which finds social expression in the reciprocal exchange of "benefits", is of fundamental importance in Barrow's ethics. In a sense, it implies and involves the obsolescence of the terms meum and tuum: every pleasure given is also a pleasure received, every pleasure received also a pleasure given.

Good nature, like charity, involves "a complacence or delightful satisfaction in the good of our neighbour".<sup>84</sup> This kind of sympathy is the good man's most reliable source of felicity. It is this, above all, that makes charity its own reward in this world. Charity involves the psychological "appropriation" of all the "good things" enjoyed by others, "for are not all these things yours, if you do...make them so by finding much delight and satisfaction in them?" —

doth not your neighbour's wealth enrich you, if you feel content in his possessing and using it? doth not his preferment advance you, if your spirit riseth with it in a gladsome complacence? doth not his pleasure delight you, if you relish his enjoyment of it? doth not his prosperity bless you, if your heart doth exult and triumph in it? ("Motives", Works, I, 255)<sup>85</sup>

"This is the divine magic of charity", declares Barrow, "which conveyeth all things into our hands": the charitable man can in this sense never be utterly "poor" or "miserable", "for while his neighbour hath any thing,

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<sup>83</sup> Cf. Fielding's "Essay on Conversation", Miscellanies I, esp. pp. 119-23.

<sup>84</sup> "The Nature, Properties, and Acts of Charity" (cited hereafter as "Charity"), Works, I, 240.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. "Love", Works, I 237: "charity is an instrument, whereby we may apply all our neighbour's good to ourselves, it being ours, if we can find complacence therein".



he will enjoy it; rejoicing with those that rejoice, as the Apostle doth enjoin" (I, 255). Charity, like Fielding's "good-nature", is as much "a delight in the happiness of mankind" as "a concern at their misery" (Champion, 27 March 1739/40: Henley, XV, 258).

According to Shaftesbury, likewise, the "natural Affections" are "founded in Love, Complacency, Good-will, and in a Sympathy with the Kind or Species": these are what constitute "whatever may be called Humanity or Good-Nature" (Inquiry, II.1.ii, 136). And for him, too, happiness is a quintessentially social phenomenon, dependent on the exercise of these benevolent sympathies. Almost all of our pleasures can be referred to the enjoyment of "Society" and "mutual Converse" (II.2.i, 180). One of the principal "natural Effects" of "Love or kind Affection, in a way of mental Pleasure", is "An Enjoyment of Good by Communication. A receiving, as it were, by Reflection, or by way of Participation in the Good of others" (II.2.i, 175). The truth of this "will be easily apprehended by one who is not exceedingly ill-natur'd":

It will be consider'd how many the Pleasures are, of sharing Contentment and Delight with others; of receiving it in Fellowship and Company; and gathering it, in a manner, from the pleas'd and happy States of those around us, from accounts and relations of such happinesses, from the very Countenances, Gestures, Voices and Sounds, even of Creatures foreign to our Kind, whose Signs of Joy and Contentment we can any-way discern. So insinuating are these Pleasures of Sympathy, and so widely diffus'd thro our whole Lives, that there is hardly such a thing as Satisfaction or Contentment, of which they make not an essential part. (II.2.i, 176)

Shaftesbury's good-natured man is thus distinctively sympathetic. And the same kind of "natural sympathy", as Barrow calls it, is of course among the salient qualities of Fielding's good men. Parson Adams "always sympathized with his Friends", on happy or melancholy occasions (JA, III, iii, p. 225). When Joseph and Fanny are fortuitously reunited, we see him "dancing about the Room in a Rapture of Joy" — "for the Goodness of his Heart enjoyed the Blessings which were exulting in the Breasts of both the other two" (II, xii, p. 155). He displays a sympathetic sensitivity to mere "accounts and relations" of happiness or misery: his sentimental involvement in Wilson's autobiographical narrative and "The History of Leonora", though a source of much comedy, is surely intended to reflect his charitable nature. Sympathy is the fundamental motive of the good works of an Adams or a Booth: good nature "disposes us to feel



the Misfortunes, and enjoy the Happiness of others; and consequently pushes us on to promote the latter, and prevent the former"

(Miscellanies I, p. 158: my emphasis). Sympathy also supplies the immediate reward of beneficence. For the charitable hero of Tom Jones, doing good is delightful because it confers happiness on others, and this happiness is a source of sympathetic gratification:

He was never an indifferent Spectator of the Misery or Happiness of any one; and he felt either the one or the other in greater Proportion as he himself contributed to either. He could not therefore be the Instrument of raising a whole Family from the lowest State of Wretchedness to the highest Pitch of Joy without conveying great Felicity to himself; more perhaps than worldly Men often purchase to themselves by undergoing the most severe Labour, and often by wading through the deepest Iniquity. (TJ, XV, viii, pp. 815-6)

It could be said that natural sympathy becomes a truly moral phenomenon — a 'reward' or a 'punishment' — when it is compounded with a sense of responsibility for the condition of its object.<sup>86</sup> Nightingale, the philanderer manqué, feels considerable pain from the contemplation of "the unhappy Situation in which he had placed poor Nancy" (TJ, XIV, vii, p. 766). His discomfort occasions the following observation from Fielding:

THE Good or Evil we confer on others, very often, I believe, recoils on ourselves. For as Men of a benign Disposition enjoy their own Acts of Beneficence, equally with those to whom they are done, so there are scarce any Natures so entirely diabolical, as to be capable of doing Injuries, without paying themselves some Pangs, for the Ruin which they bring on their Fellow-Creatures. (pp. 765-6)

The "Pangs" of remorse are moral-psychological counterparts of "the Delight of giving Happiness to others" (TJ, XIII, x, p. 728): if a blessing conferred is a blessing enjoyed, an injury inflicted on another is likewise an injury inflicted on the self. Except in "entirely diabolical" individuals, natural sympathy establishes a psychological

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. Jones's confrontation with Allworthy in TJ, III, viii, where he confesses to having sold his horse, but in order to raise funds for the penurious Seagrims: "I could not bear to see these poor Wretches naked and starving, and at the same Time know myself to have been the Occasion of all their Sufferings.—I could not bear it..." (p. 143). Fielding's chapter-heading presents this interview as evidence of "a good-natured Disposition" in the young hero.



community of interests between self and other, and this is one important sense in which self-love and social can be said to be "the same". The beneficent or injurious deeds of the sub-diabolical common man are always attended with some degree of sympathetic pleasure or pain.

The "Delight of giving Happiness to others" is then the highest of all earthly pleasures.<sup>87</sup> "They that feel it", as Hoadly says, "know that there cannot be a greater Pleasure to a well-disposed Mind, than this of adding to the Happiness, or diminishing the Miseries, of our Fellow-Creatures".<sup>88</sup> And while the world, with its narrow and misguided notions of "Interest", may think this pleasure an expensive one, the benevolent man — the man who has felt it — knows otherwise:

'Mention nothing of Obligations,' cries Jones... 'If by the Trifle you have received from me, I have preserved a whole Family, sure Pleasure was never bought so cheap.' (TJ, XIII, x, p. 727)

Jones may purchase his occasional sexual pleasures "at too dear a Price" (TJ, VI, iii, p. 283), but he clearly understands that benevolence is more consistent with "true Wisdom" than the pitiable (and more expensive) pursuits of ambition and avarice. The highest of all pleasures is also the cheapest. And as the good man's appetite for this pleasure is

more easily and safely satisfied than ambition, revenge, or any of those pernicious passions, so are its joys more exquisite, and less interrupted. Ambition is seldom satisfied without fear, or revenge without remorse, but the good-natured man can never carry his enjoyments too far, this being the only affection of the human mind which can never be sated. (Champion, 27 March 1739/40: Henley, XV, 260)

In general, Fielding argues that ambition, like avarice, can never actually be satisfied. In one of his epistolary contributions to Sarah Fielding's Familiar Letters (1747), he contrasts these "two great motives to the action of men" with the passion of love, and in terms which

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<sup>87</sup> As Fielding said elsewhere: "There is great Pleasure in Gratitude tho' it is second I believe to that of Benevolence: for of all the Delights upon Earth none can equal the Raptures which a good Mind feels on conferring Happiness on those whom we think worthy of it." Letter to George Lyttleton, 29 August 1749. Quoted in Wilbur L. Cross, The History of Henry Fielding, 1918, II, 246.



anticipate Jones's encomium on the pleasures of benevolence.<sup>89</sup> To "acquire to yourself the highest degree of human happiness", says Valentine (Fielding's epistolary persona), "must, I think, be esteemed the highest degree of human wisdom"; and "love appears alone capable of bestowing on us this highest degree of human felicity" (Henley, XVI, 48). Love, he implies, is thus the highest function of "human wisdom" — another variation on the Prudential Syllogism. The premises of this argument are essentially psychological:

First, then, it seems to me, that the full gratification of that passion which is uppermost in our minds, is the highest happiness of which we are capable.

Secondly, it seems likewise, that one man is capable of being happier than another, in proportion as the passion by which he is possessed...is more or less capable of full gratification. (Henley, XVI, 48-9)

It is in this light that Valentine considers the claims of ambition and avarice, neither of which is "capable of a full gratification" — "indeed, we may say, of any gratification at all, since every acquisition to them both brings desire along with it: desires which enlarge themselves in proportion to the good obtained" (shades of Ecclesiastes 5:10 again, here). But in the case of love "it is far otherwise":

This sweet passion admits of instant complete gratification. Every good conferred on...the beloved object, so fills the whole mind with pleasure, that it for a while leaves no wish unsatisfied. And if, after its sweetest satieties, new desires arise, these are not like avarice and ambition, restless uneasy perturbations; but so sweet and pleasant, that they bring some reward along with them. (Henley, XVI, 49-50)

It is in this sense, then, that love is "more eligible than either avarice or ambition". But love is not only "capable of receiving a fuller gratification": "we may likewise argue its superiority, as it...proposes a certain end; as this end is generally not only possible but easy, safe, and innocent; seldom attended with difficulty, danger, or crime to ourselves, or with any mischief to others. In every one of which lights it is preferable both to ambition and avarice" (Henley, XVI, 50). Love,

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<sup>89</sup> Familiar Letters between the Principal Characters in David Simple, and Some Others, Letter xliv: Henley, XVI, 47-51 (I quote from p. 49). This revealing essay has generally been neglected, but see A. R. Towers, "Amelia and the State of Matrimony", RES, n.s. 5 (1954), 144-57 (pp. 148-9), where it is touched upon briefly.



as the source of the highest and purest "gratification", is therefore uniquely consistent with "the highest degree of human wisdom": by contrast, "all the pursuits...which arise from those other motives" can be attributed to "folly and weakness of mind" (Henley, XVI, 50).

Valentine is concerned primarily with erotic love, but all of these arguments apply equally to social love or benevolence. (Fielding associates these closely in any case: the difference of context does not involve any real difference in the quality of the passion.)<sup>90</sup> It is of course significant that Tom Jones is capable of love in either of these contexts, Blifil in neither. With mock-admiration, Fielding assures us that Blifil's pursuit of Sophia had nothing at all to do with love ("as to that Passion...he had not the least Tincture of it in his whole Composition"):

But tho' he was so entirely free from that mixed Passion... of which the Virtues and Beauty of Sophia formed so notable an Object; yet was he altogether as well furnished with some other Passions, that promised themselves very full Gratification in the young Lady's Fortune. Such were Avarice and Ambition, which divided the Dominion of his Mind between them. (TJ, VI, iv, p. 284)

Here is another sense in which Blifil's characteristic vices reflect a fundamental "folly and weakness of mind". In preferring the Western estate to Sophia's "Virtues and Beauty", he demonstrates again "that great aversion to satisfaction and content which is inseparably incident to great minds" (JW, I, xiv: Henley, II, 45), and a commensurate degree of idiocy. Blifil is equally devoid of social love. It will be recalled that he was "strongly attached to the Interest only of one single Person" (TJ, IV, v, p. 165):

...there are some Minds whose Affections, like Master Blifil's, are solely placed on one single Person, whose Interest and indulgence alone they consider on every Occasion; regarding the Good or Ill of others as merely indifferent, any farther than as they contribute to the Pleasure or Advantage of that Person... (TJ, IV, vi, p. 175)

However paradoxical it may seem, this is another respect in which

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<sup>90</sup> See TJ, VI, i. And cf. J. Middleton Murry, "In Defence of Fielding", in Unprofessional Essays, 1956, pp. 9-52, esp. pp. 28-38, 51. See also Rawson, "Empson's TJ", *passim*, and "Fielding and Smollett", pp. 276-8; and Martin Price, To the Palace of Wisdom: Studies in Order and Energy from Dryden to Blake (1964), Arcturus edition, 1970, p. 292.



Blifil demonstrates a total want of true self-love. Fixated selfishness of this kind, like every other species of vice, is naturally self-defeating. As Fielding says in the Covent-Garden Journal, "a rich Man without Charity is a Rogue", and "perhaps it would be no difficult Matter to prove, that he is also a Fool" —

If a Man, who doth not know his true Interest, may be thought to deserve that Appellation; in what Light shall we behold a Christian, who neglects the Cultivation of a Virtue which in Scripture is said to wash away his Sins, and without which all his other good Deeds cannot render him acceptable in the Sight of his Creator and Redeemer.

Even in this World, it is surely much too narrow to confine a Man's Interest merely to that which loads his Coffers. To pursue that which is most capable of giving him Happiness, is indeed the Interest of every Man; and there are many who find great Pleasure in emptying their Purses with this View, to one who hath no other Satisfaction than in filling it.

(No. 44: Jensen, II, 9)<sup>91</sup>

"Even in this World", then, a Christian "void of Charity" is void of wisdom — "ignorant of his own Interest" — and "may with great Propriety be called a silly Fellow":

Nay...a mere human Being who places all his Happiness in selfish Considerations, without any relative Virtues, any Regard to the Good of others, is in plain Truth a downright Fool. (Jensen, II, 10)

Here is further unambiguous confirmation that Blifil is both the "Knave" and the "Fool" of Tom Jones. Fielding's ironic attribution of "prudence" to this knave both reflects and ridicules the egoist's misguided self-esteem. The point is that Blifil ("downright Fool" though he is) thinks of himself as flawlessly prudent, and his low opinion of Jones is a further indication of this duplex idiocy:

He fancied that he knew Jones to the Bottom, and had in Reality a great Contempt for his Understanding, for not being more attached to his own Interest. He had no Apprehension that Jones was in Love with Sophia; and as for any lucrative Motives, he imagined they would sway very little with so silly a Fellow. (TJ, VI, vii, p. 295)

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<sup>91</sup> Cf. Butler's argument in "Upon the Love of Our Neighbour", 15 Sermons, XI, 15.

Blifil's notions of wisdom and folly are inversions of Fielding's own, and the difference is constituted by true and false definitions of "Interest". (It is in this sense ironic that Bernard Harrison's estimation of Tom Jones should be entirely congruous with Blifil's.)<sup>92</sup> It is true enough that Jones is less firmly "attached to his own Interest" than he should be, and that in this respect he displays some foolish or "silly" traits. His practical weakness for sexual pleasure is the most conspicuous, and the most damaging, of these. But Blifil locates Jones's silliness primarily in his good-natured selflessness, and more precisely in his want of "lucrative Motives" — effectively, his want of avarice.<sup>93</sup> In fact, of course, it is Blifil's avaricious and uncharitable indifference to "the Good or Ill of others" that constitutes a truly contemptible lack of "Understanding".

It is a great mistake to suppose that Blifil and Jones can be differentiated by reference to a polar opposition between self-love and social. According to Barrow, any kind of self-love which generates vices is false self-love (and therefore not really self-love at all).<sup>94</sup> Self-love "true" and "false" can be distinguished by reference to their respective practical consequences: if it is productive of happiness, it is "true"; if of misery, it is palpably "false". For example:

If...out of regard to ourselves we do things base or mischievous; if thence we dote upon vain profits, embrace foul pleasures, incur sinful guilt, expose ourselves to grievous danger, trouble, remorse, and punishment; if thereby we are engaged to forsake our true interest, and forfeit our final happiness; then assuredly it is a foolish and vicious self-love; it is indeed not a proper, but a false and equivocal love, usurping that goodly name... ("Self-Love", Works, I, 536)

At the end of Tom Jones, Blifil's fate (including his future prospects) demonstrates that his self-love always was and still is "false and equivocal", since it has manifestly led him to forsake his own "true interest". Jones, by embracing "foul pleasures", does indeed expose

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<sup>92</sup> See above, pp. 121-2.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Fielding's ironic concession in TJ, IV, vi, that "Want of Prudence" (in this sense) "admits of no Excuse" (p. 171).

<sup>94</sup> For a series of sermons on the "false" and "culpable" forms of self-love, see Works, I, 537-53.



himself to "grievous danger, trouble, remorse, and punishment", and to this extent he too is led astray by "false" and "foolish" self-love. If an individual "rushes upon certain ruin for the gratification of a present desire", as Butler says, "nobody will call the principle of this action self-love" ("Upon Human Nature", 15 Sermons, I, 7n.). Only "false" self-love can be morally objectionable. "The thing to be lamented", says Butler, "is not that men have so great regard to their own good or interest in the present world, for they have not enough":

Upon the whole, if the generality of mankind were to cultivate within themselves the principle of self-love; if they were to accustom themselves to sit down and consider, what was the greatest happiness they were capable of attaining for themselves in this life, and if self-love were so strong and prevalent, as that they would uniformly pursue this their supposed chief temporal good, without being diverted from it by any particular passion; it would manifestly prevent numberless follies and vices. (15 Sermons, Preface, paras. 40, 41: my emphasis)

Surely one of the principal lessons of Tom Jones is that rational self-love of this kind would indeed have prevented many of the "Follies and Vices" which get the hero into so much trouble (TJ, XVII, ix, p. 911).

Barrow's treatment of self-love "true" and "false" owes much to the Nicomachean Ethics. In a passage to which Barrow alludes directly on more than one occasion,<sup>95</sup> Aristotle complains of loose and complacent talk about "self-love" (philautia) (NE, IX, viii). This passage presents a challenge to the common supposition that self-love is intrinsically a bad thing. Aristotle begins by conceding that we tend to "censure those who put themselves first", and that "'lover of self' is used as a term of reproach":

And it is thought that a bad man considers himself in all he does, and the more so the worse he is...whereas a good man acts from a sense of what is noble [kalos], and the better he is the more so he acts, and he considers his friend's interest, disregarding his own. (IX, viii, 1)

But Aristotle insists that "the facts do not accord with these theories". There is a problem of language here — we must ask ourselves what we mean by the term "self-love" (IX, viii, 2, 3):

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<sup>95</sup> See "Love", Works, I, 236; and "Self-Love", Works, I, 535.



Those then who make it a term of reproach call men lovers of self when they assign to themselves the larger share of money, honours, or bodily pleasures; since these are the things which most men desire and set their hearts on as being the greatest goods, and which accordingly they compete with each other to obtain... But most men are of this kind. Accordingly the use of the term 'lover of self' as a reproach has arisen from the fact that self-love of the ordinary kind is bad. Hence self-love is rightly censured in those who are lovers of self in this sense.

But those who are lovers of self in this sense (those like Blifil, for instance) are not self-lovers in the truest sense:

For if a man were always bent on outdoing everybody else in acting justly or temperately or displaying any other of the virtues...no one will charge him with love of self nor find any fault with him. Yet as a matter of fact such a man might be held to be a lover of self in an exceptional degree. At all events he takes for himself the things that are noblest and most truly good... Hence the good man will be a lover of self in the fullest degree, though in another sense than the lover of self so-called by way of reproach... (NE, IX, viii, 4-6)

This distinction between "the lover of self so-called" and the true self-lover is one which occurs ubiquitously in prudential literature, including Fielding's work. Here, surely, is the real difference between Blifil and — barring his weakness for "bodily pleasures" — Tom Jones. "The word self-love is ambiguous", warns Barrow, but few have heeded the warning ("Self-Love", Works, I, 533). Self-love must certainly not be confused with selfishness such as Blifil's.<sup>96</sup> For Fielding, as for the Anglicans, self-love is a radically natural principle, implanted in man by God "to excite him to the Pursuit of his own real Good", and a proper counterpart of those "Passions and Affections" which excite him to the pursuit of the "real Good" of others. There is no natural tension between the social affections and self-love. Indeed, this "necessary Principle of Action" was "intended...as a Spur to noble Pursuits", for these are most conducive to the ends of self-love:

But Man...has most shamefully perverted this necessary Principle of Action to the most vile Purposes, and made that which was intended by the Author of his Being as a Spur to noble Pursuits...become a Bane, a Curse to him, and productive

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<sup>96</sup> See Shaftesbury on the difference between "the Affection towards private or Self-Good" per se and "what we commonly call SELFISHNESS", which is indeed "an ill and vitious Affection": Inquiry, I.2.ii, 37-9.



of the most base ignoble Actions. For, by indulging this Passion to Excess, and mistaking imaginary for real Happiness, Men have run into the most pernicious of all Vices, Selfishness...

This narrow selfish Spirit, which pursues only an imaginary self-centred Happiness, has been the Cause of the most detestable Vices; such as Pride, Envy, Malice, Avarice, and Ambition. (TP, No. 25: Locke, p. 203)

Selfishness is indeed at odds with the social affections. But it is equally at odds with true self-love: as the Covent-Garden Journal argues, ruthless egoism such as Blifil's is distinctively self-defeating.<sup>97</sup> This "perverted" self-love may be "the Cause of the most detestable Vices", but it is also ipso facto contrary to the ends of self-love proper.<sup>98</sup> The "merely selfish Man" (Locke, p. 203) — the "lover of self so-called", in Aristotle's phrase — "pursues only an imaginary self-centred Happiness", of a kind which is palpably inconsistent with his own "real Good".

The ethical substance of Fielding's work is bound to be distorted by the a priori supposition that there is a necessary tension or conflict between benevolence and self-love. Too much criticism of Fielding has been directed by rigid modern prejudices concerning the nature of morality, ones which regrettably do not coincide with the dominant beliefs of Fielding and his age. The damaging tendency to confuse self-love (and even prudence) with selfishness is perhaps understandable, given that the positive connotations of the term "self-love" have now been entirely lost. But even selfishness is not, strictly speaking, the moral or psychological opposite of benevolence. Both logic and etymology suggest that the true

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<sup>97</sup> Cf. Barrow on the "culpable sort of self-love" known as "self-interest", exemplified by those who "inordinately or immoderately do covet and strive to procure for themselves...worldly goods, merely because profitable or pleasant to themselves, not considering or regarding the good of others": this "practice of pursuing self-interest so vehemently" (which is "looked upon and cried up as a clear and certain point of wisdom" in this world) is not only the bane of civilized society, but is also ultimately self-defeating — "Nay, even a true regard to our own private good will engage us not inordinately to pursue self-interest; it being much hugged, will be smothered and destroyed" ("Self-Interest", Works, I, 547, 548: my emphasis). Butler makes the same point: "Immoderate self-love does very ill consult its own interest: and how much soever a paradox it may appear, it is certainly true, that even from self-love we should endeavour to get over all inordinate regard to, and consideration of ourselves" ("Upon the Love of Our Neighbour", 15 Sermons, XI, 9).

<sup>98</sup> Barrow would call it a "bastard self-love", one which "more properly may be called cruelty, treachery, flattery, mockery, delusion, and abuse of ourselves" ("Self-Love", Works, I, 537, 536).



inverse of benevolence is malevolence — that the opposite of "humanity and benevolence" is not self-love or selfishness but "ill-nature and cruelty" (Champion, 3 January 1739/40: Henley, XV, 136). Malevolence is something quite distinct from any kind of self-interest. Indeed, as Fielding points out, the worst forms of malice are characteristically disinterested (CGJ, No. 14: Jensen, I, 221). And if the quintessence of virtue is "a delight in doing good" (Henley, XV, 136), it could reasonably be inferred that vice is, at its worst, a delight in doing ill — a delight in promoting pain and misery. This is the real subject of Fielding's Champion essay on "a certain diversion called roasting":

If we consider this diversion in the worst light, it will appear to be no other than a delight in seeing the miseries, misfortunes, and frailties of mankind displayed; and a pleasure and joy conceived in their sufferings therein. A pleasure, perhaps, as inhuman, and which must arise from a nature as thoroughly corrupt and diabolical, as can possibly pollute the mind of man. (13 March 1739/40: Henley, 240, 243)

Blifil is of course a self-seeking individual, but so are many other characters in Tom Jones. What makes him a preeminent villain, and a fitting adversary for Jones himself, is not self-love, nor avarice and ambition, but pride, hatred, envy, and malice. These "detestable Vices" are typical of the "narrow selfish Spirit"; and, like avarice and ambition, they are punishments unto themselves. This is yet another respect in which the moral and the prudential can be said to be indivisible. All the passions, good or bad, are naturally self-rewarding or self-punishing. The charitable heart, says Barrow, "carrieth a reward and a heaven in itself": "a man doth abundantly enjoy himself in that steady composedness, and savoury complacency of mind, which ever doth attend it" ("Motives", Works, I, 258). Charity "doth settle our mind in a serene, calm, sweet, and cheerful state; in an even temper, and good humour, and harmonious order of soul"; and it "therefore greatly conduceth to our happiness, or rather alone doth suffice to constitute us happy" (I, 252). It achieves this psychological miracle by driving from our souls "all those bad dispositions and passions which vex and disquiet them": it frees us from anger, from envy ("that severely just vice, which never faileth to punish itself"), from "rancour and spite, those dispositions which create a hell in our soul", from revenge ("that



canker of the heart"), and from "fear, suspicion, jealousy of mischief designed against us" — from every kind of psychological self-torment:

In the prevalence of such bad passions and dispositions of soul our misery doth most consist; thence the chief troubles of our life do proceed: wherefore charity doth highly deserve of us in freeing us from them. (I, 252)

The very passions and affections of the good man, whatever his outward circumstances, guarantee a certain fundamental inward contentment, while the vicious mind per se "never faileth to punish itself".

This is a moral that Fielding teaches again and again, but perhaps most graphically in Iago's letter to the Covent-Garden Journal (No. 21: Jensen, I, 258-63). Fielding's epigraph is drawn from Plautus: "It is a miserable State to be malevolent and to envy good Men". Iago (clearly another manifestation of the Blifil-type) sets out to explode the notion that benevolence is its own reward, but his cynical thesis is continuously subverted by ill-concealed undercurrents of rancorous envy. "Folly I am convinced it is", he insists, "to interest yourself in the Happiness, or in the Concerns of others" — for, among other reasons, "the just Man and the unjust Man are often reciprocally mistaken by Mankind", whose praises are distributed accordingly. Iago supposes, wisely enough, that "it becomes a Man to purchase every Thing as cheap as he can" — and "why should he be at the Pains and Expence of being good in Reality, when he may so certainly obtain all the Applause he aims at, merely, by pretending to be so"? But this doctrinal cynicism is undermined by a manifest personal fear that Axylus, the good-natured object of his contempt, is actually happier for "that Compassion which is the constant Energy of these good Hearts". The contradictions are revealing: "notwithstanding all the secret Comforts which Axylus pretends to receive from the Energies of Benevolence, as he calls them, I cannot persuade myself, that there is really any Pleasure in a good Action" — yet,

I am convinced that Praise sounds most harmonious to that Ear where it finds an Eccho from within; nay who knows the secret Comforts which a good Heart may dictate from within, even when all without are silent! I perceive Symptoms of such inward Satisfaction in Axylus, and for that Reason I envy and hate him from the Bottom of my Soul.

Far from proving his point, Iago succeeds only in adding substance to the claims of Axylus, and in exposing his own secret discomfort and inward



dissatisfaction. Fielding's brief 'editorial' comment is hardly necessary:

I cannot dismiss this Letter without observing, that if there be really such a Person as this Writer describes himself, the Possession of his own bad Mind is a worse Curse to him, than he himself will ever be able to inflict on the happy Axylus.

This echoes the moral of a much earlier paper in the Champion (11 December 1739), where, after a similar letter from a swaggering hypocrite, Fielding remarks that the correspondent is "all the while deceiving himself" and "would be much happier, was he really as good as he hath hitherto appeared to the world" (Henley, XV, 96).

All this is consistent with contemporary psychology. According to Butler, the "temper" or "heart" is constituted by "the whole system...of affections"; and the prevalence of the benevolent affections in a particular individual's "heart" is the foundation not only of virtue but also of happiness — "benevolence...is itself the temper of satisfaction and enjoyment" ("Upon the Love of Our Neighbour", 15 Sermons, XII, 10, 11; XI, 14).

Let it not be taken for granted that the temper of envy, rage, resentment, yields greater delight than meekness, forgiveness, compassion, and good-will: especially when it is acknowledged that rage, envy, resentment, are in themselves mere misery; and the satisfaction arising from the indulgence of them is little more than relief from that misery; whereas the temper of compassion and benevolence is itself delightful; and the indulgence of it, by doing good, affords new positive delight and enjoyment.

There can be "no doubt", Butler declares, "which temper...is attended with most peace and tranquillity of mind, which with most perplexity, vexation, and inconvenience" ("Upon Human Nature", 15 Sermons, III, 8). Butler may well be consciously following Shaftesbury here. In the Inquiry, Shaftesbury analyses and compares the functions and effects of three kinds of passion: first, "THE natural Affections, which lead to the Good of THE PUBLICK"; second, "the Self-Affections, which lead only to the Good of THE PRIVATE"; and finally "such as are neither of these; nor tending either to any Good of THE PUBLICK or PRIVATE; but contrary-wise: and which may therefore be justly stil'd unnatural Affections" (II.1.iii, 144). The happiness of the individual depends upon the establishment of a proper balance and proportion between the first two (natural) kinds of



"Affection". A whole section of the Inquiry is devoted to proving that "BY HAVING THE SELF-PASSIONS TOO INTENSE OR STRONG, A CREATURE BECOMES MISERABLE".<sup>99</sup> An excessive intensity of the "Self-Affections" (which include such passions as avarice and ambition) implies a relative deficiency of the "natural Affections", which are as essential to happiness as they are to virtue. Shaftesbury argues at length that "TO HAVE THE NATURAL AFFECTIONS...IS TO HAVE THE CHIEF MEANS AND POWER OF SELF-ENJOYMENT: And THAT TO WANT THEM IS CERTAIN MISERY AND ILL" (Inquiry, II.2.i, 161).

This kind of thinking is continuously implicit in Tom Jones. It is entirely consonant with Fielding's moral and aesthetic purposes that Blifil should seem to prosper in his wickedness. But the reader who has already absorbed the lessons of Jonathan Wild, or the commonplace moral-psychological doctrines of Barrow, Shaftesbury or Butler, will immediately recognize in Blifil the paradigmatic self-oppressor. In Shaftesbury's terms, Blifil's leading passions — avarice and ambition — are inflated "Self-Affections", whose tyrannical dominion implies the suppression of the "natural Affections", and which are in themselves self-defeating. But Blifil's depravity consists in something worse than the mere suppression of the social affections. By suppressing these, the swollen self-affections tend to let in what Shaftesbury calls the "UNNATURAL AFFECTIONS":<sup>100</sup>

NOW if these SELFISH PASSIONS, besides what other Ill they are the occasion of, are withal the certain means of losing us our natural Affections; then...'tis evident, "That they must be the certain means of losing us the chief Enjoyment of Life, and raising in us those horrid and unnatural Passions, and that Savageness of Temper, which makes THE GREATEST OF MISERYS, and the most wretched State of Life..." (Inquiry, II.2.ii, 252)

This section of the Inquiry was already interesting Fielding when he wrote the Champion essays,<sup>101</sup> but it is in the character of Blifil that the "UNNATURAL AFFECTIONS" are most comprehensively represented. Among these, according to Shaftesbury, are: "MALICE, MALIGNITY, or ILL-WILL,

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<sup>99</sup> See esp. II.2.ii-iii. (I quote from II.2.ii, 219.)

<sup>100</sup> On these, see Inquiry, II.2.iii, 253 ff.

<sup>101</sup> The dissertation on "roasting" in the Champion (13 March 1739/40: Henley, XV, 240-43) draws heavily on the psychology of the Inquiry, incorporating a substantial quotation from II.2.iii, 255.



such as is grounded on no Self-Consideration, and where there is no Subject of Anger or Jealousy, nor any thing to provoke or cause such a Desire of doing ill to another"; "ENVY too, when it is such as arises from the Prosperity or Happiness of another Creature no ways interfering with ours"; "ENORMOUS PRIDE or AMBITION"; "such a REVENGE as is never to be extinguish'd, nor even satisfy'd without the greatest Crueltys; such an INVETERACY and RANCOUR as seeks, as it were, occasion to exert it-self"; and — last but not least of Blifil's vices:

TREACHERY and INGRATITUDE are in strictness mere negative Vices; and, in themselves, no real Passions...but are deriv'd from the Defect, Unsoundness, or Corruption of the Affections in general. But when these Vices become remarkable in a Character, and arise in a manner from Inclination and Choice ...'tis apparent they borrow something of the mere unnatural Passions, and are deriv'd from Malice, Envy, and Inveteracy... (Inquiry, II.2.iii, 253, 256, 257, 262, 263)

Most of these vices are dramatized in Blifil's malicious and treacherous exploitation of Jones and Allworthy. And the "unnatural" bent of his temper is perhaps also reflected in his predatory courtship of Sophia. Even his sexuality is set in moral opposition to Jones's buoyant and good-natured libido: "his Appetites were, by Nature, so moderate, that he was able by Philosophy or by Study, or by some other Method, easily to subdue them" (TJ, VI, iv, p. 284: my emphasis).<sup>102</sup> To some extent, it seems, Blifil exemplifies the "Depravitys of Appetite" which Shaftesbury includes among the unnatural passions, "such as...Perversions of the amorous Desire" (Inquiry, II.2.iii, 260). He is not without desire — or, rather, appetite — for Sophia: he considers her "a most delicious Morsel", regarding her "with the same Desires which an Ortolan inspires into the Soul of an Epicure". Unlike Jones's sexual appetite, however, his is tied up not with benevolence but with malice, and amounts to a monstrous inversion of "Love" as Fielding defines it in the opening chapter of Book VI. Here, Blifil contemplates his prey:

Blifil...looked on this human Ortolan with greater Desire than when he viewed her last; nor was his Desire at all lessened by the Aversion which he discovered in her to himself. On the contrary, this served rather to heighten the Pleasure he proposed in rifling her Charms, as it added Triumph to

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<sup>102</sup> For further interesting remarks about this aspect of Blifil, "about whom there hangs a persistent odour of sexual oddity", see Harrison, The Novelist as Moral Philosopher, p. 95 (and footnote).



Lust; nay, he had some further Views, from obtaining the absolute Possession of her Person, which we detest too much even to mention; and Revenge itself was not without its Share in the Gratifications which he promised himself...

Besides all these Views, which to some scrupulous Persons may seem to savour too much of Malevolence, he had one Prospect, which few Readers will regard with any great Abhorrence. And this was the Estate of Mr. Western... (TJ, VII, vi, pp. 345-6)

Even when Sophia's aversion has been unambiguously demonstrated — and perhaps because of this — he is still determined to have her, proposing "the Gratification of a very strong Passion besides Avarice, by marrying this young Lady, and this was Hatred: For he concluded that Matrimony afforded an equal Opportunity of satisfying either Hatred or Love..." (XVI, vi, p. 858).

Blifil's passions are self-evidently productive of the most detestable vices. What is less obvious to the modern reader is that these unnatural and perverted affections are also productive of "THE GREATEST OF MISERYS, and the most wretched State of Life" (Shaftesbury, Inquiry, II.2.ii, 252). Like the other moralists, Fielding believes the vicious temper to be a heavy punishment unto itself. Even if Blifil were to succeed in his "prudent" and malicious designs, he would be none the happier. Jones is in some respects his own worst enemy, but he does at least enjoy the "secret Comforts" which Iago envies in Axylus, and continually tastes the highest of all earthly pleasures — the pleasures of benevolence. His "kind and benevolent Disposition" (TJ, VI, i, p. 270) is a reward unto itself:

In the Energy itself of Virtue (says Aristotle) there is great Pleasure; and this was the Meaning of him who first said, That Virtue was its own Reward. A Sentiment most truly just, however it hath been ridiculed by those who understood it not. (CGJ, No. 29: Jensen, I, 308)

Blifil's rather different energies, on the other hand, render him constitutionally incapable of enjoying true pleasure, never mind true happiness. Shaftesbury believes the very idea of vicious pleasure to be paradoxical:

Now if it be possible in Nature, that any-one can feel a barbarous or malicious Joy, otherwise than in consequence of mere Anguish and Torment, then may we perhaps allow this kind of Satisfaction [which is found in Pride, or Tyranny, Revenge, Malice, or Cruelty exerted] to be call'd Pleasure or Delight.



But the Case is evidently contrary. To love, and to be kind; to have social or natural Affection, Complacency and Good-Will, is to feel immediate Satisfaction and genuine Content. 'Tis in it-self original Joy, depending on no preceding Pain or Uneasiness; and producing nothing beside Satisfaction merely. On the other side, Animosity, Hatred and Bitterness is original Misery and Torment, producing no other Pleasure or Satisfaction, than as the unnatural Desire is for the instant satisfy'd by something which appeases it. How strong so-ever this Pleasure, therefore, may appear; it only the more implies the Misery of that State which produces it. For as the cruellest bodily Pains do by Intervals of Assuagement, produce ...the highest bodily Pleasure; so the fiercest and most raging Torments of the Mind, do, by certain Moments of Relief, afford the greatest of mental Enjoyments, to those who know little of the truer kind. (Inquiry, II.2.iii, 264)

In these terms, Blifil is a very sick man. Shaftesbury's account of "original Joy" and "original Misery" seems to me to crystallize what is an important — though largely implicit — dimension of the oppositions and conflicts between the hero and the villain of Tom Jones. It might be said that Jones was born for happiness. Blifil, on the other hand, is continuously racked by his own passions. As Whichcote puts it, "an ILL-NATURED Person, is altogether incapable of Happiness" (Select Sermons, II, v, p. 260). The affections and passions which constitute virtue and vice also constitute happiness and misery.

But there is yet another respect in which virtue and vice can be said to be naturally self-rewarding and self-punishing, another sense in which honestas and utilitas, the moral and the prudential, can be said to be naturally "the same". The mind, heart or temper is the fundamental seat of self-enjoyment or self-oppression. And the pleasures of virtuous practice are in themselves infinitely superior to the so-called pleasures of vicious practice. These "immediate" sanctions (to borrow Shaftesbury's term) are subsequently confirmed and endorsed by the long-term psychological sanctions of the natural conscience. Tom Jones, as Fielding says, "did not always act rightly, yet he never did otherwise without feeling and suffering for it" (TJ, IV, vi, p. 173). For the Anglicans, the natural conscience is something quite distinct from its religious counterpart (which consists essentially in the doctrine of eternal rewards and punishments internalized), though it does of course serve the same ends. All men are subject to the verdicts of this God-implanted principle, as Barrow (alluding to Romans 2:14-15) assures us:



Yea no man can act according to those rules of justice and goodness without satisfaction of mind; no man can do against them without inward self-condemnation and regret (as St. Paul did observe for us.)<sup>103</sup>

We may appeal to the conscience of each man, if he doth not feel dissatisfaction in that fierceness or frowardness of temper, which produceth uncharitableness; if he have not a complacence in that sweet and calm disposition of soul, whence charity doth issue; if he do not condemn himself for the one, and approve himself in the other practice. ("Motives", Works, I, 249)

In Amelia, accordingly, we see Billy Booth suffering the acute "Depression of Guilt" for his adulterous betrayal of Amelia: "In fact, a Reflection on the Injury he had done her was the sole Cause of his Grief. This it was that enervated his Heart, and threw him into Agonies..." (IV, iii, pp. 162-3). As Butler says, it is impossible for any man to do wrong "without being self-condemned, and, unless he has corrupted his nature, without real self-dislike" (15 Sermons, Preface, para. 28). The qualification — "unless he has corrupted his nature" — points toward a moral-psychological paradox which Barrow himself recognizes,<sup>104</sup> and one which Fielding himself touches upon in Amelia. The "Depression of Guilt", as he notes in passing, is felt only "in Minds not utterly abandoned" (IV, iii, p. 162). Paradoxically, it seems, the Blifils of this world enjoy an acquired immunity to this particular natural punishment. But the very corruption of Blifil's nature is of course its own punishment, and in any case the "utterly abandoned" mind is a rare thing indeed. In the common man, of motley disposition, the conscience is a source of heavy punishment:

The many bitter Reflections which every bad Action costs a Mind in which there are any Remains of Goodness, are not to be compensated by the highest Pleasures which such an Action can produce. (Amelia, IV, ii, p. 155)

Here is another sense in which the pleasures of vice are purchased "at too dear a Price" (TJ, VI, iv, p. 283). And the punitive "bitter Reflections" which follow "every bad Action" have their positive

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<sup>103</sup> "The Being of God Proved from the Frame of Human Nature" (cited hereafter as "Human Nature"), Works, II, 145-6.

<sup>104</sup> "Conscience is a check to beginners in sin, reclaiming them from it, and rating them for it: but this in long standers becometh useless, either failing to discharge its office, or assaying it to no purpose..." ("Repentance", Works, I, 453).



counterpart in the equally sweet "Reflections" of the good man who contemplates his own good deeds. This is particularly true of the social virtues. The "sensible pleasure" of doing good, as Barrow calls it ("Bounty", Works, I, 299), is translated by time and reflection into the more intellectual pleasure of having done good:

As it is a rascally delight (tempered with regret, and vanishing into bitterness) which men feel in wreaking spite, or doing mischief; such as they cannot reflect upon without disgust and condemning their base impotency of soul: so is the pleasure which charity doth breed altogether pure, grateful to the mind, and increasing by reflection; never perishing or decaying; a man eternally enjoying the good he hath done, by remembering and ruminating thereon. ("Motives", Works, I, 258)

Charity "carrieth a reward and a heaven in itself", a more refined and subtle reward than the "sensible pleasure" immediately annexed to the good deed — a mental rather than a sentimental gratification — though even this is typically represented in the language of "sensible" experience:

...a man doth abundantly enjoy himself in that steady composedness, and savoury complacence of mind, which ever doth attend it [charity]; and as the present sense, so is the memory of it, or the good conscience of having done good, very delicious and satisfactory. (I, 258)

Shaftesbury echoes this kind of thinking in the Inquiry. For him, the psychological delights of "virtuous Motion" are uniquely exquisite and rewarding, not least because they are perpetuated by reflection. The "Exercise of Benignity and Goodness" is in itself "delightful", but it also invokes a "pleasing Assent and Approbation of the Mind" — and "what is there relating to us, of which the Consciousness and Memory is more solidly and lastingly entertaining?" (II.2.i, 172).<sup>105</sup>

This "very delicious and satisfactory" mode of reflection is a vital source of consolation for the hero of Tom Jones.<sup>106</sup> Nothing, as Fielding

<sup>105</sup> According to Hutcheson, likewise, these "moral Pleasures" are "the most delightful Ingredient in the ordinary Pleasures of Life". An Inquiry concerning Moral Good and Evil (Treatise II of An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue, 1725), Sect. VI, p. 221. Cited hereafter as Inquiry.

<sup>106</sup> Fielding's "rather cloying faith in the 'self-approving joy' of benevolent actions" brings a disappointed "alas!" from Miller (Essays, p. 61). Cf. Battestin's prejudicial attitude to this supposedly "less strictly disinterested aspect of benevolism": Moral Basis, pp. 70-72. Both Miller and Battestin appear to take their ethical cue from Crane's "Genealogy", Essays, I, 210-213.



puts it, "can give greater Happiness to a good Mind, than the Reflexion on having relieved the Misery or contributed to the well being, of his Fellow-Creature" (CGJ, No. 44: Jensen, II, 9). Tom Jones continually enjoys this kind of happiness. And even in the midst of his trials and tribulations, he is consistently able to feel what Shaftesbury calls "SELF-ENJOYMENT" (Inquiry, II.2.i, 161). This "solid inward Comfort of Mind" (TJ; Dedication, p. 7) is directly related to "the good conscience of having done good", or at least of having acted on consistently good intentions. In conversation with Dowling, he protests and exalts his own fundamental innocence:

'...I had rather enjoy my own Mind than the Fortune of another Man. What is the poor Pride arising from a magnificent House, a numerous Equipage, a splendid Table, and from all the other Advantages or Appearances of Fortune, compared to the warm, solid Content, the swelling Satisfaction, the thrilling Transports, and the exulting Triumphs, which a good Mind enjoys, in the Contemplation of a generous, virtuous, noble, benevolent Action? I envy not Blifil in the Prospect of his Wealth; nor shall I envy him in the Possession of it. I would not think myself a Rascal half an Hour, to exchange Situations... But, I thank Heaven, I know, I feel,—I feel my Innocence, my Friend; and I would not part with that Feeling for the World.—For...I know I have never done, nor even designed an Injury to any Being whatever...' (TJ, XII, x, p. 659)

Jones derives more satisfaction from his own innocent mind than Blifil will ever derive from his ill-gotten gains.<sup>107</sup> He recommends the same kind of moral satisfaction to Nightingale, when urging him to do the right thing and marry Nancy Miller:

'...I am well assured there is not a Man of real Sense and Goodness in the World, who would not honour and applaud the Action. But admit no other would, would not your own Heart, my Friend, applaud it? And do not the warm, rapturous Sensations, which we feel from the Consciousness of an honest, noble, generous, benevolent Action, convey more Delight to the Mind, than the undeserved Praise of Millions?...' (TJ, XIV, vii, p. 768)

The inward self-approval of the "Heart" or conscience will always override whatever approval or disapproval is won from others. As Iago confesses, all praise "sounds most harmonious to that Ear where it finds an Eccho

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<sup>107</sup> The same moral psychology is rendered ironically in JW, I, v (Henley, II, 18-19), and II, iv (Henley, II, 66-7).

from within". There is, as Fielding says elsewhere, "a Judge in every Man's Breast, which none can cheat", and therefore "no Man can...enjoy any Applause which is not thus adjudged to be his Due": the pursuit of "Honour" by vicious means is therefore psychologically self-defeating (Miscellanies I, Preface, p. 10). Furthermore:

The same righteous Judge always annexes a bitter Anxiety to the Purchases of Guilt, whilst it adds a double Sweetness to the Enjoyments of Innocence and Virtue: for Fear, which all the Wise agree is the most wretched of human Evils, is, in some Degree, always attending on the former, and never can in any manner molest the Happiness of the latter. (p. 11)

This brings us back to Tom Jones, where Fielding introduces his moral concerns by contrasting "that solid inward Comfort of Mind, which is the sure Companion of Innocence and Virtue", with "the Evil of that Horror and Anxiety which, in their Room, Guilt introduces into our Bosoms" (Dedication, p. 7).

Tom Jones argues at various levels that happiness (to borrow Hoadly's phrase) "can never subsist, but under the Direction of Virtue".<sup>108</sup> Natural psychology ensures that vice is always in one way or another self-defeating, whatever it might achieve in social or material terms.<sup>109</sup> Fielding would ultimately sympathize with Whichcote's view that "Happiness is not from without", that it consists quintessentially in "internal Peace, Ease, and Satisfaction of Mind", which are "the true Ingredients of Self-Enjoyment" (Select Sermons, I, v, p. 126). Vice, being without this inward foundation, can derive no true enjoyment from its outward gains: these, however real and substantial in themselves, can never outweigh or compensate for the psychological penalties. "TO BE WICKED OR VITIOUS," as Shaftesbury declares, "IS TO BE MISERABLE AND UNHAPPY"; and "it must follow, That EVERY VITIOUS ACTION MUST BE SELF-INJURIOUS AND ILL":

IF this be the Case of moral Delinquency... 'twill appear, "That to yield or consent to any thing ill or immoral, is a Breach of Interest, and leads to the greatest Ills:" and, "That, on the other side, Every thing which is an Improvement

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<sup>108</sup> "Of the Love of Pleasure", Twenty Sermons, V, p. 100.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Dudden, II, 681.



of Virtue, or an Establishment of right Affection and Integrity, is an Advancement of Interest, and leads to the greatest and most solid Happiness and Enjoyment."  
(Inquiry, Conclusion, 270, 271, 275: italics omitted)

Yet this, complains Fielding, "is that virtue which wanton wits have strove to ridicule, and wicked sophisters have argued to be so contrary to our worldly interest" (Champion, 24 January 1739/40: Henley, XV, 168). Vice has been "tricked out and adorned with all possible shew and splendour" by the cynics and the sceptics, while virtue has been represented as a "coy" and "cruel mistress", a "morose and rigid" taskmistress:

And yet...if we strip virtue and vice of all their outward ornaments and appearances, and view them both naked, and in their pure, native simplicity, we shall, I trust, find virtue to have in her every thing that is truly valuable, to be a constant mistress, a faithful friend, and a pleasant companion; while vice will appear a tawdry, painted harlot, within, all foul and impure, enticing only at a distance, the possession of her certainly attended with uneasiness, pain, disease, poverty, and dishonour. (Henley, XV, 167)

Virtue is no enemy of our "worldly interest". In reality, says Fielding (adapting a favourite Latitudinarian text),<sup>110</sup> "her commands are most easy, and her burthens light; she commands us no more than to be happy, and forbids us nothing but destruction" (Henley, XV, 168). This is a secularized version of an idea that is commonplace among the Anglican divines. According to Barrow, it is no mere coincidence that the moral precepts of Christianity are directly conducive to our "worldly interest": they were in fact designed to promote human happiness in both worlds. God himself quite literally "commands us no more than to be happy, and forbids us nothing but destruction". His laws were framed "out of tender kindness to his subjects and creatures, with especial regard to our welfare... (For thy good; that was the design of their being commanded...)" ("Profitableness", Works, I, 19). He "commendeth his laws to our observance, by declaring them in their design and tendency chiefly to regard our good and advantage" ("Self-Love", Works, I, 535). The natural coincidence of virtue and interest, of the moral and the prudential, is divinely ordained. Even if the promise of future rewards and punishments

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<sup>110</sup> Matthew 11:30. See, for example, Hoadly's sermon on this text: Twenty Sermons, IX, pp. 167-86.



is disregarded, "experience doth attest" that God's commands and prohibitions direct us toward the greatest possible happiness in this world:

For virtue in itself is far more eligible than vice; to keep God's commandments hath much greater convenience than to break them; the life of a good man...is highly to be preferred above the life of a bad man: for what is virtue, but a way of living ...that promoteth our true benefit and interest; that procureth and preserveth health, ease, safety, liberty, peace, comfortable subsistence, fair repute, tranquillity of mind, all kinds of convenience to us?... What is vice, but a sort of practice which debaseth and disparageth us, which plungeth us into grievous evils, which bringeth distemper of body and soul, distress of fortune, danger, trouble, reproach, regret, and numberless inconveniences upon us...? Virtue is most noble and worthy, most lovely, most profitable, most pleasant, most creditable; vice is most sordid and base, ugly, hurtful, bitter, disgraceful in itself, and in its consequences. If we compare them together, we shall find that virtue doth always preserve our health, but vice doth commonly impair it; that virtue improveth our estate, vice wasteth it; that virtue adorneth our reputation, vice blemisheth it; that virtue strengtheneth our parts, vice weakeneth them; that virtue maintaineth our freedom, vice enslaveth us; that virtue keepeth our mind in order and peace, vice discomposeth and disquieteth it; virtue breedeth satisfaction and joy, vice spawneth displeasure and anguish of conscience: to enter therefore into a virtuous course of life, what is it but to embrace happiness? to continue in vicious practice, what is it but to stick in misery?

Thus, since virtue is nothing but "a way of living...that promoteth our true benefit and interest", even in this world, it is "most reasonable" to embrace it ("Repentance", Works, I, 462). Here, again, is the ubiquitous Prudential Syllogism. As Fielding puts it, "virtue...is always the result of wisdom, as happiness will be always the result of virtue" (Champion, 24 January 1739/40: Henley, XV, 168).

The weight I have given to the Prudential Syllogism is I believe commensurate with the weight given to it in Fielding's writings. But given his manifest attachment to this kind of reasoning, we are left with the seemingly formidable problem of accounting for his celebrated assault on a certain species of philosophical optimism:

THERE are a Set of Religious, or rather Moral Writers, who teach that Virtue is the certain Road to Happiness, and Vice to Misery in this World. A very wholesome and comfortable Doctrine, and to which we have but one Objection, namely, That it is not true. (TJ, XV, i, p. 783)



Bernard Harrison views this as unambiguous and incontestable proof that Fielding's philosophical "position" was "fundamentally alien to the Augustan consensus [sic] of opinion which reconciled morality and self-interest", at odds with the "received wisdom" of "Standard Benevolism", whose most articulate spokesman was Butler. In these two brief sentences, says Harrison, Fielding "dissolves the whole shoddy fabric of complacency and bad reasoning" upon which the so-called "Augustan consensus" was built: "What Fielding has seen, in short, is that there can be no question of reconciling morality and self-interest".<sup>111</sup> Either Fielding is radically contradicting himself, or there is something wrong with Harrison's logic.

Before we jump to the former conclusion, it is worth examining Harrison's confident assumption that Fielding is challenging the "received wisdom" of Latitudinarian Anglicanism. There was indeed a streak of 'worldly' optimism in prudential homiletics, and the critical substitution of "Moral" for "Religious" does suggest that the offending writers thought of themselves as religious teachers; but given Fielding's radical allegiance to this Anglican tradition it is prima facie unlikely (though technically possible) that Barrow, Tillotson and Hoadly were among the "Religious, or rather Moral Writers" he had in mind.<sup>112</sup> Whoever these writers were, Fielding's next paragraph suggests that he perceived an implicit tendency towards Epicureanism in their teachings:

Indeed if by Virtue these Writers mean, the Exercise of those Cardinal Virtues, which like good House-wives stay at home, and mind only the Business of their own Family, I shall very readily concede the Point: For so surely do all these contribute and lead to Happiness, that I could almost wish, in Violation of all the antient and modern Sages, to call them rather by the Name of Wisdom, than by that of Virtue: For with regard to this Life, no System, I conceive, was ever wiser than that of the antient Epicureans, who held this Wisdom to constitute the chief Good... (p. 783)

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<sup>111</sup> The Novelist as Moral Philosopher, pp. 120, 122, 70, 122.

<sup>112</sup> Barrow can be found arguing that virtue and piety are thoroughly conducive to our happiness in this world, even in material terms: see, for instance, "Bounty", Works, I, 286-7; "Motives", Works, I, 252-4; "Profitableness", Works, I, 15-17. But there is much else in Barrow to qualify this rhetorical optimism. On the face of it, Shaftesbury is a possible candidate; but again there is much in the Inquiry that chimes with Fielding's arguments in TJ, XV, i. It is perhaps possible that he was thinking of Richardson; but the 'worldly' optimism of Pamela had already been superseded by the Christian tragedy of Clarissa. It is more probable that he was thinking of Pope's Essay on Man, which is in some ways vulnerable to the charge of sweeping optimism. I remain unsure about this, but it seems to me highly improbable that Fielding was attacking the Latitudinarians, for reasons which should become clear in what follows.



More precisely, Fielding is arguing that the unqualified virtue-happiness equation can hold good only if "Virtue" is understood in quasi-Epicurean terms.

But if by Virtue is meant (as I almost think it ought) a certain relative Quality, which is always busying itself without Doors, and seems as much interested in pursuing the Good of others as its own; I cannot so easily agree that this is the surest way to human Happiness; because I am afraid we must then include Poverty and Contempt, with all the Mischiefs which Backbiting, Envy, and Ingratitude can bring on Mankind in our Idea of Happiness; nay, sometimes perhaps we shall be obliged to wait upon the said Happiness to a Goal, since many by the above Virtue have brought themselves thither.

I have not now Leisure to enter upon so large a Field of Speculation, as here seems opening upon me; my Design was to wipe off a Doctrine that lay in my Way; since while Mr. Jones was acting the most virtuous Part imaginable in labouring to preserve his fellow Creatures from Destruction, the Devil, or some other evil Spirit, one perhaps cloathed in human Flesh, was hard at Work to make him completely miserable in the Ruin of his Sophia.

This therefore would seem an Exception to the above Rule, if indeed it was a Rule... (pp. 783-4)

True, Christian virtue is a public and excursive affair. And when virtue is understood in this sense, as Harrison says, "to be virtuous is to live dangerously": "The exercise of goodness of heart, though its pleasures are unmatched, is unsafe."<sup>113</sup>

But can we infer from this that Fielding, with a single polemical flourish, is deliberately undoing the Anglicans' attempts to reconcile morality with self-interest? I think not. Barrow may be a tireless champion of prudential equations, but his definition of virtue could hardly be described as quasi-Epicurean. His analysis of charity is (as we would expect) entirely consistent with Fielding's account of true "Virtue":

Love is a busy and active, a vigorous and sprightly, a courageous and industrious disposition of soul; which will prompt a man, and push him forward to undertake or undergo anything, to endure pains, to encounter dangers, to surmount difficulties, for the good of its object. ("Charity", Works, I, 243)

Ease is a thing generally desirable and acceptable; but charity doth part with it, embracing labour, watchings, travels, and troubles for its neighbour's good...

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<sup>113</sup> Op. cit., p. 122.



Life of all things is held most precious and dear; yet this charity upon urgent occasions will expose, will sacrifice for its neighbour's good...

Reputation to some is more dear than life, and it is worse than death...to be loaded with odious reproaches, to have an infamous character; yet charity will engage men hereto, willingly to sustain the most grievous obloquy and disgrace... (I, 245)

Barrow goes further than this, sometimes deliberately drawing attention to the "manifold inconveniences, crosses and trouble, which do attend the strict practice of virtue" in this world ("Future Judgment Reasonable", Works, II, 376). He admits that one can "view innocence and right sadly groaning under oppression, while fraud and violence do triumph and insult"; and far from being certain of universal honour and esteem, the good man will often be positively victimized for his goodness: it is "commonly" true "that not only good men suffer, but often suffer for being good (from envy and malignity of men that hate goodness), and that bad men not only prosper, but prosper by their wickedness" (II, 379, 380). More than this, the good man is uniquely vulnerable to malicious abuse and slander — in fact, the world is such that

the obloquy of men is a part of that cross which every good man here is appointed to bear, and assuredly shall meet with; for the devil and the world do nothing, if they cannot by impudent assaults dash, or by malicious suggestions blast, the practice of goodness... ("Future Judgment Certain", Works, II, 395)

Barrow even confesses that one can

observe it frequently to happen, that most innocent and virtuous persons do conflict all their days with hardships and crosses, and sometime after all die sadly in pain, and under ignominy; while persons most outrageous in lewdness and iniquity do flourish and rant it out in a long and undisturbed course of prosperity, and in the end depart hence fairly and quietly. ("Future Judgment Reasonable", Works, II, 379)

Fielding never goes as far as this, even in Amelia. Barrow, apparently contradicting the "Augustan consensus" in advance of its appearance, has here laid out the distasteful premises of Fielding's assault on the optimists. But thanks to the providence of comedy, Fielding's novels exclude the spectacle of good men dying sad and painful deaths (though this tragic possibility is always immanent, particularly in Tom Jones).



- . He does however make a point of showing us the good and innocent suffering envy, hatred, slander and oppression, and does so most extensively in Amelia. Booth, no less than Jones, is apparently hated for his goodness by some. This, at least, is how Amelia sees it, as she laments Booth's victimization at the hands of the slanderers:

The Children presently accompanied their Mother's Tears, and the Daughter cried — 'Why, will any body hurt poor Papa? Hath he done any harm to any body?' — 'No, my dear Child,' said the Mother, 'he is the best Man in the World, and therefore they hate him.' Upon which the Boy, who was extremely sensible at his Years, answered, 'Nay, Mamma, how can that be? Have not you often told me, that if I was good, every body would love me?' 'All good People will,' answered she. 'Why don't they love Papa then?' replied the Child, 'for I am sure he is very good.' 'So they do, my dear,' said the Mother, 'but there are more bad People in the World, and they will hate you for your Goodness.' (Amelia, IV, iii, pp. 166-7)

Notwithstanding Fielding's comic dénouement, the world as depicted in Amelia is radically unjust. And private malice is only a part of the good man's appointed cross. In Tom Jones, the injustices of this world are generated most obviously by the activities of vicious or malevolent individuals; but in Amelia these are compounded by the promiscuities of corrupt legal, penal and political institutions. This institutionalized injustice is characterized most forcefully, at the opening of the novel, in the person of Justice Thrasher. Booth, arraigned and imprisoned for a courageous act of charity, seems to have good reason for his "disadvantageous Opinion of Providence" (I, iii, p. 31). And his experiences are clearly not extraordinary. Thrasher's venal magistracy is an emblem of the private rottenness which underlies all public institutions in Amelia. Thrasher, Fielding tells us, "never read one Syllable" of the law —

This perhaps was a Defect; but this was not all: for where mere Ignorance is to decide a Point between two Litigants, it will always be an even Chance whether it decides right or wrong; but sorry am I to say, Right was often in a much worse Situation than this, and Wrong hath often had Five hundred to one on his Side before that Magistrate; who, if he was ignorant of the Law of England, was yet well versed in the Laws of Nature... To speak the Truth plainly, the Justice was never indifferent in a Cause, but when he could get nothing on either Side. (I, ii, p. 21)

There is no space here to itemize the many social and political evils



exposed in Amelia.<sup>114</sup> It is enough to note that Booth not only suffers private persecution of the kind inflicted on Tom Jones, but also has to fight against the promiscuities of legal and professional structures which are, if anything, weighted against the meek and the virtuous.<sup>115</sup>

But Amelia does not stop at social satire of this kind. Despite the (perhaps inevitably) contradictory implications of the comic resolution, this novel repeatedly insists on the necessary imperfection of human happiness in this world. "Too true is it, I am afraid", exclaims Booth, "that the highest human Happiness is imperfect. How rich would be my Cup, was it not for one poisonous Drop, which embitters the Whole!" (II, iii, p. 74). This jeremiad becomes something of a leitmotif: again and again Fielding draws our attention to the inevitable fly in the ointment.<sup>116</sup> In Book IV, for instance, Billy Booth Jr is assaulted by an infantryman in the park. The incident proves relatively harmless, but Amelia is shaken and upset, and a hitherto pleasant outing turns decidedly sour. Fielding's comment on this "trifling Adventure" seems to me to be in keeping with the ethos of the whole novel: "None, I think, can fail drawing one Observation from it; namely, how capable the most insignificant Accident is of disturbing human Happiness, and of producing the most unexpected and dreadful Events. A Reflection which may serve to many moral and religious Uses" (IV, vii, p. 184). Here is one fundamental sense in which virtue can never be "the certain Road to Happiness...in this World" — there can be no certain road to happiness in a world such as this.

It may now be useful to look again at Fielding's attack on the optimists in Tom Jones. Ultimately, his objections centre on the irreligious tendency of the offending "Doctrine". This facile optimism not only misrepresents the facts of life, and the nature of "Virtue", but also presents an insidious threat to the empirical foundations of Christian belief:

<sup>114</sup> For a good historical study of these, see Battestin's General Introduction to Amelia, esp. pp. xxi-xl.

<sup>115</sup> Booth's failure to gain military promotion, despite his ample military merits, is surely an important feature of the plot: see esp. XI, ii, where Dr Harrison attempts in vain to circumvent the prevailing corruption and secure Booth the post he deserves. See also Mrs James's remarks on this subject in IX, vii, p. 383. "Merit Unrewarded" seems to be one of the principal satiric themes of the novel. Cf. Booth's altercation with the hack-writer in VIII, vi, p. 332.

<sup>116</sup> Cf., for instance, II, iv, p. 79; II, vii, p. 87; VII, v, p. 286.



...we chuse to dispute the Doctrine on which it is founded, which we don't apprehend to be Christian, which we are convinced is not true, and which is indeed destructive of one of the noblest Arguments that Reason alone can furnish for the Belief of Immortality. (TJ, XV, i, p. 784)

To deny the fact of temporal suffering and injustice is to undermine the rational grounds of faith. Fielding's peremptory dismissal of the unqualified virtue-happiness equation is in part a defence of Christianity. The "noble" argument to which he alludes in this passage is laid out more explicitly in the Champion (4 March 1739/40). This essay on the promiscuous distribution of worldly honour and reputation concludes with an affirmation of the religious consolation which is available to unrewarded virtue: the good man, though "slighted and despised" in this life, "may rejoice even in the never attaining that which he so well deserves, since it furnishes him with a noble argument for the certainty of a future state" (Henley, XV, 228, 230).<sup>117</sup> The argument is built from two basic premises, one empirical, the other theological: it is a matter of common observation that virtue often goes unrewarded in this world; but on the other hand "it is inconsistent with the justice of a supremely wise and good being, to suffer...honest and worthy endeavours to go unrewarded" (Henley, XV, 230). Ergo, there is some "future state" in which justice will be done.

The locus classicus of this favourite Anglican syllogism is Ecclesiastes, which moves from a brutally comprehensive anatomy of the vanity of human wishes to an affirmation of faith in ultimate divine judgment. The wise man and the fool, the good man and the sinner, "time and chance happeneth to them all" (9:11); "there is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all" (9:3). Justice is confused, or inverted: "there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous" (8:14). The God of Ecclesiastes is a deus absconditus. But his very absence reinforces the Preacher's faith: "I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked" (3:17); the wise and the good may perish, while the fool and the sinner prosper, but "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (12:14).

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<sup>117</sup> Cf. Champion, 29 December 1739: Henley, XV, 128-9. Note also Heartfree's command of this logic in JW, III, x.



In "The Reasonableness and Equity of a Future Judgment", Barrow bases his own expansive version of this "noble argument" on a lengthy summary of Ecclesiastes (Works, II, 373-83). The doctrine of a future judgment is the keystone of Latitudinarian theodicy. This doctrine "doth indeed, even to our common sense, thoroughly solve most of those appearances in the course of things here, which otherwise might seem intricate or strange", thus "clearing Providence from all misprisions" (II, 382). In Amelia, Booth's experience has furnished him with good reason to question the ways of providence, and Barrow would be prepared to admit as much. But Barrow, believing implicitly in the superintendence of a "supremely wise and good being", insists that we can actually derive a paradoxical comfort from the manifold injustices of this world. God and injustice are incommensurable ideas: the promiscuous distribution of temporal happiness and misery therefore betokens the certainty of perfect and eternal redistribution.<sup>118</sup> In this sense, even the most galling kinds of secular injustice can be seen as "proofs" that we live in a just universe — as pointers towards the final judgment. For instance:

Seeing...there are natural relations of men to one another, and frequent transactions between them, founding several duties of humanity and justice; the which may be observed or transgressed; so that some men shall do, and others suffer much injury, without any possible redress from elsewhere; it is fit that a reference of such cases should be made to the common Patron of right, and that by him they should be decided, that due amends should be made to one party, and fit correction inflicted on the other... (II, 375)

Since it is "fit", it is certain, that God will make "due amends" to the good man and inflict condign punishment on his enemies. Another of Barrow's points seems to me to have a special relevance to Amelia. He probably has in mind a verse from Ecclesiastes: "If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth" (5:8). Barrow argues likewise from the corruption of secular justice to the perfection of divine judgment:

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<sup>118</sup> For a classic and particularly detailed exposition of this argument, see Samuel Clarke, A Discourse concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion, 1706, Prop. iv, pp. 160-93. Cited hereafter as Discourse.



There are also persons whom, although committing grievous wrong, oppression, and other heinous misdemeanours, offensive to God and man, yet, by reason of the inviolable sacredness of their authority, or because of their uncontrollable power, no justice here can reach, nor punishment can touch; who therefore should be reserved to the impartial and irresistible judgment of God; and fit it is, that...a Tophet should be prepared for them. (II, 375)

Since it is fit, it is certain, that God will prepare a Tophet for the oppressor and the tyrant. In one way or another, the good man can feel assured that the injustices of this world will be rectified in the next. Given a firm belief in a just God, the promiscuous distribution of happiness and misery in this life can become one of many reasons for belief in the certainty of a future judgment.

Billy Booth's confidence in God is not strengthened but eroded by his experience of injustice and oppression. Contrary to the advice of Ecclesiastes, he marvels at the matter, seeing these things not as sure pointers to the certainty of ultimate justice but as indices of divine indifference. His tardy conversion, brought on in fact by a reading of Barrow, presumably brings with it a proper understanding of these things. Amelia argues that the happiness of the virtuous — of those who deserve it — can be assured only by Christian theology. In some ways it could be said to embody the conventional Anglican argument for a future judgment. Dr Harrison's allusion to Matthew 20 typifies the ethos of this novel, and supplies the remedy for Booth's "disadvantageous Opinion of Providence" (I, iii, p. 31): "A true Christian can never be disappointed if he doth not receive his Reward in this World: The Labourer might as well complain, that he is not paid his Hire in the Middle of the Day" (IX, viii, p. 388). If Fielding himself is the "Providence" of Tom Jones,<sup>119</sup> he could perhaps be said to be the deus absconditus of Amelia, revealing himself only at the eleventh hour in a flourish of poetic justice. The comic peripety which follows on the heels of Booth's conversion is not a denial of injustice or unmerited suffering, but a quasi-theological affirmation of its ultimate insignificance: it argues, with Ecclesiastes, that "God shall bring every work into judgment, whether it be good, or whether it be

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<sup>119</sup> See Aubrey Williams, "Interpositions of Providence and the Design of Fielding's Novels", SAQ, 70 (1971), 265-86; and Battestin, Providence, pp. 141-63.



evil" (12:14).<sup>120</sup> As Dr Harrison says to Booth, "Your Sufferings are all at an End; and Providence hath done you the Justice at last, which it will one Day or other render to all Men" (Amelia, XII, vii, p. 522). In Amelia, as in Jonathan Wild, it is affirmed to be "the surest truth, THAT PROVIDENCE WILL SOONER OR LATER PROCURE THE FELICITY OF THE VIRTUOUS AND INNOCENT" (JW, IV, xi: Henley, II, 188).

Fielding's attempt to accommodate the logic of Ecclesiastes within the providential comedy of Tom Jones is inevitably less convincing than it is in the tragicomic Amelia: the reader is never really in any doubt about the ultimate outcome of Jones's erratic adventures, even when his fortunes are at their lowest ebb. The very shape and spirit of comedy could be said to undermine the cogency of Fielding's anti-optimistic thesis. Chapter i of Book XV would perhaps be more at home in the Postscript to Clarissa. Whether or not we view this as a formal flaw, the anti-optimistic thesis does however remain to be reconciled with Fielding's overall emphasis on the coincidence of morality with self-interest. I believe this can be done without legerdemain. In the first place, it should be noted that there is no logical inconsistency between Fielding's reiterated view that "the greatest and truest happiness which this world affords, is to be found only in the possession of goodness and virtue" and, on the other hand, his bitter disapproval of the doctrine that "Virtue is the certain Road to Happiness...in this World" (Journey, Introduction: Henley, II, 213; TJ, XV, i, p. 783). The former proposition does not embrace the latter. In its unqualified forms, the Prudential Syllogism can be somewhat misleading. What Fielding actually believes — and consistently teaches — is that the potential happiness of the good and virtuous individual is always inestimably greater than the potential happiness of his bad and vicious counterpart. What he calls "the greatest and truest happiness which this world affords" (not the same thing as Happiness per se) involves the marriage of 'inward' with 'outward' enjoyments. True 'inward' happiness is accessible only to the good and virtuous. But Fielding is neither an ascetic nor a stoic: physical, social and economic well-being are important and legitimate constituents of happiness "in this

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<sup>120</sup> It could of course be argued, on the other hand, that Fielding is simply (and typically) following the ancient conventions of romance plotting: see Sheridan Baker, "Fielding's Amelia and the Materials of Romance", PQ, 41 (1962), 437-49, esp. pp. 448-9. While this is palpably true, there surely remains a need to consider the different uses to which these conventions are put in Fielding's novels.



World", and he sees no reason why virtue should exclude them.<sup>121</sup> In fact, as we have seen, Fielding believes that virtue alone is capable of deriving true enjoyment from these things. But virtue alone does not procure them. In this sense, virtue could be said to be a condition but not a guarantee of enjoying "the greatest and truest happiness which this world affords".<sup>122</sup>

Tom Jones deserves, and is therefore fitted to enjoy, the highest possible worldly felicity. But to gain "Possession" of it, as Squire Allworthy says, he must first cultivate "Prudence and Religion" (TJ, V, vii, p. 244). By contrast with Amelia, Tom Jones actually makes little of the good man's need for "Religion", but it makes a great deal of his need for "Prudence". While it is true in a sense that Blifil (with the help of Thwackum and Square) is the architect of Jones's initial downfall, it is also true that Jones renders himself unnecessarily vulnerable to Blifil's slanderous machinations. Viewed from one angle, the central perversion of justice which expels Jones from Paradise Hall could be said to epitomize the anti-optimistic thesis of Book XV, Ch. i: the hero's many virtues prove to be no protection against Blifil's potent villainy. But this is only half the point. The fact is that Blifil's villainy borrows much of its power from Jones's chronic imprudence. "Prudence and Circumspection are necessary even to the best of Men", as Fielding says (TJ, III, vii, p. 141). Prudence is the good man's necessary protection against what Dr Harrison calls "the malicious Disposition of Mankind", in this brief but important homily addressed to Booth:

As the malicious Disposition of Mankind is too well known,  
and the cruel Pleasure which they take in destroying the  
Reputations of others; the Use we are to make of this  
Knowledge is to afford no handle to Reproach: For bad as the

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<sup>121</sup> Fielding's conception of happiness is in fact entirely congruous with Aristotle's. See NE, Book I, esp. vii-x. The "Good of man" consists essentially in "the active exercise of his soul's faculties in conformity with excellence or virtue"; happiness (eudaimonia) can be defined as "activity in conformity with virtue" (I, vii, 15; I, viii, 8). But "it is manifest that happiness also requires external goods in addition" (I, viii, 15): "May not we then confidently pronounce that man happy who realizes complete goodness in action, and is adequately furnished with external goods?" (I, x, 15).

<sup>122</sup> A failure to make this distinction is what mars Dudden's otherwise sound account of "the profitableness of virtue": see Dudden, II, 679, 680-82.



World is, it seldom falls on any Man who hath not given some slight Cause for Censure, tho' this, perhaps, is often aggravated Ten thousand Fold; and when we blame the Malice of the Aggravation, we ought not to forget our own Imprudence in giving the Occasion. (Amelia, III, i, p. 100)

Fielding's good men are continually victimized by "the World". But one of his principal purposes in displaying this kind of injustice is to insist on the importance of prudence. In some respects, the tribulations of Jones and Booth are not entirely unmerited: in forsaking the duty which they owe to themselves, they effectively collude with their own enemies. Jones's cavalier sexual activities may be harmless enough in themselves, but in one way or another they could be said to fuel his progress towards Tyburn. At the nadir of his hero's career, Fielding reminds us that Jones's "Calamities" are principally "owing to his own Imprudence, by which if a Man does not become a Felon to the World, he is at least a Felo de se" (TJ, XVII, i, p. 875).<sup>123</sup>

There is nothing intrinsically suicidal about virtue per se, but virtue combined with imprudence is indeed a serious liability. Fielding's assault on the optimists must be viewed in the context of this "great, useful and uncommon Doctrine" (TJ, XII, viii, p. 652). When read in isolation from the novel to which it belongs, the anti-optimistic polemic does indeed suggest a radical deviation from what Bernard Harrison calls "the Augustan consensus of opinion which reconciled morality and self-interest". If it were this, we would have to conclude that Fielding has involved himself in a serious self-contradiction, and indeed a betrayal of the Anglican tradition to which his work fundamentally belongs. But the same apparent self-contradiction can be found in Barrow's sermons. It might therefore be suggested that Fielding is purveying a traditional contradiction. Here, however, I must repeat my principal point: that the Prudential Syllogism does not embrace the view that "Virtue is the certain Road to Happiness... in this World". Certain, complete and lasting happiness is in any case unattainable in this life.<sup>124</sup> Given this premise, the question of reconciling morality with self-interest can be seen as a question of relativity. Like Barrow, Fielding teaches only that "the greatest and truest happiness which this world affords, is to be found only in the possession of goodness and virtue". Virtue, unlike vice, is always

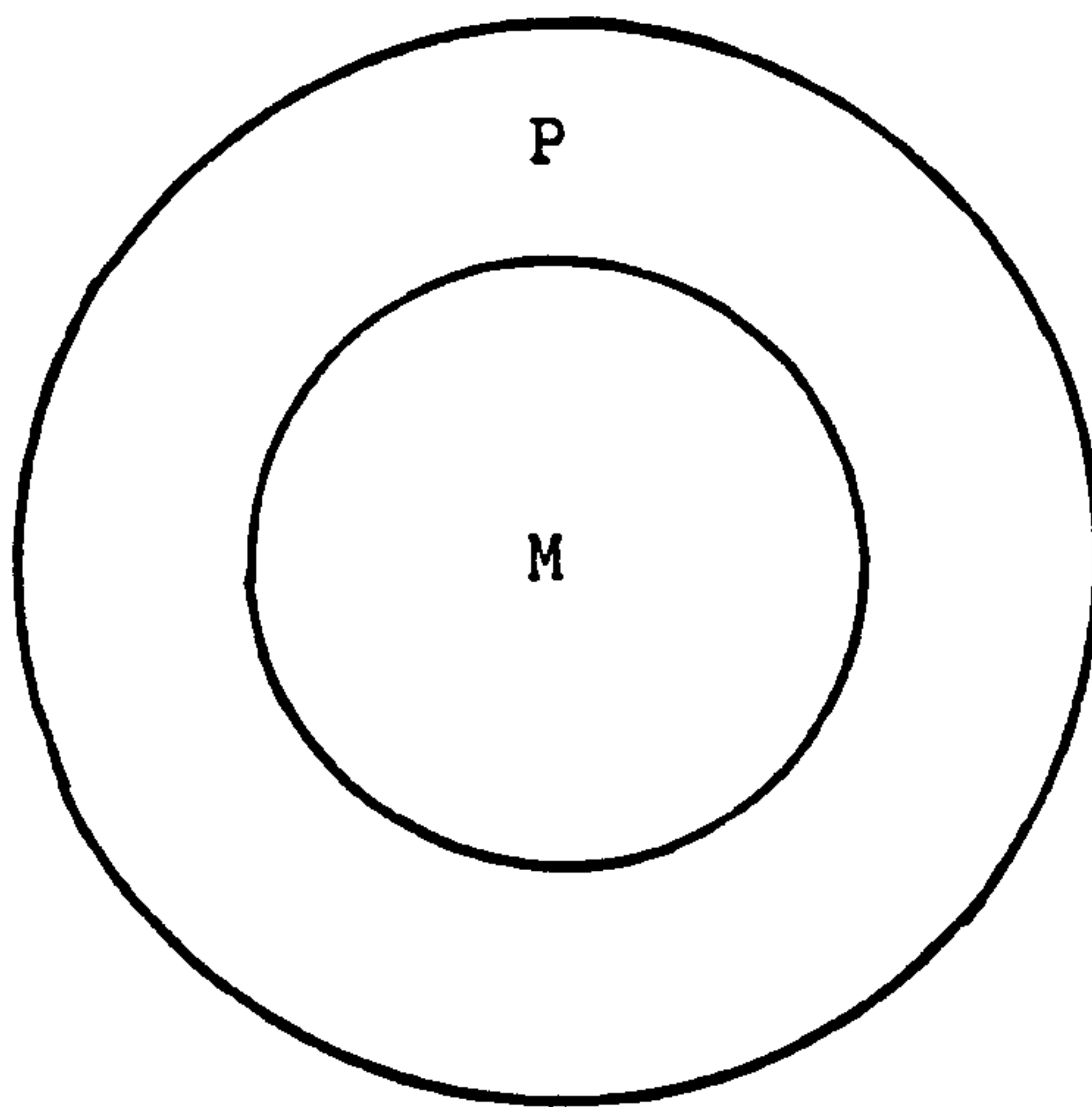
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<sup>123</sup> Cf. Fielding's use of this term in TP, No. 31: Locke, p. 243.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Familiar Letters, Letter xliv: Henley, XVI, 48.

potentially capable of enjoying this degree of happiness: virtue is an indispensable condition of worldly felicity, precisely because it is (barring religion) the only reliable source of true inward comfort, and the supplier of the very highest of earthly pleasures. In this sense, virtue and interest are perfectly coincident. But this is not to say that virtue is the only condition of worldly felicity. In a world such as this, virtue alone is unlikely to procure the outward goods which are also essential to happiness. And given the existence of characters like Blifil and Lady Bellaston, virtue must be married with a degree of self-interested social intelligence. In short, prudence alone can put the good man in possession of the happiness he deserves.

Virtue is the essence, but not the whole, of true practical wisdom. The moral and the prudential are coincident, not in the sense that they are identical and indistinguishable, but in the sense that the prudential embraces the moral. These seemingly complex relations between virtue, prudence, and happiness can perhaps be represented more intelligibly in a simple Venn diagram, where M represents the domain of morality and P the prudential domain (though it should not be forgotten that prudence itself is a moral duty):



Insofar as happiness is possible in this world, the happy man is the one who occupies the whole of the area contained within the outer circle. This is what Fielding's hero finally achieves at the end of Tom Jones. At the beginning of the novel, Jones occupies only the inner circle: being virtuous, he already possesses the greater and essential part of wisdom, but must extend his prudential intelligence outwards in order to complete it. Blifil, on the other hand, occupies only the area between the inner



and outer circles (the wilderness where the Wise Men live): he commands only the kinds of practical intelligence which Jones acquires in the course of the novel; and, standing as he does outside the moral domain, he is ipso facto essentially imprudent. Strictly speaking, my diagram is incomplete without a third circle to represent the domain of religion, which embraces the prudential just as completely as the prudential embraces the moral. Nor can a diagram of this kind do anything to represent the ethical complexities which will be considered in my next chapter. But, extravagant as it may seem, it is I think of some heuristic value relative to the point in hand. Fielding's assault on the optimists does not imply that "there can be no question of reconciling morality and self-interest",<sup>125</sup> nor can it even be said to hint at an intrinsic tension between them. What it does is to enforce the importance of "Prudence and Circumspection" and, ultimately, of religion.

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<sup>125</sup> Harrison, p. 122.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRUDENTIALISM AND BENEVOLISM

The "great, useful and uncommon Doctrine" of Tom Jones modifies but does not essentially alter the terms of the Prudential Syllogism. It does however raise some questions about the extent of Fielding's commitment to the ethics of Latitudinarian Anglicanism. According to the Anglican prudentialists, moral obligation is fundamentally grounded in man's natural and necessary self-interest. All moral duties are subsumed in "the Duty which we owe to ourselves". The basic terms of the prudential ethic are clearly laid out in Whichcote's Select Sermons:

All things must work according to their natural Principles (nor can they do otherwise,) as heavy Bodies must tend downwards... The most universal Principle belonging to all Kind of Things, is Self-preservation; which, in Man, being a rational Agent, is somewhat farther advanc'd to strong Propensions and Desires of the Soul after a State of Happiness, which hath the Predominancy over all other Inclinations; as being the supreme and ultimate End to which all his Designs and Actions must be subservient by a natural Necessity.—Whereas, on the other hand, those Rules or Means which are most proper for the attaining of this End, about which we have a Liberty of acting; to which Men are to be induc'd in a moral Way, by such Kind of Motives or Arguments as are in themselves sufficient to convince the Reason; these I call moral Duties: DUTIES, as deriving their Obligation from their Conducibility to their promoting of our chief End; and MORAL, as depending upon moral Motives.<sup>1</sup>

God, as the Author of nature, is responsible for man's necessary attachment to his own happiness. As Legislator, on the other hand, He has supplied us with infallible "Rules or Means...for the attaining of this End". This is what the Anglicans believed to be the purpose of divine commands and prohibitions — to conduct us, singly and collectively, to our own true happiness. In this sense, even our duties to God are derived from, and validated by, our natural and fundamental duty to ourselves. Thus, while obedience to God is the whole duty of man, the indispensable condition of salvation, the ultimate criterion of desert at the final

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<sup>1</sup> Select Sermons, I, vi, pp. 141-2. The passage to which this quotation belongs is apparently a verbatim replication of a passage in Wilkins's Natural Religion, Bk. I, Ch. xiv: see Rivers, "Reason, Grace and Sentiment", Ch. i (n. pag.).



judgment, our legal obligations imply a general prudential obligation. God's laws were framed with human nature in mind: as Whichcote puts it, "Self-love, and the proposing of Happiness as our chief End", is "the Foundation of Duty, that Basis, or Substratum, upon which the Law is founded" (Select Sermons, I, vi, p. 142). God commands obedience not as an end in itself but as a means to an end — it is recommended to us as a means of satisfying our natural and necessary self-love:

He doth enforce obedience to all his commands by promising rewards, yielding immense profit and transcendent pleasure to us, and by threatening punishments grievous to our sense; which proceeding is grounded upon a supposition that we do and ought greatly to love ourselves, or to regard our own interest and pleasure.

He doth recommend wisdom or virtue to us, as most agreeable to self-love; most eligible, because it yieldeth great benefit to ourselves...

He commendeth his laws to our observance, by declaring them in their design and tendency chiefly to regard our good and advantage...

In fine, God chargeth and encourageth us to affect and pursue the highest goods whereof we are capable...

(Barrow, "Self-Love", Works, I, 535)

Since obedience to God is the only certain means of attaining happiness, and is recommended to us as such, it could be said that all Christian moral obligations resolve themselves into a single overriding imperative: Be prudent.

Anglican prudentialism is indeed characterized by a general tendency to conflate moral with prudential imperatives, and to resolve the virtues and vices into so many functions of wisdom and folly. According to Locke, "the highest perfection of intellectual nature, lies in a careful and constant pursuit of true and solid happiness" (Essay, II.xxi.51, p. 266). In the context of Anglican moral theology, with its heavy emphasis on laws and sanctions, this pursuit implies and involves obedience to God. For the Anglicans, obedience is what ultimately constitutes both virtue and wisdom. Legality is the ethical common denominator that allows Barrow to argue that "wisdom" and "virtue" are "terms equivalent" ("Faith", Works, II, 88). The individual who obeys God is both "virtuous" and — ipso facto — "wise". Every degree of virtue is also a degree of wisdom, every degree of vice a degree of folly. In practice, therefore, virtue and wisdom, vice and folly, are indistinguishable. When Barrow preaches that virtue is wisdom (or vice folly), he is exploiting what is really only a



metonymic equivalence, but it could be said that much of his pulpit rhetoric is devoted to breaking down the distinction between the moral and the prudential.

Anglican prudentialism is the bedrock of Fielding's own moral outlook, and of many of his typical rhetorical strategies. He repeatedly exploits the Prudential Syllogism, declaring or inferring again and again that virtue and wisdom, vice and folly, are in a general sense "terms equivalent". But Fielding, though in many ways a rhetorician in the same tradition as Barrow, is also committed to the fictive exploration of moral complexities that would be out of place — and probably counter-productive — in the pulpit. These complexities also reflect the catholicity of Fielding's ethical sympathies. In some respects, his work could be said to effect a synthesis of the Anglican prudential tradition and the relatively new 'benevolist' school of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. (The term is inadequate in itself, but sufficient for the distinction in hand.) Given the historical antipathy between the prudentialists and the sentimental benevolists,<sup>2</sup> Fielding's work could be said to tend towards ethical self-contradiction. There are indeed some perplexing inconsistencies, but in many ways the synthesis is successful.

Fielding's use of language often seems to give the lie to his own prudential equations. In the Dedication of Tom Jones, for instance, he explains that his moral purpose has been circumscribed partly by the belief that "it is much easier to make good Men wise, than to make bad Men good" (TJ, p. 8). The very idea of making "good" men "wise" would probably be regarded by Barrow as something of a paradox. But a similar distinction manifests itself in another key passage, when Fielding warns us that "Prudence and Circumspection are necessary even to the best of Men": in this openly didactic passage, "Virtue" seems to signify "Goodness of Heart", while "Prudence" clearly signifies something else (TJ, III, vii, p. 141). Even Jones himself displays an awareness of the distinction when he declares that the pregnant Nancy Miller "hath sinned more against Prudence than Virtue" (TJ, XIV, vii, p. 768).<sup>3</sup> The distinction could hardly be clearer than it is in Allworthy's 'death-bed' admonition to

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<sup>2</sup> Shaftesbury's critique of prudentialism is analyzed in my final chapter. See also Hutcheson's Inquiry, Introduction, pp. 104-6; II, vii, pp. 137-40; VI, ix, pp. 247-8; and VII, i-iii.

<sup>3</sup> Rawson has also noted this, but we draw rather different conclusions from it: see "Order and Misrule", p. 485.



Jones:

Allworthy...gently squeezed his Hand, and proceeded thus.  
'I am convinced, my Child, that you have much Goodness, Generosity and Honour in your Temper; if you will add Prudence and Religion to these, you must be happy: For the three former Qualities, I admit, make you worthy of Happiness, but they are the latter only which will put you in Possession of it.'  
(TJ, V, vii, p. 244)

In Tom Jones, clearly, it is possible to be good and generous and honourable but imprudent. Indeed, it could be said that Fielding's novel is principally concerned with the problems raised by this possibility. The prudential embraces the moral; but the moral does not embrace the prudential. That imprudence is not coequal with vice per se becomes explicitly clear in Allworthy's final cautionary lecture to Jones:

You now see, Tom, to what Dangers Imprudence alone may subject Virtue (for Virtue, I am now convinced, you love in a great Degree.) Prudence is indeed the Duty which we owe to ourselves... You say, however, you have seen your Errors; and will reform them. I firmly believe you, my dear Child; and therefore, from this Moment, you shall never be reminded of them by me. Remember them only yourself so far, as for the future to teach you the better to avoid them; but still remember, for your Comfort, that there is this great Difference between those Faults which Candour may construe into Imprudence, and those which can be deduced from Villainy only.  
(TJ, XVIII, x, p. 960)

Here, as elsewhere, Fielding is making ethical discriminations which Barrow would find difficult to accommodate. In terms of the prudential ethic, to fulfil "the Duty which we owe to ourselves" is to discharge all other duties, and vice versa. Jones, according to Allworthy, has failed only in his duty to himself (per impossibile, Barrow might say). His "Errors" and "Faults", though real enough, are ones "which Candour may construe into Imprudence". This passage also features an important casuistical distinction between two different orders of immorality, one which has already manifested itself in Jones's own confessions: for instance, "though I cannot charge myself with any gross Villainy, yet I can discern Follies and Vices more than enough to repent and to be ashamed of" (p. 959). The plurality of the term "Vices" appears to be a function of the casuistical process. The singular terms "Virtue" and "Villainy" are the morally important ones for Fielding, ultimately denoting antithetical characters or dispositions, marking the difference

between the good and the bad man. In this passage, it seems to me, Jones's "Faults" and "Vices" are effectively being reduced to failures of conduct, failures apparently consistent with "Virtue" and attributable to "Imprudence alone".

Fielding sees his hero's sexual misdemeanours in exactly these terms. It is these to which Allworthy is referring when he speaks of "those Faults which Candour may construe into Imprudence". Jones is banished, in the first place, not for his incontinence but for his alleged "Villainy" (alleged by Blifil, of course), and particularly for his supposedly callous "Ingratitude to the best of Benefactors" (TJ, VI, x, p. 308). In reality, Jones was always the most grateful of beneficiaries. Blifil's slanderous misrepresentations actually invert his moral character, and it is Allworthy's consequent conviction that Jones really is "one of the worst Men in the World" that condemns him (p. 307). Being "entirely innocent" (and almost equally ignorant) of the principal "Charge", Jones is understandably taken aback by the severity of the arraignment:

Many Disadvantages attended poor Jones in making his Defence; nay, indeed he hardly knew his Accusation... His Heart was, besides, almost broken already, and his Spirits were so sunk, that he could say nothing for himself; but acknowledged the whole, and, like a Criminal in Despair, threw himself upon Mercy; concluding, 'That tho' he must own himself guilt of many Follies and Inadvertencies, he hoped he had done nothing to deserve what would be to him the greatest Punishment in the World.' (VI, xi, pp. 309, 310)

Jones is palpably in the right: he has "done nothing to deserve" his banishment, as Allworthy ultimately admits. Once his "Villainy" is discovered to have been a malicious fiction, there is nothing left to disgrace him but "those Faults which Candour may construe into Imprudence" — his sexual lapses. Jones's "Vices" are essentially "Follies and Inadvertencies", morally significant primarily as breaches of the duty which he owes to himself.

And yet they are "Vices". Fielding's commitment to prudentialism is clearly being modified not by differences about the general meaning of prudence (enlightened self-interest), but by a more complex analysis of virtue and vice. In Tom Jones, particularly, Fielding distinguishes continually between two orders of morality and immorality, in effect reducing second-order virtues and vices to mere functions of wisdom and folly (that is, locating them in the area between the two circles of



my Venn diagram).<sup>4</sup> Most important, he maintains a constant distinction between being and doing, between the man and his conduct.<sup>5</sup> Certain practical "Vices" can evidently be consistent with "Virtue". In this respect, Tom Jones has some of the moral complexity of the Nicomachean Ethics. Virtue, according to Aristotle, is a quality belonging not to actions but to agents: it is "a settled disposition of the mind", a radical and habitual commitment to "moral nobility" (NE, II, vi, 15; IX, viii, 5). Ultimately, prudence relates to virtue as means relate to ends (but is no less necessary for that):

Prudence [phronēsis] as well as Moral Virtue [ethikē aretē] determines the complete performance of man's proper function: Virtue ensures the rightness of the end we aim at, Prudence ensures the rightness of the means we adopt to gain that end. (NE, VI, xii, 6)

On the face of it, this account of the relation between virtue and prudence seems to invert the Anglican prudential ethic, where virtue itself is ultimately only a means to an end dictated by prudence. Aristotle does however share the Anglicans' belief that the prudential embraces the moral — that "we cannot be prudent without being good" (NE, VI, xii, 10). His handling of this point does in fact anticipate Fielding's ironic treatment of Blifil in Tom Jones. Here is Aristotle's distinction between "Prudence", which always implies virtue, and mere "Cleverness" (deinotēs), which does not:

There is a certain faculty called Cleverness, which is the capacity for doing the things aforesaid that conduce to the aim we propose, and so attaining that aim. If the aim is noble, this is a praiseworthy faculty: if base, it is mere knavery; this is how we come to speak of both prudent men and knaves as clever. Now this faculty is not identical with Prudence, but Prudence implies it. But... we cannot acquire the quality of Prudence without possessing Virtue... For deductive inferences about matters of conduct always have a major premise of the form 'Since the End or Supreme Good is so and so'...but the Supreme Good only appears good to the good man: vice perverts the mind and causes it to hold false views about the first principles of conduct. Hence it is clear that we cannot be prudent without being good. (NE, VI, xii, 9-10)

Both "Prudence" and "Cleverness" concern themselves with the choice of effective practical means to a predetermined end, and in this sense they

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<sup>4</sup> See above, p. 161.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Dudden, II, 683-4.

are "similar" (NE, VI, xiii, 1). But "Cleverness" is inferior to "Prudence" because it is exercised in the pursuit of inferior ends. Virtue is itself "the greatest of goods" (IX, viii, 7), the summum bonum; and since happiness is the ultimate object of prudence, the good man alone is capable of being prudent. Vice "perverts the mind", and mistakenly locates the "Supreme Good" in natural goods such as "money, honours, or bodily pleasures" (IX, viii, 4). To pursue happiness in these, however cleverly, is to pursue a delusion. In this sense, vice always implies imprudence, whatever the degree of practical "Cleverness" it employs. It is simply "not possible", argues Aristotle, "to be prudent without Moral Virtue" (VI, viii, 6). The prudential, in other words, embraces the moral.

All this is entirely consistent with Anglican thinking: whatever else might be said of the relations between them, virtue and prudence are fundamentally coincident. For Aristotle, however, it is possible to be morally virtuous but imprudent. As with Fielding, this reflects a more complex analysis of "Moral Virtue". Like Fielding, Aristotle believes virtue and vice to be essentially inward dispositions, and therefore recognizes that certain kinds of conduct can be morally ambiguous. And it is perhaps significant that Aristotle presents incontinence as an example of such ambiguity. Practical incontinence, he argues, can be vicious or venial, a product of "profligacy" (akolasia) or of mere "Unrestraint" (akrasia). "Profligacy" is a function of vice per se (kakia), whereas "Unrestraint" is not.<sup>6</sup> The "profligate" and the "unrestrained man" are distinguished by their respective dispositions:

...the unrestrained man is so constituted as to pursue bodily pleasures that are excessive and contrary to right principle without any belief that he ought to do so, whereas the profligate, because he is so constituted as to pursue them, is convinced that he ought to pursue them. Therefore the former can easily be persuaded to change, but the latter cannot. For virtue preserves the fundamental principle, vice destroys it, and the first principle or starting-point in matters of conduct is the end proposed... The man of principle therefore is temperate, the man who has lost all principle, profligate. But there is a person who abandons his choice, against right principle, under the influence of passion, who is mastered by passion sufficiently for him not to act in accordance with right principle, but not so completely as to

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<sup>6</sup> Aristotle distinguishes two kinds of "Unrestraint": "Impetuousness" and "Weakness". See NE, VII, vii, 8. The virtue corresponding to akrasia is enkrateia, self-control. The opposite of akolasia is sōphrosunē, temperance.



be of such a character as to believe that the reckless pursuit of pleasure is right. This is the unrestrained man... (NE, VII, viii, 3-4)

Conduct is morally ambiguous because "the first principle or starting-point in matters of conduct is the end proposed". The end of the profligate is pleasure alone, and this "he is...convinced that he ought to pursue". The incontinence of the profligate proceeds directly from his character, as it were, from his perverse conviction "that the reckless pursuit of pleasure is right". In other words, his immoral conduct is the product of an immoral disposition, of "Vice" in the strictest sense. The "unrestrained man", on the other hand, acts impetuously or reluctantly, "under the influence of passion", and not in accordance with conviction but against it. Characteristically, Aristotle suggests that he is "like people who get drunk quickly, and with a small amount of wine". The difference between the profligate or licentious disposition and a mere passionate impulse is ethically crucial: "That Unrestraint is not strictly a vice (though it is perhaps vice in a sense), is clear; for Unrestraint acts against deliberate choice, Vice in accordance with it" (NE, VII, viii, 2-3). "Unrestraint" thus "resembles Vice" only "in the actions that result from it" (VII, viii, 3: my emphasis). The distinction is further underlined in a passage which seems to me directly relevant to Tom Jones:

The profligate...does not feel remorse, for he abides by his choice; the unrestrained man on the other hand invariably repents his excesses afterwards. Hence...it is the profligate who cannot be cured, whereas the unrestrained man can; for Vice resembles diseases like dropsy and consumption, whereas Unrestraint is like epilepsy, Vice being a chronic, Unrestraint an intermittent evil. Indeed Unrestraint and Vice are entirely different in kind, for Vice is unconscious, whereas the unrestrained man is aware of his infirmity. (NE, VII, viii, 1)

In these terms, the hero of Tom Jones is at worst morally epileptic. He "repents his excesses afterwards" precisely because he is "aware of his infirmity", because the "fundamental principle" remains intact. Jones is thoroughly "sensible" of the error of his ways, as he himself confesses to Mrs Miller during one of her prison visits:

'Believe me, Madam,' said he, 'I do not speak the common Cant of one in my unhappy Situation. Before this dreadful Accident happened, I had resolved to quit a Life of which I

was become sensible of the Wickedness as well as Folly. I do assure you...I am not an abandoned Profligate. Though I have been hurried into Vices, I do not approve a vicious Character...' (TJ, XVII, v, p. 894)

In extenuating Jones's "Vices" in this manner, here and elsewhere, Fielding is appealing to exactly the kind of ethical distinction made by Aristotle. Jones's very capacity for rigorous moral self-criticism is what raises him above profligacy, and indicates the continuing force of an essentially virtuous disposition. He has been "hurried into Vices": this phrase in particular suggests an appeal to Aristotelian moral criteria ("Unrestraint acts against deliberate choice, Vice in accordance with it"). Jones, like Nancy Miller, might be said to have "sinned more against Prudence than Virtue" (TJ, XIV, vii, p. 768).

Like Fielding, Aristotle does in fact view incontinence (sexual or otherwise) as a paradigm of imprudent conduct. It may therefore be worth looking in more detail at his definition of prudence. According to Aristotle, "the prudent man in general will be the man who is good at deliberating in general": he will be "able to deliberate well about what is good and advantageous for himself" (NE, VI, v, 2, 1). One of the prudent man's intellectual virtues is what Aristotle calls "Deliberative Excellence" (euboulia):

Deliberative Excellence...is correctness of deliberation as regards what is advantageous, arriving at the right conclusion on the right grounds at the right time. (VI, ix, 6)

The function of "practical intelligence" (dianoia), in the prudential sphere, is "the attainment of truth corresponding to right desire" (VI, ii, 3). But what are the constituents of prudential "truth"? What are the psychological materials of prudential reasoning? According to Aristotle, the prudent man commands a knowledge of "general principles" and "particular facts". What he means by these terms will be clarified by the following passage:

Nor is Prudence a knowledge of general principles only: it must also take account of particular facts, since it is concerned with action, and action deals with particular things. This is why men who are ignorant of general principles are sometimes more successful in action than others who know them: for instance, if a man knows that light meat is easily digested,



and therefore wholesome, but does not know what kinds of meat are light, he will not be so likely to restore you to health as a man who merely knows that chicken is wholesome; and in other matters men of experience are more successful than theorists. (NE, VI, vii, 7)

Because prudence is a practical virtue, it "requires...knowledge of particular facts even more than knowledge of general principles" (VI, vii, 7). Theoretical knowledge (e.g., "light meat is easily digested, and therefore wholesome") can be quite useless without knowledge of particular facts (e.g., "chicken is light meat"). The prudent pursuit of health and happiness implies both. But while a stock of general principles can be acquired relatively easily (from books, from counsellors, from received wisdom), a knowledge of particular facts is more difficult to come by. Aristotle notes that, "although the young may be experts in geometry, and mathematics and similar branches of knowledge, we do not consider that a young man can have Prudence": "The Reason is that Prudence includes a knowledge of particular facts, and this is derived from experience, which a young man does not possess; for experience is the fruit of years" (VI, viii, 5). In order to become truly prudent, "to be able to deliberate well about what is good and advantageous for himself" (VI, v, 1), the young man must grow a little older.

Clearly, then, imprudent conduct can be the product of simple juvenile ignorance. In Book VII of the Ethics, Aristotle considers precisely this connexion in the case of incontinence. Here he employs the Practical Syllogism, in which the two kinds of knowledge we have been dealing with constitute major and minor premises respectively:

In a practical syllogism, the major premise is an opinion, while the minor premise deals with particular things, which are the province of perception. Now when the two premises are combined, just as in theoretic reasoning the mind is compelled to affirm the resulting conclusion, so in the case of practical premises you are forced at once to do it. For example, given the premises 'All sweet things ought to be tasted' and 'Yonder thing is sweet'...you are bound, if able and not prevented, immediately to taste the thing. (NE, VII, iii, 9)<sup>8</sup>

This is the simplest form of the Syllogism (which can also of course describe evasive action, if "sour" is substituted for "sweet"). But what

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<sup>8</sup> "Pursuit and avoidance in the sphere of Desire correspond to affirmation and denial in the sphere of the Intellect" (NE, VI, ii, 2).

would happen if the agent were cognizant of a second major premise (or "general principle") which conflicted with the first — for example, 'All sweet things cause dyspepsia, and are therefore unwholesome'? Aristotle sees incontinence as the typical product of just such a conflict:

When...there is present in the mind on the one hand a universal judgment forbidding you to taste and on the other hand a universal judgment saying 'All sweet things are pleasant,' and a minor premise 'Yonder thing is sweet' (and it is this minor premise that is active), and when desire is present at the same time, then, though the former universal judgment says 'Avoid that thing,' the desire leads you to it (since desire can put the various parts of the body in motion). (NE, VII, iii, 10)

The tension between the two major premises confronts the agent with a prudential dilemma: he must choose between one kind of good (the pleasant) and another (the expedient — what the Anglicans would call the profitable).<sup>9</sup> In such a case, the prudent man will of course take the expedient course of action. The incontinent man, on the other hand, typically chooses the pleasant. In such a case, then, the incontinent man behaves imprudently. However, he does act "in a sense under the influence of a principle or opinion", one "not in itself but only accidentally opposed to the right principle (for it is the desire, and not the opinion, that is really opposed)" (VII, iii, 10-11). In other words, the prohibitive major premise does not falsify the general principle that 'all sweet things are pleasant' — this remains true, and in this sense the incontinent man is guided by "principle or opinion". But in choosing according to this truth rather than the other, under the influence of desire, he acts on the (prudentially) less important premise. The resulting action is a practical non sequitur.

On the other hand, it could be said that the incontinent action implies ignorance of the prohibitive major premise. Aristotle associates akrasia with a special kind of ignorance. In cases where there are two practical premises, "it is quite possible for a man to act against knowledge when he knows both premises but is only exercising his knowledge of the universal premise and not of the particular; for action has to do with particular things" (VII, iii, 2: my emphases). For example:

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<sup>9</sup> "There are three things that are the motives of choice and three that are the motives of avoidance; namely, the noble, the expedient, and the pleasant, and their opposites, the base, the harmful, and the painful" (NE, II, iii, 7).



...he may know and be conscious of the knowledge that dry food is good for every man and...that food of a certain kind is dry, but either not possess or not be actualizing the knowledge whether the particular food before him is food of that kind. (NE, VII, iii, 2: my emphasis)

At this point it may not be impertinent to note that Fielding is fond of setting up metaphorical associations between sexual activity and eating.<sup>10</sup> Consider the following example from Tom Jones: "place a well-powdered Buttock before a hungry Lover, and he seldom fails very handsomely to play his Part" (XII, v, p. 637). Taken out of context, it is not at all clear whether this tribute to Jones's appetite refers to salt beef or to "delicate white human Flesh" (VI, i, p. 270). (Jones, it is implied elsewhere, was "ready to eat every Woman he saw") (VII, vi, p. 345). Actually, Fielding is eulogizing Jones's heroic appetite for eggs and bacon, but the metaphorical sense is very near the surface here, and (in Jones's case) quite as appropriate as the literal sense. The same metaphor is given dramatic form in Fielding's account of Jones's gigantic supper with Mrs Waters, which culminates — naturally enough — in the literalization of the metaphor (IX, v). Now, while Jones's robust appetite for both kinds of flesh is natural (and perhaps innocent) enough, his weakness for the human variety gets him into a great deal of trouble. His imprudence manifests itself first and foremost in bouts of sexual incontinence: amorous misconduct is the primum mobile of his progress from Paradise Hall towards the gallows.

It is of course highly unlikely that Fielding's taste for the eating-fornication analogy was directly inspired by the Nicomachean Ethics. However coincidental, my point is that it confirms and reinforces Aristotle's relevance to Tom Jones. Again and again, Aristotle illustrates his theoretical points with exempla drawn from food, eating, diet. In a sense, Fielding dramatizes his prudential theme in the same terms. In Book V, Chapter x of Tom Jones, Fielding's hero retires, none too sober, into the fields, "where he intended to cool himself by a Walk in the open Air" and where, not much later, "an Accident happened" (p. 255). Fielding

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<sup>10</sup> The metaphor is of course as old as the hills, but it does seem to be a particular favourite of Fielding's. See also, for instance, JW, II, viii (Henley, II, 81-2); and II, ix (Henley, II, 82); and cf. the "MODERN GLOSSARY" definition of "LOVE" in CGJ, No. 4 (Jensen, I, 156). On Fielding's exploitation of this metaphor, see Johnson, Fielding's Art of Fiction, pp. 119-22; Hodges, "NE and TJ", pp. 226-8; and O'Brien, "The Hungry Author", esp. pp. 626 ff.

places Jones in a pastoral landscape of gentle breezes, murmuring streams and birdsong. Here, appropriately enough, the tipsy hero breaks into a bombastic soliloquy, vowing eternal constancy to the incomparable Sophia. But the "Accident" is imminent. Molly Seagrim, characteristically "odoriferous", breaks into the romantic idyll and within fifteen minutes persuades Jones to retire with her "into the thickest Part of the Grove" (pp. 256-7). His eternal constancy has lasted "a full Quarter of an Hour". Apologetically, Fielding urges us "to recollect in his Favour, that he was not at this Time perfect Master of that wonderful Power of Reason, which so well enables grave and wise Men...to decline any of these prohibited Amusements. Wine now had totally subdued this Power in Jones" (p. 257).

Jones had been explicitly warned, on more than one occasion, against the dangers of yielding too readily to "those turbulent Passions, which engage us in the Pursuit of Pleasure" (TJ, V, ii, p. 215). His future happiness, warns Allworthy, will depend entirely on his own behaviour (p. 216). In effect, Allworthy is enforcing upon Jones the general principle that "delicate white human Flesh" — however appealing to the palate — can be decidedly unwholesome. With the appearance of Molly Seagrim, then, Jones is confronted with a choice between two kinds of good, the pleasant and the expedient (or profitable). Imprudently, he decides to enjoy the moment. And, as Colonel James (of all people) was to say in Amelia, "if men will be imprudent, they must suffer the Consequences" (VIII, viii, p. 342).

Desire has, in some sense, overridden Jones's better knowledge. Aristotle would see the whole "Accident" as an example of a specific kind of practical non sequitur. In reality, he would argue, Jones's misguided choice was a product of ignorance:

Again, it is possible for men to 'have knowledge' in yet another way besides those just discussed; for even in the state of having knowledge without exercising it we can observe a distinction: a man may in a sense both have it and not have it: for instance, when he is asleep, or mad, or drunk. But persons under the influence of passion are in the same condition; for it is evident that anger, sexual desire, and certain other passions, actually alter the state of the body, and in some cases even cause madness. It is clear therefore that we must pronounce the unrestrained to 'have knowledge' only in the same way as men who are asleep or mad or drunk. (NE, VII, iii, 7)

Sexual desire alone would be enough to induce a state of practical



ignorance, a temporary suspension of prudential knowledge. Jones was also drunk. Clearly, therefore, Aristotle would not have been unduly surprised by his practical non sequitur. Nor, apparently, would he have been surprised by the contradiction between the bombastic soliloquy and the action that followed it. Aristotle thinks it characteristic of incontinent men to display this kind of practical self-contradiction:

Their using the language of knowledge is no proof that they possess it. Persons in the states mentioned repeat propositions of geometry and verses of Empedocles; students who have just begun a subject reel off its formulae, though they do not yet know their meaning, for knowledge has to become part of the tissue of the mind, and this takes time. Hence we must conceive that men who fail in self-restraint talk in the same way as actors speaking a part. (NE, VII, iii, 8: my emphasis)<sup>11</sup>

This is surely a fitting characterization of Jones's abrupt descent from histrionic posturing to practical inconstancy. In effect, Aristotle has theorized the 'ridiculous' as well as the serious aspect of this important prudential failure.

In a more general sense, what Fielding and Aristotle share is an humanely sympathetic attitude to certain kinds of moral frailty. Tom Jones displays many of the strengths and weaknesses of youth, as anatomized in Aristotle's Rhetoric.<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, says Aristotle, the young are dangerously hot-blooded, "ready to desire and to carry out what they desire": "Of the bodily desires they chiefly obey those of sensual pleasure and these they are unable to control". This, he implies, is in the nature of things. On the other hand, the virtues of the young are vastly superior to the virtues of middle-age: they "attach only the slightest value" to money, but are "ambitious of honour"; they are "not ill-natured but simple-natured", ready to place trust and confidence in others ("because they have as yet not been often deceived"); they are "courageous" and "high-minded", and "as yet judge nothing by expediency": "In their actions, they prefer the noble to the useful; their life is

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<sup>11</sup> "The reference is to persons of weak will uttering sound moral maxims almost at the very moment of yielding to temptation", says Rackham in his note on this passage. On prudence and temperance, see also NE, VI, v, 6.

<sup>12</sup> Ribble has noted the relevance of this: see "Aristotle", pp. 39-40.

guided by their character rather than by calculation, for the latter aims at the useful, virtue at the noble".<sup>13</sup> This generalized portrait of youth — constitutionally incontinent and imprudent, but also constitutionally "noble" — might almost have been a model for Fielding's characterization of Tom Jones.

Fielding's anti-puritanical attitude to sins of the flesh is important in itself, and I shall return to this. But even if Tom Jones's "Faults" and "Errors" can be described as "Vices", they are ones "which Candour may construe into Imprudence" (TJ, XVIII, x, p. 960). The man himself remains virtuous, fundamentally committed to what Aristotle calls "moral nobility". In at least one sense, then, Fielding regards some kinds of conduct as morally ambiguous. The agent cannot be judged entirely according to his actions, since the good man and the profligate tend sometimes to act in the same way. Certain practical "Vices" can be products either of vice or of mere imprudence. This in no sense undermines the Anglicans' proposition that "Vices" are always foolish, or that wisdom embraces virtue. But this kind of discrimination does seem to undermine the legalistic framework of Anglican prudentialism. For Barrow, "virtue" and "wisdom" are both essentially names for the same thing — obedience to the letter of God's commands and prohibitions. Fielding, however, persistently refuses to judge his creatures according to exclusively legal criteria. Squire Allworthy, in some ways the Christian rigorist of Tom Jones, repeatedly condemns the wickedness of fornication.<sup>14</sup> And yet it is Allworthy himself who ultimately dismisses Jones's sins as imprudent peccadilloes. The illegality of fornication is, finally, understated if not disregarded altogether. The sins committed in the course of the novel appear to be wiped out by the virtues of the sinner (and perhaps also by his repentance). Fielding's insistence on the moral ambiguity of certain practical sins is clearly anti-legalistic in tendency. And he tends to qualify the immorality of certain kinds of conduct not only by reference to redeeming qualities in the agent, but also by reference to the consequences of his conduct.

In some respects, Fielding's ethics might be said to embrace the

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<sup>13</sup> The "Art" of Rhetoric, trans. John Henry Freese, Loeb Classical Library, 1947, II, xii.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, his sermon to Jenny Jones in I, vii, esp. p. 51; or his angry confrontation with Jones himself in IV, xi, pp. 193-4, where it is said that Allworthy "greatly condemned the Vice of Incontinence" (p. 194).



Greatest Happiness Principle, as originally defined by Hutcheson: "that Action is best, which accomplishes the greatest Happiness for the greatest Numbers" (Inquiry, III, viii, p. 164). Like Hutcheson, Shaftesbury or Butler, whose quite distinct ethical systems converge at this point, he sees the end or sum of morals as the promotion of social happiness, and/or the alleviation of pain and misery. The moral status of particular actions can thus be determined partly by reference to their actual or estimated social consequences. For Hutcheson, the moral judgment of agents is a far more complicated matter, but conduct is universally judged according to the principle of utility. He notes, for instance,

That amidst the diversity of Sentiments on this Head among various Sects, this is still allow'd to be the way of deciding the Controversy about any disputed Practice, to enquire whether this Conduct, or the contrary, will most effectually promote the publick Good. The Morality is immediately adjusted, when the natural Tendency, or Influence of the Action upon the universal natural Good of Mankind is agreed upon. That which produces more Good than Evil in the Whole, is acknowledg'd Good; and what does not, is counted Evil. (Inquiry, III, iii, pp. 153-4)

The moral "Good" or "Evil" of a particular "Practice" is thus determined by reference to the natural "Good" or "Evil" it produces, or tends to produce. In "common Life", Hutcheson points out, "Actions are approv'd or condemn'd, vindicated or excus'd" according to their "natural Tendency", their "Tendency" to "publick Good" or "publick Evil" (Inquiry, III, iii, p. 155). Bishop Butler likewise builds his ethical system on the presupposition that the promotion of social happiness is the "chief end" of man: "That mankind is a community, that we all stand in relation to each other, that there is a public end and interest of society which each particular is obliged to promote, is the sum of morals" ("Upon Forgiveness of Injuries", 15 Sermons, IX, 9, 8). And, despite his grim misgivings about the implications of the Greatest Happiness Principle,<sup>15</sup> Butler frequently applies it to moral questions. The passion of "resentment", for instance, though given us for ultimately valuable purposes, is said to be "in every instance absolutely an evil in itself, because it implies producing misery" (15 Sermons, IX, 8). In another sermon, he appeals to utilitarian criteria in deciding the question of whether the rich or the

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<sup>15</sup> See the Dissertation, paras. 8-11: 15 Sermons, pp. 151-4.

poor are the most proper objects of beneficence: "What proportion is there", he asks, "between the happiness produced by doing a favour to the indigent, and that produced by doing the same favour to one in easy circumstances?" There would be "much more good done by the former; or, if you will allow me the expressions, more misery annihilated, and happiness created". We are therefore manifestly obliged to choose in favour of the poor and indigent. Whatever we make of his apology for using such "expressions", Butler is solving a moral dilemma by reference to "the happiness or good produced", the "new enjoyment or satisfaction" yielded, by alternative courses of action ("Upon Compassion", 15 Sermons, VI, 7).

Fielding employs the utilitarian principle most conspicuously in his social and legal writings (to which I shall return in a later chapter). But he also respects it as an aid to that judicial "Candour" recommended by his fiction. His seemingly ambiguous treatment of fornication in Tom Jones is perhaps a case in point. According to Hutcheson, "when we blame any Piece of Conduct, we shew it to be prejudicial to others, besides the Actor". On the other hand, certain actions can be defended by appealing to the same utilitarian yardstick:

If we are vindicating a censur'd Action, and maintaining it lawful, we always make this one Article of our Defence, "That it injur'd no body, or did more Good than Harm..." We all know how great an Extenuation of Crimes this is, to alledge, "That the poor Man does harm to no body but himself;" and how often this turns Hatred into Pity... (Inquiry, IV, i, pp. 179-80)

This is one of the principal ways in which Fielding vindicates the moral slips of Tom Jones. Like Sophia, who, "when very young, discerned that Tom, though an idle, thoughtless, rattling Rascal, was no-body's Enemy but his own" (TJ, IV, v, p. 165), Fielding tends to overlook or extenuate those offences which — in utilitarian terms — can be described as harmless. Insofar as these offences prove injurious to Jones himself, they are imprudent, breaches of the duty which he owes to himself. But "those Faults which Candour may construe into Imprudence", as Allworthy calls them (XVIII, x, p. 960), are clearly differentiated from first-order immorality by reference to the utilitarian principle. An offence against the letter of the law, if it involves no injury to others, if it is harmless in tendency, is characteristically implied to be venial. Certainly, this is how Jones defends his own sexual transgressions:



'Looke, Mr. Nightingale,' said Jones, 'I am no canting Hypocrite, nor do I pretend to the Gift of Chastity, more than my Neighbours. I have been guilty with Women, I own it; but am not conscious that I have ever injured any — nor would I to procure Pleasure to myself, be knowingly the Cause of Misery to any human Being.' (TJ, XIV, iv, p. 755)

Jones obviously has a clear conscience, and this is some indication of Fielding's own moral priorities. The erring hero has sinned with women but not against them. This distinction is surely critical.<sup>16</sup>

At many points in Tom Jones, Fielding implicitly urges his reader to discriminate between the wantonness of consenting adults and sheer sexual aggression against the innocent and the defenceless. Defloration, rather than fornication, is a truly immoral manifestation of male sexuality. The deliberate corruption of feminine innocence is, in Fielding's eyes, a moral monstrosity, not least because it often involves the virtual destruction of a young woman's life.<sup>17</sup> Where defloration is not involved, Fielding seems to believe that illicit masculine sexual activity becomes radically less immoral. When Square is discovered in Molly Seagrim's garret, this is precisely the defence he offers to Jones: "if you will consider the Matter fairly, you will find you are yourself only to blame. I am not guilty of corrupting Innocence" (TJ, V, v, p. 232). As it happens, neither is Jones "guilty of corrupting Innocence". Allworthy does indeed condemn him for "breaking the Laws of God and Man", by

<sup>16</sup> For other useful discussions of Fielding's sexual ethics (some rather different from mine), see Murry, "In Defence of Fielding", esp. pp. 28-38; Empson, "Tom Jones", esp. pp. 136-43; Rawson, "Empson's TJ", passim, and "Fielding and Smollett", pp. 276-8; Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel (1957), Penguin, 1972, pp. 319-24; John Valdimir Price, "Sex and the Foundling Boy: The Problem in Tom Jones", Review of English Literature, 8, no. 4 (1967), 45-52; Murial Brittain Williams, Marriage: Fielding's Mirror of Morality, Alabama, 1973, passim, esp. (on TJ) pp. 77-84. The subject is also touched upon in Harrison, The Novelist as Moral Philosopher, pp. 91 ff., 109-112; and in Hodges, "NE and TJ", pp. 225-9.

<sup>17</sup> See esp. Allworthy's sermon to Jenny Jones, TJ, I, vii; and cf. CGJ, No. 20. The 'domino-effect' view of feminine sexuality was commonplace in the eighteenth century: see W. A. Speck, "The Harlot's Progress in Eighteenth-Century England", BJECS, 3 (1980), 127-39. The conventional formula is perhaps most powerfully dramatized in Richardson's Clarissa, where Lovelace's victims either become hardened prostitutes (Sally Martin et al) or die premature deaths (Miss Betterton, and Clarissa herself). For a relevant discussion of Fielding's ambivalent attitude to 'fallen' women, see Bertrand A. Goldgar, "Fielding and the Whores of London", PQ, 64 (1985), 265-73.

"corrupting and ruining a poor Girl", and Jones accepts the justice of the charge (IV, xi, p. 193). But Jones is flattering himself. In fact, as Fielding is careful to point out, the "Triumph" was Molly's: it was she who initially "triumphed over all the virtuous Resolutions of Jones", and not vice versa, despite the fact that Jones "attributed the Conquest entirely to himself" (IV, vi, p. 175). He is the seduced party, she the seducer.<sup>18</sup> In short it is Molly, not Jones, who is "guilty of corrupting Innocence". And, of course, there can be no question of Jones having debauched Mrs Waters or Lady Bellaston, neither of whom is any more innocent — or sexually passive — than Molly Seagrim.

In fact, Jones shares Fielding's abhorrence of militant male sexuality. "To debauch a young Woman, however low her Condition was, appeared to him a very heinous Crime", and this accounts for his "virtuous Resolutions" to resist the blandishments of Molly Seagrim (whom he mistakenly supposed chaste): for a long time, "his Principles...forcibly restrained him" (TJ, IV, vi, p. 174). Later, when Nightingale is discovered to have seduced young Nancy Miller, the force of these "Principles" is heavily emphasized. Indeed, one principal point of this episode (XIV, iv-vii), which embraces Mrs Miller's remonstrations against Jones for his nocturnal activities, seems to be to underline the decisive moral distinction between sinning 'with' and sinning 'against' women. On the discovery of Nancy's pregnancy, and Nightingale's dastardly flight, Mrs Miller's house becomes a scene of heightened pathos. Nancy weeps inconsolably, and her mother, denouncing Nightingale (more than once) as a "barbarous Villain", tearfully laments the destruction of Nancy's future and her own dearest hopes: "O my Child, my Child! She is undone, she is ruined for ever!", "The barbarous cruel — hath destroyed us all. O my poor Children! Is this the Reward of all my Cares?" (XIV, vi, pp. 762-3). This self-consciously pathetic scene is surely designed to make a point: that fornication, of certain kinds and in certain contexts, can be profoundly injurious, destructive, and immoral. The man who procures his pleasures at the expense of others is not only a sinner but (infinitely worse in Fielding's moral lexicon) a "barbarous Villain". As it happens, Nightingale proves redeemable. But Fielding is highly critical of his past record in "Affairs of Love": he had "been guilty of some indefensible Treachery to Women", and until his final change of heart "was so far from being ashamed of his Iniquities of this Kind, that he gloried in them". In short, where women

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Murry, op. cit., p. 31.



were concerned, "he was somewhat loose in his Morals" (XIV, iv, p. 756). This is a revealing phrase. Nightingale's immorality consists not in his having sinned with women but in having sinned against them — not in fornication per se, but in "Treachery". In the name of pleasure, Nightingale has casually injured and betrayed other human beings. This is where he differs from Jones, whose conduct is certainly "loose", but whose "Morals" are essentially sound. Even before the Nancy Miller crisis, Nightingale "had...received some Rebukes from Jones, who always exprest great Bitterness against any Misbehaviour to the fair Part of the Species" (p. 756). In the same chapter (before the discovery of Nancy's pregnancy) we see Jones rebuking Nightingale merely for having "play'd the Fool" with the girl's affections, when he had no intention of reciprocating them. Nightingale, says Jones, has "gone far beyond common Gallantries":

'What do you suppose,' says Nightingale, 'that we have been a-bed together?' 'No, upon my Honour,' answered Jones, very seriously, 'I do not suppose so ill of you; nay, I will go farther, I do not imagine you have laid a regular premeditated Scheme for the Destruction of the Quiet of a poor little Creature, or have even foreseen the Consequence; for I am sure thou art a very good-natured Fellow, and such a one can never be guilty of a Cruelty of that Kind; but at the same time, you have pleased your own Vanity, without considering that this poor Girl was made a Sacrifice to it...' (XIV, iv, pp. 753, 754)

This carefully-worded rebuke tells us far more about Jones than about Nightingale. Jones's own "Morals", with respect to sexual relations, are clear enough: to seek pleasure at the expense of a girl's feelings, never mind her entire future, is to him a quintessentially immoral act. His principles, and his moral intelligence, are further displayed when he successfully persuades Nightingale to do the honourable thing, to act in accordance with "the very best and truest Honour, which is Goodness" (XIV, vii, p. 767). That Jones himself has a clear conscience throughout this episode, and feels himself in a position to offer moral guidance to a fellow-sinner, is surely significant. The episode not only dramatizes Fielding's views on the morality of sexual relations, but puts these views into the mouth of the errant hero. In effect, Jones is self-vindicated. For all his sins, he does cleave to "the very best and truest Honour" — not chastity but "Goodness". He has been plentifully "guilty with Women", but, never having consciously injured any, feels himself essentially innocent. Here, and elsewhere, Fielding characteristically implies that

fornication per se, however contrary to "the Duty which we owe to ourselves", is a venial offence, one which becomes a cardinal offence only when it involves a breach of the duty which we owe to others. This is perhaps where Jones's sexual career differs from Nightingale's, or Wilson's,<sup>19</sup> or indeed Booth's, whose casual affairs are in one way or another directly injurious to others.

In some cases, then, Fielding is prepared to measure or qualify the morality of an action by reference to its consequences. Leaving aside its illegality, fornication is morally ambiguous precisely because its "natural Tendency" (Hutcheson's phrase) is ambiguous. In general Fielding does emphasize the harmful tendencies of sexual licence. But this ambiguity helps to explain his tolerant attitude to the 'sins' of Tom Jones, which (thanks to some careful plotting) are injurious to no one but himself, and far more significant as failures of prudence than as instances of true moral weakness.

For Fielding, the very end and purpose of morality is the promotion of social happiness. Any action which produces, or directly tends to produce, misery is therefore a 'bad' action. Any action which produces, or directly tends to produce, happiness is 'good'. This basic utilitarian ethic is exemplified most lucidly and explicitly in "An Essay on Conversation", where good and bad manners are defined by reference to the Greatest Happiness Principle. Conversation itself is said to be the "grand Business of our Lives, the Foundation of every Thing, either useful or pleasant": our social "Talents" are "the noblest Privilege of human Nature, and productive of all rational Happiness" (Miscellanies I, p. 121). The very "End of Conversation" is indeed "the Happiness of Mankind"; it is "the chief Means to procure their Delight and Pleasure": "The Art of pleasing or doing Good to one another is therefore the Art of Conversation" (pp. 149, 123). Conversation, in other words, is a practical means to a natural end. Its tendency to promote happiness is what "gives it all its Value". And, since man is naturally a "social Animal", which "presupposes a natural Desire or Tendency this Way", Fielding suggests that "we can fail in attaining this truly desirable End from Ignorance only in the Means" (p. 123). These "Means" are particular forms of conduct, which together make up what Fielding calls "Good Breeding": according to

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<sup>19</sup> Though essentially a good-natured soul, Wilson has the premature death of one sexual partner on his conscience: see JA, III, iii, pp. 205-8 (here, by the way, is another paradigm of the 'Harlot's Progress').



Fielding, "true Good-Breeding consists in contributing, with our utmost Power, to the Satisfaction and Happiness of all about us" (Miscellanies I, Preface, p. 4). This is impossible without a knowledge of the proper "Means", or (which amounts to the same thing) a command of the appropriate forms of conduct. Hence Fielding's definition of "Good Breeding" as "the Art of pleasing" (pp. 123, 125: my emphasis). It consists not in the desire of a particular end (social "Satisfaction and Happiness"), but in the promotion of that end by appropriate means: to be a "well-bred Man" is to behave in such a way as to contribute "as much as possible to the Ease and Happiness of those with whom you converse" (p. 123). The purpose of Fielding's essay is to lay down a set of "Rules" for social behaviour (p. 125), the observance of which will conduce most effectually to the promotion of social well-being. In laying down these "Rules for Good Breeding" (p. 128), Fielding is in a sense furnishing the social 'actor' with his 'part'.<sup>20</sup> As a behavioural accomplishment, "Good Breeding" is something essentially artificial.

This, for Fielding, is where manners differ from morality.<sup>21</sup> There is a difference between the "Art" of promoting happiness and the desire to promote it. This is the difference between "Good Breeding" and "Good Nature". Relevant here is Addison's distinction between "that Disposition of Mind which in our Language goes under the Title of Good-nature" and that "artificial Humanity which is what we express by the Word Good-Breeding".<sup>22</sup> This "artificial Humanity" is justified by its utility. Where the generous and humane "Disposition of Mind" is wanting, something must take its place:

There is no Society or Conversation to be kept up in the World without Good-nature, or something which must bear its Appearance, and supply its Place. For this Reason Mankind have been forced to invent a kind of artificial Humanity, which is what we express by the Word Good-Breeding. For if we examine

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<sup>20</sup> Note the typical use of theatrical language at p. 130, for example: "Let us now consider a little the Part which the Visitor himself is to act...". Cf. Fielding's more extensive application of the same language to ill breeding in Amelia, V, i, p. 194.

<sup>21</sup> The matter is not perhaps quite as simple as this, given Fielding's passionate belief in the importance of traditional social forms and proprieties. See Rawson, Augustan Ideal, Ch. i, passim.

<sup>22</sup> Spectator, No. 169 (13.9.1711): Bond, ed., II, 165.

thoroughly the Idea of what we call so, we shall find it to be nothing else but an Imitation and Mimickry of Good-nature, or in other Terms, Affability, Complaisance and Easiness of Temper reduced into an Art.

The difference between "Humanity" and "Good-Breeding" is the difference between nature and art. In utilitarian terms, "Imitation and Mimickry" are better than nothing; but when such virtues as "Affability" and "Complaisance" are entirely "artificial", entirely a matter of "Appearance", "Good-Breeding" amounts to an elegant species of hypocrisy:

These exterior Shows and Appearances of Humanity render a Man wonderfully popular and beloved, when they are founded upon a real Good-nature; but without it are like Hypocrisie in Religion, or a bare Form of Holiness, which, when it is discovered, makes a Man more detestable than professed Impiety.<sup>23</sup>

In effect, Addison is insisting on the distinction between 'actor' and 'performance', and implying that the former alone is a proper object of moral assessment. An "artificial Humanity" is, in utilitarian terms, far better than sincere inhumanity; but "Good-Breeding" alone cannot be regarded as a moral accomplishment, nor therefore as any argument for the merit of the 'actor', precisely because it is only a matter of "Appearance". Ideally, the "exterior Shows and Appearances of Humanity" which constitute "Good-Breeding" will be the public, outward expression of "a real Good-nature" — the civilized 'performance' will reflect the humane nature of the 'actor'. In the "Essay on Conversation" Fielding implies as much when he says that "Good-Nature itself" is "the very Habit of Mind most essential to furnish us with true Good Breeding" (Miscellanies I, pp. 124-5). Genuine courtesy comes from the heart, as it were.<sup>24</sup> Morality, as distinct from social propriety, is not reducible to questions of conduct or behaviour.

Ironically, perhaps, another major essay in Fielding's Miscellanies is devoted to resolving the epistemological problems raised by these distinctions. "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" argues, on the one hand, that "Actions are their own best Expositors", that "the Actions of Men seem to be the justest Interpreters of their Thoughts, and

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., II, 165.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Barrow on charity, "the most civilizing and most polishing disposition that can be": "what a charitable man truly is, that a gallant would seem to be" ("Charity", Works, I, 247: my emphases).



the truest Standards by which we may judge them" (Miscellanies I, pp. 163, 162). To come at their "true Characters" (p. 163), we should "carefully...observe the Actions of Men with others, and especially with those to whom they are allied in Blood, Marriage, Friendship...or any other Connection":

Trace then the Man proposed to your Trust, into his private Family and nearest Intimacies. See whether he hath acted the Part of a good Son, Brother, Husband, Father, Friend, Master, Servant, &c. if he hath discharged these Duties well, your Confidence will have a good Foundation; but if he hath behaved himself in these Offices with Tyranny, with Cruelty, with Infidelity, with Inconstancy, you may be assured he will take the first Opportunity his Interest points out to him, of exercising the same ill Talents at your Expence. (p. 175)

In short, we must "judge of Men by what we actually see them perform towards those with whom they are most closely connected" (p. 175). But all this serves to underline the acuteness of the problem which it is intended to solve. The fact is that we cannot easily judge of men by what we actually see them perform towards ourselves, on the public 'stage' — not, at least, until it is too late. The whole point of the essay is to offer practical solutions to the problems raised by the very ambiguity of public behaviour. The hypocrite manipulates appearances, disguising himself under exactly the kind of behavioural artifice with which Fielding is concerned in "An Essay on Conversation". The refined hypocrite will tend to behave in precisely the same way as the truly "well-bred Man". In this sense, mere manners can be a positive impediment to accurate moral judgment. Fielding is preoccupied with the ambiguity of conduct precisely because moral judgment presupposes a knowledge of character. His essay argues the necessity of inferring "the real Character", "Nature", "Heart", "Affections", or "Passions" of men from their observable behaviour — from their "Conversation", as it were (pp. 155, 156, 157). To judge the 'actor' according to his public 'performance' is to fall into the hypocrite's trap. Fielding insists that we must come at the nature of the 'actor' before we can judge the 'performance'.

For Fielding, hypocrisy is a "pernicious" and "detestable" vice (Miscellanies I, p. 156). In a sense, however, it is but an extreme manifestation of the universal disjunction between character and conduct, the inward and the outward, motive and action, with which Fielding's

work is consistently preoccupied. All conduct is morally ambiguous. To judge any given action or practice, we must have some knowledge of its consequences, actual or probable. To judge the agent, we must have some knowledge of his motives or intentions. In his Dissertation of the Nature of Virtue, Bishop Butler notes that our moral judgments always imply "a distinction between merely being the instrument of good, and intending it", or "the like distinction, every one makes, between injury and mere harm" (para. 1: 15 Sermons, p. 147). He concedes that "actions" are the proper objects of our natural moral sense; but the very word "action" properly connotes intention:

It ought to be observed, that the object of this faculty is actions, comprehending under that name active or practical principles...which, when fixed or habitual in any person, we call his character. It does not appear, that brutes have the least reflex sense of actions, as distinguished from events: or that will and design, which constitute the very nature of actions as such, are at all an object to their perception. But to ours they are: and they are the object, and the only one, of the approving and disapproving faculty. Acting, conduct, behaviour, abstracted from all regard to what is, in fact and event, the consequence of it, is itself the natural object of the moral discernment... Intention of such and such consequences, indeed, is always included; for it is part of the action itself: but though the intended good or bad consequences do not follow, we have exactly the same sense of the action as if they did. (Dissertation, para 2: 15 Sermons, p. 148)

The word "actions" comprehends the "active or practical principles" by which they are produced. Actions are distinct from events, because "will and design" are what "constitute the very nature of actions as such". In this sense, "will and design" are properly "the object, and the only one, of the approving and disapproving faculty". The consequences of a particular action are ultimately irrelevant to our judgment of the agent: "Intention of such and such consequences" is what counts, even if "the intended good or bad consequences do not follow". This account of "action" and judgment implies that mere "conduct" or "behaviour" — the outward and observable part of action — is in itself wholly ambiguous.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Hume, Treatise, III.2.i (p. 477): "'Tis evident, that when we praise any actions, we regard only the motives that produced them, and consider the actions as signs or indications of certain principles in the mind and temper. The external performance has no merit. We must look within to find the moral quality. This we cannot do directly; and therefore fix our attention on actions, as on external signs; and the ultimate object of our praise and approbation is the motive, that produc'd them". See also p. 478, and cf. III.3.i, p. 575.



Hutcheson likewise locates the centre of morality not in the objective connexion between actions and consequences, but in the subjective connexion between actions and intentions. And intentions are generally moulded by (if not coequal with) what Hutcheson calls "the Passions and Affections" (Inquiry, II, p. 125). While "that Action is best, which accomplishes the greatest Happiness for the greatest Numbers" (III, viii, p. 164), this utilitarian principle is only a general premise of our moral judgments, which always look beyond the action to the passions and affections of the agent. The morality of an action consists in something more than its utility:

The Actions which in fact are exceedingly useful, shall appear void of moral Beauty, if we know that they proceeded from no kind Intentions toward others; and yet an unsuccessful Attempt of Kindness, or of promoting publick Good, shall appear as amiable as the most successful, if it flow'd from as strong Benevolence. (III, i, p. 151)

The moral goodness of any action is not directly proportionate to the natural good produced by it. Hutcheson insists explicitly that "the Perceptions of moral Good and Evil, are perfectly different from those of natural Good, or Advantage" (I, i, p. 107).<sup>26</sup> Every moral sentiment implies a supposition concerning the agent's "Intentions toward others", concerning the orientation of his affections:

EVERY Action, which we apprehend as either morally good or evil, is always supposed to flow from some Affection toward rational Agents; and whatever we call Virtue or Vice, is either some such Affection, or some Action consequent upon it... All the Actions counted religious in any Country, are supposed, by those who count them religious, to flow from some Affections toward the DEITY; and whatever we call social Virtue, we still suppose to flow from Affections toward our Fellow-Creatures; for in this all seem to agree, "That external Motions, when accompany'd with no Affections toward GOD or Man, or evidencing no Want of the expected Affections toward either, can have no moral Good or Evil in them." (II, i, pp. 125-6)

For Hutcheson, the most excellent of "Affections", and the very quintessence of moral goodness, is benevolence. The Greatest Happiness Principle is effectively subsumed in his contention that virtue is a name for the intentional promotion of human happiness. The natural guarantor

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Inquiry, I, i, p. 109, on the functions and objects of the "MORAL SENSE".

of altruistic intentions is of course "Love, or Benevolence", and this is "the Foundation of all apprehended Excellence in social Virtues" (Inquiry, III, iii, p. 153). No activity, no disposition, is counted morally "amiable" unless it can be seen to serve the ends of benevolence, unless it implies the "kind Affections":

IF we examine all the Actions which are counted amiable any where, and enquire into the Grounds upon which they are approv'd, we shall find, that in the Opinion of the Person who approves them, they always appear as BENEVOLENT, or flowing from the Love of others, and Study of their Happiness...; so that all those kind Affections which incline us to make others happy, and all Actions suppos'd to flow from such Affections, appear morally Good...: Nor shall we find any thing amiable in any Action whatsoever, where there is no Benevolence imagin'd; nor in any Disposition, or Capacity, which is not suppos'd applicable to, and design'd for benevolent Purposes. (III, i, p. 150)

Moral evil, on the other hand, is ultimately reducible (not to self-love but) to hatred or malevolence and the actions which naturally flow from them. "The Affections which are of most Importance in Morals, are LOVE and HATRED", says Hutcheson: "All the rest seem but different Modifications of these two Original Affections". This polarity of the affections constitutes "the universal Foundation of our Sense of moral Good, or Evil, viz. Benevolence toward others on one hand, and Malice, or even Indolence, and Unconcernedness about the apparent publick Evil on the other" (II, ii, p. 127; III, iii, p. 156).

For Hutcheson, as for Butler and Hume, "external Motions" — even the most beneficial — are morally ambiguous: it is the "kind Intentions" or benevolent "Affections" which bestow a merit on the actions. Virtue and vice are essentially orientations of the heart. In effect, 'virtue' and 'benevolence' are interchangeable terms. As we shall see, Butler would want to qualify Hutcheson's thesis in a number of ways, but cannot and does not ignore the Pauline lesson that "love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10). In the second of his two sermons "Upon the Love of Our Neighbour", he considers how far and in what sense virtue can be resolved into benevolence (the text is Romans 13:9). Butler begins by defining his terms:

The love of our neighbour is the same with charity, benevolence, or good-will: it is an affection to the good and happiness of our fellow creatures. This implies in it a disposition to produce happiness: and this is the simple



notion of goodness, which appears so amiable wherever we meet with it. (15 Sermons, XII, 2)

Since our obligation to promote public good is for Butler "the sum of morals",<sup>27</sup> it is not surprising that he should describe benevolence as "the simple notion of goodness". Benevolence is unique among the natural passions and affections in that its direct and immediate end is the production of happiness. With reservations, Butler accepts that the ends of benevolence are virtually coequal with the ends of morality. It is the fountainhead of all the social virtues:

The advantage, which this principle of benevolence has over other remote considerations, is, that it is itself the temper of virtue; and likewise, that it is the chief, nay, the only effectual security of our performing the several offices of kindness we owe to our fellow-creatures. (15 Sermons, XII, 8)

The happy influence of this temper extends to every different relation and circumstance in human life. It plainly renders a man better, more to be desired, as to all the respects and relations we can stand in to each other. The benevolent man is disposed to make use of all external advantages in such a manner as shall contribute to the good of others, as well as to his own satisfaction. His own satisfaction consists in this. (XII, 22)

It is manifest that nothing can be of consequence to mankind or any creature, but happiness. This then is all which any person can, in strictness of speaking, be said to have a right to. We can therefore "owe no man anything," [Romans 13:8] but only further and promote his happiness, according to our abilities. And therefore a disposition and endeavour to do good to all with whom we have to do...is a discharge of all the obligations we are under to them. (XII, 28)

In short, "whatever cautions and restrictions there are" (and I shall come to these later), "it is manifest that the common virtues, and the common vices of mankind, may be traced up to benevolence, or the want of it". More than this, "benevolence seems in the strictest sense to include in it all that is good and worthy; all that is good, which we have any distinct particular notion of". On this main point, Butler's argument is in complete agreement with Hutcheson's. Moral goodness is directly proportionate to — is indeed coequal with — benevolence:

We have no clear conception of any positive moral attribute in the Supreme Being, but what may be resolved up into

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<sup>27</sup> See above, p. 178.

goodness. And, if we consider a reasonable creature or moral agent...we cannot conceive anything else to come in towards determining whether he is to be ranked in an higher or lower class of virtuous beings, but the higher or lower degree in which that principle, and what is manifestly connected with it, prevail in him. (15 Sermons, XII, 31-2)<sup>28</sup>

For Fielding, likewise, benevolence "is itself the temper of virtue", the most godlike of human dispositions, and the natural guarantor of all the relative virtues. It is the sine qua non of moral goodness. In An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers (1751), Fielding typically argues that "a tender-hearted and compassionate disposition, which inclines men to pity and feel the misfortunes of others..., is of all tempers of mind the most amiable". Moreover, the "natural energies of this temper" are uniquely virtuous and eminently meritorious: "Indeed", says Fielding, "the passion of love or benevolence, whence this admirable disposition arises, seems to be the only human passion that is in itself simply and absolutely good" (Henley, XIII, 109-110). Fielding's usual term for this cluster of "natural energies", embracing the "disposition" and the "passion" which gives rise to it, is of course "Good-Nature": this is "that benevolent and amiable Temper of Mind which disposes us to feel the Misfortunes, and enjoy the Happiness of others; and consequently pushes us on to promote the latter, and prevent the former" ("An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men", Miscellanies I, p. 158). This "Temper of Mind" is "Virtue's Self", as Fielding declares in his poem "Of Good-Nature":

What is Good-nature? Gen'rous Richmond, tell;  
He can declare it best, who best can feel.  
Is it a foolish Weakness in the Breast,  
As some who know, or have it not, contest?  
Or is it rather not the mighty whole  
Full Composition of a virtuous Soul?  
Is it not Virtue's Self? A Flow'r so fine,  
It only grows in Soils almost divine.

What by this Name, then, shall be understood?  
What? but the glorious Lust of doing Good?

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<sup>28</sup> Bernard Harrison apparently ignores all this, arguing that Butler "would have granted the existence of pure love" but (unlike Fielding) "would have seen in this merely another mode of desire, having no particular moral value in itself" (The Novelist as Moral Philosopher, p. 91; see also pp. 130-31). Harrison was perhaps misled by Butler's insistence that benevolence is not necessarily "disinterested": I shall come to this.



The Heart that finds its Happiness to please,  
Can feel another's Pain, and taste his Ease.

(11. 1-8, 23-6: Miscellanies I, pp. 30-31)

"Virtue's Self", then, is "the glorious Lust of doing Good". This characteristic formula also appears in the Champion (3 January 1739/40): "I do not know a better general definition of virtue", says Fielding, "than that it is a delight in doing good" (Henley, XV, 136). By "doing good" Fielding clearly means practical beneficence, the promotion of happiness and the prevention of alleviation of misery. But this, by itself, is no proof of virtue in the doer. Virtue implies and involves the "Lust" and the "delight", and these are felt only by the good-natured or benevolent "Heart": the desire to do good, and the pleasure of doing it, are conditioned by — and are dependent upon — the compassionate "natural energies" of "love or benevolence". Without this one passion (which, it should be remembered, is "in itself simply and absolutely good") there will be no "Lust of doing Good" and no "delight" in doing it. In short, there can be no true virtue where there is no benevolence.<sup>29</sup> Virtue is a state of the "Heart", an orientation of the affections, a capacity to feel altruistic desires and pleasures — its quintessence is simply "the passion of love or benevolence". Virtue (whatever else it may involve) always implies good nature, "a delight in the happiness of mankind, and a concern at their misery, with a desire, as much as possible, to procure the former, and avert the latter" (Champion, 27 March 1739/40: Henley, XV, 258). Like Hutcheson and Butler, Fielding believes it is this quality which inspires and validates all the important practical virtues:

This is that amiable quality, which, like the sun, gilds over all our other virtues; this it is, which enables us to pass through all the offices and stations of life with real merit. This only makes the dutiful son, the affectionate brother, the tender husband, the indulgent father, the kind master, the faithful friend, and the firm patriot... It is (as Shakespeare calls it) the milk, or rather the cream of human nature, and whoever is possessed of this perfection should be pitied, not hated for the want of any other. Whereas all other virtues without some tincture of this, may be well called splendida peccata... (Henley, XV, 259-60)<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Dudden, I, 272-4; II, 682-4.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. the argument of the Champion leader for 3 January 1739/40: Henley, XV, 134-6.

All this is reminiscent of Hutcheson's account of the "four Qualities, commonly call'd Cardinal Virtues" (temperance, courage, wisdom and justice): these, he argues, enjoy the "Name" of virtues only "because they are Dispositions universally necessary to promote publick Good, and denote Affections toward rational Agents; otherwise there would appear no Virtue in them" (Inquiry, II, i, pp. 126-7). Even the so-called cardinal virtues are morally validated only by benevolence, which is their original foundation and their proper director. This and Fielding's argument are variations on Christian teaching, which gives to charity the kind of moral preeminence which they give to benevolence or good nature. Barrow, for instance, teaches that "charity doth sanctify every action, and impregnate all our practice with a savour of goodness, turning all we do into virtue":

Charity giveth worth, form, and life, to all virtue, so that without it no action is valuable in itself, or acceptable to God.

Sever it from courage; and what is that, but the boldness or fierceness of a beast? from meekness; and what is that, but the softness of a woman, or weakness of a child? from courtesy; and what is that, but affectation or artifice? from justice; and what is that, but humour or policy? from wisdom; what is that, but craft or subtilty? ("Motives", Works, I, 257)

Charity is the "root" from which all the relative virtues naturally grow: "if it be planted in our heart, we need not fear but that all kind of good fruit will sprout forth into conversation and practice". Like Fielding's "Good-Nature", charity will "certainly dispose us" to "discharge all our duties", and when exerted in practice is "ever accompanied with delectation" (I, 257). Charity is the very heart of practical virtue: without it, even our best actions will be so many splendida peccata. Most important here is Barrow's particular distinction between charity and mere "alms-doing", the latter being little more than one of the splendida peccata if it is not animated by the former: alms-giving without charity is little better than "ambitious ostentation" (I, 257). Charity is the only source of "sincere alms, which not only the hand, but the heart doth reach forth" (I, 258: my emphases). Where the heart is not involved, we "lose all the virtue, and forfeit all the benefit of what we perform": in short, "we must follow the rule of St. Paul, to do all our works in charity" (I, 258: alluding to I Corinthians 16:14). The heart is what bestows a merit on the activities of the hand.



This is exactly the way in which Fielding presents and defends the Christian conception of charity. This, he insists, is "a virtue not confined to munificence or giving alms, but that brotherly love and friendly disposition of mind which is everywhere taught in Scripture" (Champion, 5 April 1740: Henley, XV, 269). On more than one occasion, he underlines this distinction by satirizing sophisticated perversions of it. In Joseph Andrews, for instance, Adams and Peter Pounce have "different Notions of Charity" (the latter thinks it "a mean Parson-like Quality"):

'Sir,' said Adams, 'my Definition of Charity is a generous Disposition to relieve the Distressed.' 'There is something in that Definition,' answered Peter, 'which I like well enough; it is, as you say, a Disposition — and does not so much consist in the Act as in the Disposition to do it...' (III, xiii, p. 274)

Pounce is of course both right and wrong. Like Captain Blifil, who treats Allworthy to a more sophisticated 'Methodist' variation on the same non sequitur (TJ, II, v, pp. 93-4), Pounce is actually rationalizing his own constitutional meanness. For Fielding, as for Barrow, the "Disposition" implies and entails the "Act". It is psychologically and ethically true to say that charity "does not so much consist in the Act as in the Disposition to do it"; but it is equally true that where the "heart" is possessed by charity the "hand" will naturally follow. Charity "does good offices, behaves kindly"; it is "not confined to our wishes merely, but our actions": indeed, practical "liberality" is "a necessary qualification of any who would call himself a successor of Christ's disciples". But true Christian "liberality" is not a matter of occasional alms-giving:

By this virtue, which is generally called charity itself (and perhaps it is the chief part of it), is not meant the ostentatious giving a penny to a beggar in the street...as if charity was change for sixpence, but the relieving the wants and sufferings of one another to the utmost of our abilities. It is to be limited by our power, I say, only. (Champion, 5 April 1740: Henley, XV, 270)

By "power" Fielding means ability or capacity. (Thus, the alms-giving of the true Christian will be limited only by his financial means.) The implications of this final stipulation become clearer when it is viewed in the light of another passage in the Champion: concluding his definition of good nature, Fielding assures us that "this virtue lies in will, and not at all in power" (27 March 1739/40: Henley, XV, 260: my emphases).

This is a simple but important ethical distinction. Charity as Fielding understands it has nothing to do with "power" and everything to do with "will" — that is, with disposition, inclination, desire. Charity (or good nature) is in fact compatible with total practical impotence, precisely because it is a condition of the "heart" and not an activity of the "hand". Barrow's commentary on the story of the widow's mites (Luke 21:1-4) makes precisely the same point, that charity "lies in will, and not at all in power": it "consisteth only in good-will, and that which naturally springeth thence", says Barrow, "whence the weakest and poorest man is no less able to perform it than the greatest potentate; his heart may be as charitable, though his hand cannot be so liberal" ("Motives", Works, I, 256: my emphases). The weak and the poor may be good even when they cannot do good.

Fielding makes this point frequently, whether talking of charity or of good nature, which seem to be different names for essentially the same virtuous energies.<sup>31</sup> In the Covent-Garden Journal, for instance, he insists that charity is not beyond even "the most Impotent":

Whatever our Talents are, let us convert them to the good of Mankind. Charity is not confined to giving Alms. If so, perhaps it would be but little within your Reach or mine. But the divine Founder of our Religion never intended to restrain a Virtue so essentially necessary to a Christian, to the Rich alone. As one Man's Talent lies in his Purse, another's may lie in his Pen; a third may employ his Tongue, and a fourth his Hands for the Service of others, nay the most Impotent may perhaps fully exercise this Virtue even with their Wishes, most certainly they may with their Prayers. (No. 29: Jensen, I, 306)

Charity may be expressed in different ways, according to our individual means, abilities or "Talents"; but the virtue itself is invariable, and (in Barrow's phrase) "consisteth only in good will". This "brotherly love and friendly disposition of mind" can be fully exercised privately and inwardly, in our "Wishes" and "Prayers". The same is true of good nature, as Fielding assures Richmond in the poem devoted to that virtue:

Tho' few have Pow'r their Wishes to fulfil,  
Yet all Men may do Good, at least in Will.  
Tho' few, with you or Marlborough can save  
From Poverty, from Prisons, and the Grave;

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<sup>31</sup> On good nature and charity, see Battestin, Moral Basis, pp. 75-8; and Miller, Essays, pp. 63-6.



Yet to each Individual Heav'n affords  
The Pow'r to bless in Wishes, and in Words.

("Of Good-Nature", ll. 33-8: Miscellanies I, pp. 31-2)<sup>32</sup>

In these terms, practical virtue is only the outward expression or fulfilment of "Virtue's Self", which, whether we call it charity or good nature, consists quintessentially in good-will or benevolence. Virtue is, first and foremost, an orientation of the "Heart".

Virtue is also distinctively 'disinterested'. Barrow emphasizes the essential selflessness of the charitable heart, which "doth enlarge our minds beyond private considerations, conferring on them an universal interest...so that a man's self is a very small and inconsiderable portion of his regard": "This indeed is a property of charity, to make a man deny himself, to neglect his own interest, yea, to despise all selfish regards, for the benefit of his neighbour" ("Charity", Works, I, 242, 244-5). Charity is "the imitation and copy" of divine love: "nothing advanceth us so near a resemblance to him, who is essential love and goodness; who freely and purely, without any regard to his own advantage or capacity of finding any beneficial return, doth bear and express the highest good-will"; it "rendereth us as angels, or peers to those glorious and blessed creatures, who, without receiving or expecting any requital from us, do heartily desire and delight in our good" ("Motives", Works, I, 251). All this suggests that the very 'disinterestedness' of charity or love is what makes it angelic, or divine, and incomparably meritorious. Fielding likewise seems to believe that doing good is properly an end in itself. In this, the ethical sympathies of his work lie with Shaftesbury and, less directly, with the Cambridge Platonists whom Shaftesbury so admired. "The best of Men", says Whichcote, "take Delight to gratify, and to shew Kindness": "It is Divine, Heavenly, and Angelical, to take Delight in the Good of others". This is true of charity or benevolence, "the Agent taking Pleasure in the Good of others; and satisfying himself with it, as a proper Recompence, that he doth Good, and that others are the better for him" (Select Sermons, II, ii, p. 205; II, iv, p. 253; II, i, p. 178). Fielding cherished a very similar conception of Christian virtue or benevolence as something naturally and properly self-rewarding.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Fielding's remarks on Mrs Miller in TJ, XIII, v, p. 705.

<sup>33</sup> See esp. CGJ, No. 29: Jensen, I, 305-9 (discussed later in the present chapter).

It would seem, then, that the special merit of benevolence is a function of its 'disinterestedness'. I attach inverted commas to this term, here and elsewhere, because the moral-psychological concept it denotes is acutely problematic, and was an object of keen debate in the early eighteenth century. This is another respect in which the ethical controversies of that period were carried on in the lengthy shadow of Thomas Hobbes. But it was Mandeville, with his cynical doctrine that "the Moral Virtues are the Political Offspring which Flattery begot upon Pride",<sup>34</sup> who kept alive the psychological egoism of Leviathan. According to Mandeville, most of our virtues are the products of vanity, pride and ambition — of unquestionably selfish passions. More than this, even the supposedly 'altruistic' affections, such as pity and compassion, are only subtle modifications of self-love. Mandeville provocatively accepts that self-interest is inconsistent with virtue or merit, while also arguing that man is naturally incapable of acting from any higher motive. From these two premises he draws the logical conclusion: that man is naturally incapable of acting virtuously or meritoriously. Like his ethical adversaries, Mandeville accepts that "it is impossible to judge of a Man's Performance, unless we are thoroughly acquainted with the Principle and Motive from which he acts", but turns this argument against the champions of benevolence. Even the most 'charitable' actions are fundamentally selfish:

Pity, tho' it is the most gentle and the least mischievous of all our Passions, is yet as much a Frailty of our Nature, as Anger, Pride, or Fear... It must be own'd, that of all our Weaknesses it is the most amiable, and bears the greatest Resemblance to Virtue; nay, without a considerable mixture of it the Society could hardly subsist: But as it is an Impulse of Nature, that consults neither the publick Interest nor our own Reason, it may produce Evil as well as Good. It has help'd to destroy the Honour of Virgins, and corrupted the Integrity of Judges; and whosoever acts from it as a Principle, what good soever he may bring to the Society, has nothing to boast of but that he has indulged a Passion that has happened to be beneficial to the Publick. There is no Merit in saving an innocent Babe ready to drop into the Fire: The Action is neither good nor bad, and what Benefit soever the Infant received, we only obliged our selves; for to have

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<sup>34</sup> An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue: in Fable, I, 38-57 (I quote from p. 51).



seen it fall, and not strove to hinder it, would have caused a Pain, which Self-preservation compell'd us to prevent...<sup>35</sup>

Mandeville does not deny the reality or the natural force of "Pity". What he does deny is the reality of altruism. Like all the other passions, pity is a mere "Impulse of Nature", and therefore purely egoistic. To gratify any passion, even compassion, is for Mandeville to act selfishly: the direct and immediate end of our compassionate actions, as of all others, is either self-gratification or self-preservation. To give alms to "an Object of Compassion" (loc. cit.), or to save an "innocent Babe" from certain death, is only a means to one of these radically egoistic ends; and "what good soever he may bring to the Society", the man who acts from compassion "has nothing to boast of but that he has indulged a Passion that has happened to be beneficial to the Publick".

Fielding's moral psychology would appear to be vulnerable to this notorious argument.<sup>36</sup> "Love, Benevolence, or what you please to call it" (Amelia, III, vii, p. 123), though "the Perfection of human Nature", is no less a "Passion" than any other natural passion (CGJ, No. 29: Jensen, I, 308). In Tom Jones, Fielding insists — apparently with Mandeville in mind<sup>37</sup> — that "there is in some (I believe in many) human Breasts, a kind and benevolent Disposition, which is gratified by contributing to the Happiness of others", and that "in this Gratification alone...there is great and exquisite Delight" (VI, i, p. 270). Mandeville would no doubt regard this as grist to his egoistic mill: he would be sure to view Fielding's emphasis on "Gratification" as a confirmation of his theory that benevolence is essentially a modification of self-love. In short, he would infer that the benevolent individual, no less than the ambitious or the avaricious, is engaged in the direct pursuit of self-gratification, and that this pursuit only happens, incidentally, to be beneficial to others. And if benevolence is no more 'disinterested' than any other natural passion, how can it be any more virtuous?

Anglican accounts of good nature are, on the face of it, even more vulnerable to Mandevillean cynicism. According to Barrow, natural

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<sup>35</sup> Fable, I, 56.

<sup>36</sup> For a rather different perspective on the Mandevillean threat, see Sacks, Shape of Belief, pp. 115 ff. See also Harrison, The Novelist as Moral Philosopher, pp. 70-88.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Battestin's footnote, TJ, VI, i, p. 268, n. 2.

compassion is a quasi-biological sympathy with the pains and distresses of others, and therefore seeks its own relief no less than the most basic "sensible" appetites: "the best of our natural inclinations...do sensibly prompt, and vehemently urge us to mercy and pity"; our acts of natural charity are instigated by "a lively sense of pain", and terminate in an equally lively "sensible pleasure"; and thus, indeed, "even our own ease and satisfaction demand from us compassion and kindness", in the same way that hunger demands the act of eating ("Bounty", Works, I, 299).

"Compassion", as Butler puts it, "is a call, a demand of nature, to relieve the unhappy; as hunger is a natural call for food" ("Upon Compassion", 15 Sermons, VI, 6). Compassion of this kind may be more radically and universally natural than benevolence per se,<sup>38</sup> but there is little difference in kind between the one and the other: as Butler says, in a memorable phrase, "compassion is momentary love" ("Upon Human Nature", 15 Sermons, I, 6). In any case, "benevolence is no more disinterested than any of the common particular passions" (15 Sermons, Preface, para. 38). It is, says Butler, only one of "a variety of particular affections, passions, and appetites to particular external objects" ("Upon the Love of Our Neighbour", 15 Sermons, XI, 5). That the "object and end" of benevolence is "the good of another" ("Upon Human Nature", 15 Sermons, I, 6) makes no difference:

A man has an affection or aversion to another: that one of these tends to, and is gratified by doing good, that the other tends to, and is gratified by doing harm, does not in the least alter the respect which either one or the other of these inward feelings has to self-love... ("Upon the Love of Our Neighbour", 15 Sermons, XI, 11)

All particular affections whatever, resentment, benevolence, love of arts, equally lead to a course of action for their own gratification, i.e. the gratification of ourselves; and the gratification of each gives delight: so far then it is manifest they have all the same respect to private interest. (XI, 12)

This does indeed look like grist to Mandeville's mill. But Mandeville neglects the one thing that makes benevolence unique among the passions (and this was Fielding's principal point): the very fact that it is "gratified by contributing to the Happiness of others". Benevolence establishes a community of interests, uniting the interests of the self with the interests of others. As Butler says, "real benevolence" forges-

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<sup>38</sup> See "Upon Compassion", 15 Sermons, V, 2.



a "common interest" between ourselves and our neighbours: "for in the degree we love another, his interest, his joys and sorrows, are our own" — benevolence leads us "to appropriate to ourselves his good and welfare" ("Upon the Love of Our Neighbour", 15 Sermons, XII, 7: my emphasis). In this sense, benevolence is a function of compassion, of that natural sympathy which breaks down the distinction between 'self' and 'other':

When we rejoice in the prosperity of others, and compassionate their distresses, we, as it were, substitute them for ourselves, their interest for our own; and have the same kind of pleasure in their prosperity, and sorrow in their distress, as we have from reflection upon our own. Now there is nothing strange or unaccountable in our being thus carried out, and affected towards the interests of others. For, if there be any appetite, or any inward principle besides self-love; why may there not be an affection to the good of our fellow-creatures, and delight from that affection's being gratified...?  
 ("Upon Compassion", 15 Sermons, V, 1)

Thus, while all "particular affections" have "the same respect to private interest", benevolence is unique in that it has an equal respect to the interests of others: the very object of this passion is "the good of our fellow-creatures".

In more than one sense, then, it is misleading to confuse benevolence with 'disinterestedness'.<sup>39</sup> For Fielding, as for Butler, what makes this passion special is the fact that it is interested — interested in the good of others.<sup>40</sup> Fielding makes exactly this point in Tom Jones, observing that his hero's good nature did in fact give him "a very considerable Interest" in the fate of Nancy Miller and her mother:

<sup>39</sup> This kind of confusion can be found in M. Price, Palace of Wisdom, p. 92; W. R. Irwin, The Making of JW, pp. 59, 62, 63; Battestin, Moral Basis, pp. 20, 77-8; Wendt, "The Moral Allegory of JW", p. 312; and in Harrison, The Novelist as Moral Philosopher, pp. 113-4.

<sup>40</sup> Harrison's account of the "Good Heart" (op. cit., p. 97) is in this respect both right and wrong. The "Good Heart", he argues, is "primarily a motion of will: a commitment of one person's will to taking another person's good as ultimate in his scheme of ends or goals; as an end coequal...with his own private good". Such a coequality of interests is indeed at the heart of morality as Fielding understands it, but it cannot be said to depend upon any "act of will" (loc. cit.): it is in fact a natural function of benevolence, itself a natural passion. The "will" (as Harrison understands it) has no place in Fielding's moral psychology — he and Butler might have said that it was unnecessary.

And now Mr. Jones having seen his good Offices to that poor Woman and her Family brought to a happy Conclusion, began to apply himself to his own Concerns; but here lest many of my Readers should censure his Folly for thus troubling himself with the Affairs of others, and lest some few should think he acted more disinterestedly than indeed he did, we think proper to assure our Reader, that he was far from being unconcerned in this Matter, that he had indeed a very considerable Interest in bringing it to that final Consummation. (TJ, XV, viii, p. 815: my emphasis)

Fielding goes on to resolve this "seeming Paradox" (as he archly calls it) by reference to the sympathetic properties of benevolence (pp. 815-6). And this is not the only occasion on which he emphasizes the interestedness of good nature. Jones's affair with Molly Seagrim involves him in a crucial and revealing moral dilemma, one in which his "good Heart" plays a very important part, and one which is ultimately resolved by imaginative sympathy. Jones imagines the consequences of deserting his first love:

The Idea of lovely Molly now intruded itself before him. He had sworn eternal Constancy in her Arms, and she had as often vowed never to outlive his deserting her. He now saw her in all the most shocking Postures of Death; nay, he considered all the Miseries of Prostitution to which she would be liable, and of which he would be doubly the Occasion; first by seducing, and then by deserting her... The Ruin, therefore, of the poor Girl must, he foresaw, unavoidably attend his deserting her; and this Thought stung him to the Soul... The Meanness of her Condition did not represent her Misery as of little Consequence in his Eyes, nor did it appear to justify, or even to palliate, his Guilt, in bringing that Misery upon her. But why do I mention Justification; his own Heart would not suffer him to destroy a human Creature, who, he thought, loved him, and had to that Love sacrificed her Innocence. His own good Heart pleaded her Cause; not as a cold venal Advocate; but as one interested in the Event, and which must itself deeply share in all the Agonies its Owner brought on another. (TJ, V, iii, p. 222: my emphases)

Benevolence is an "interest" in the good of others; and it is precisely this kind of "interestedness" that constitutes Jones's moral eminence. As Fielding says elsewhere, and in a similar context, "there is a...Temper of Mind which borrows a Degree of Virtue even from Self-love" (TJ, IV, vi, p. 175).<sup>41</sup>

For a number of reasons, "interested" and "disinterested" are not very

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Rawson's analysis of the passage from which I take this quotation: "Empson's TJ", esp. p. 403.



useful terms for the analysis of morality as Fielding and Butler understood it. Looked at from one angle, benevolence is no less "interested" than any other passion; looked at from another angle, it is no less "disinterested" than the other passions. This is one of Butler's principal points, and his second line of defence against Mandeville's simplistic egoism. Butler not only rejects the cynical view of benevolence, but does so partly by rejecting the cynic's whole view of the passions. In particular, he denies the proposition that the exercise of the passions is always essentially an exercise of self-love; or, more precisely, he denies that the object of the passions is mere self-gratification. According to Butler, there could be no pleasure in the gratification of any passion if the object of that passion were not something other than the pleasure itself:

That all particular appetites and passions are towards external things themselves, distinct from the pleasure arising from them, is manifested from hence; that there could not be this pleasure, were it not for that prior suitableness between the object and the passion: there could be no enjoyment or delight of one thing more than another, from eating food more than from swallowing a stone, if there were not an affection or appetite to one thing more than another. ("Upon the Love of Our Neighbour", 15 Sermons, XI, 6: Butler's emphases)

Pleasure arises only when an appetite or passion is gratified by its proper object: it is an effect, a product, of the "suitableness between the object and the passion". The concert-goer finds pleasure in music only because he loves the sound of it. The gourmet finds pleasure in eating fine food only because he has a taste for it. Pleasure is not the end but the consequence of their respective activities. This deceptively simple argument constitutes a potent challenge to Mandevillean egoism. For what is true of the appetites and passions in general is also true of benevolence.<sup>42</sup> This important implication of Butler's argument has been

<sup>42</sup> Butler's reasoning might be said to expose the ethical oversimplification in Crane's remarks about "the strain of egoistic hedonism" in Anglican "benevolism": see "Genealogy", Essays, I, 210-13 (I quote from p. 212). The "hedonistic" label has sometimes been adopted by others: see, for instance, Battestin, Moral Basis, pp. 70-72; Rawson, "Empson's TJ", p. 403. Harrison (op. cit., pp. 82-5) notes the force of Butler's argument, but fails to square it with his own unsympathetic account of Butler's ethics. It is true, however, that the argument is subverted as soon as the pleasures of benevolence are held up as motives or inducements to beneficence, and in this sense it could be said that Latitudinarian "hedonism" is essentially a rhetorical phenomenon. (I shall return to this point in my final chapter.)

noted by T. A. Roberts: "The objective of an action is to be distinguished from the satisfaction that the agent gains from successfully achieving the objective. Thus...it is possible for a man to aim at doing good to others, and, if he succeeds, it undoubtedly gives him pleasure or satisfaction; but the objective of the action was the good of another, not his own pleasure".<sup>43</sup> If the agent does feel this kind of pleasure or satisfaction, it is an indication not that the action proceeded from self-love but that it was prompted by the passion of benevolence, "the object and end of which is the good of another" ("Upon Human Nature", 15 Sermons, I, 6). In the absence of genuine benevolence, which (in Fielding's phrase) is "gratified by contributing to the Happiness of others", there could be no such pleasure. Thus, by demonstrating that all the passions are in a sense "disinterested", Butler confirms that one of them, benevolence, is genuinely altruistic.

According to Butler, none of our pursuits can be attributed directly to self-love. The proper object of self-love is happiness, private happiness, but self-love would be rendered useless without the particular passions, all of which pursue gratification in particular external objects: "It is not because we love ourselves that we find delight in such and such objects, but because we have particular affections towards them" (15 Sermons, Preface, para. 37). And what is true of the passions in general is also true of benevolence. "Happiness or satisfaction", argues Butler, "consists only in the enjoyment of those objects, which are by nature suited to our several particular appetites, passions, and affections". The benevolent man, therefore, who acts from a "desire of and delight in the happiness of another", will find gratification in the happiness of the other. "Self-love...does not constitute this or that to be our interest or good" (only the "particular passions" can do this), but "our interest or good being constituted by nature and supposed, self-love only puts us upon obtaining and securing it":

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<sup>43</sup> 15 Sermons, XI, 6, n. 91 (p. 163). Butler may have borrowed his line of argument from Hutcheson: cf. Inquiry, II, ix, pp. 143 ff. In his essay "Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature", Hume also complains that the egoists have been "led astray" by the pleasurable functions of virtue: "they found, that every act of virtue or friendship was attended with a secret pleasure; whence they concluded, that friendship and virtue could not be disinterested. But the fallacy of this is obvious. The virtuous sentiment or passion produces the pleasure, and does not arise from it. I feel a pleasure in doing good to my friend, because I love him; but do not love him for the sake of that pleasure." (Essays, I, 155)



The short of the matter is no more than this. Happiness consists in the gratification of certain affections, appetites, passions, with objects which are by nature adapted to them. Self-love may indeed set us on work to gratify these: but happiness or enjoyment has no immediate connexion with self-love, but arises from such gratification alone. Love of our neighbour is one of those affections. ("Upon the Love of Our Neighbour", 15 Sermons, XI, 11, 9, 16)

Butler's moral psychology seems to me an especially appropriate context in which to view Fielding's own. Many of Butler's principal points are in fact concentrated in Billy Booth's psychological lecture to Amelia:

'I have often told you, my dear Emily,' cries Booth, 'that all Men, as well the best as the worst, act alike from the Principle of Self-Love. Where Benevolence therefore is the uppermost Passion, Self-Love directs you to gratify it by doing good, and by relieving the Distresses of others; for they are then in Reality your own...' (Amelia, X, ix, p. 451)

This is not a Mandevillean posture (as Amelia seems to suppose) but a quasi-Butlerian one.<sup>44</sup> (Though Booth, unlike Butler, would at this stage perhaps conclude that benevolence is morally worthless.) Fielding himself applies the same moral-psychological model in his comments on Colonel James, where it is said that "the Man, whose tender Disposition really feels the Miseries of another, will endeavour to relieve them for his own Sake" (Amelia, VIII, v, p. 331).<sup>45</sup> For Fielding, as for Booth, "the full gratification of that passion which is uppermost in our minds, is the highest happiness of which we are capable" (Familiar Letters, xliv: Henley, XVI, 48). And happiness is the object of self-love. The good man is the one in whom the passion of benevolence is generally "uppermost", and in whom the exercise of self-love is therefore coequal with doing good.

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<sup>44</sup> See Amelia, III, v, p. 115, where Booth explicitly rejects Mandevillean egoism. Many critics have for one reason or another ignored or undervalued this disclaimer. Allan Wendt insists that "Booth is a Mandevillean, even though he explicitly denies that allegiance": "The Naked Virtue of Amelia", ELH, 27 (1960), 131-48 (p. 140). Cf. Johnson, Fielding's Art of Fiction, p. 154 (Booth views benevolence as "a mere Mandevillean gratification of self-love"). See also M. Irwin, The Tentative Realist, pp. 118-9; D. S. Thomas, "Fortune and the Passions in Fielding's Amelia", MLR, 60 (1965), 176-87 (p. 184); and Robert Alter, Fielding and the Nature of the Novel, Cambridge, Mass., 1968, p. 164.

<sup>45</sup> Rawson has rightly noted that Booth's moral psychology is essentially continuous with the "benevolist hedonism" of Tom Jones: see "Empson's TJ", pp. 402-3.

Insofar as Fielding believes benevolence to be the essential part of virtue, it can be said that he conceives virtue as something definitively "disinterested", but only in a specialized sense. All men are self-lovers, and all the passions seek their own gratification. What makes the good man special is the fact that he finds gratification in the good of others, the fact that he finds pleasure in doing good. If he does good for its own sake, he does so only in the sense that this pleasure is not the immediate end of his activities, and in the sense that he does not pursue any other future or external recompense. This is what distinguishes benevolence per se from certain "interested" kinds of alms-giving, as Hutcheson maintains:

As to...Benevolence, the very Name excludes Self-Interest. We never call that Man benevolent, who is in fact useful to others, but at the same time only intends his own Interest, without any desire of, or delight in, the Good of others. If there be any Benevolence at all, it must be disinterested; for the most useful Action imaginable, loses all appearance of Benevolence, as soon as we discern that it only flowed from Self-Love, or Interest... Wherever then Benevolence is suppos'd, there it is imagin'd disinterested, and design'd for the Good of others. (Inquiry, II, iii, p. 129)

This brings us back, again, to the moral ambiguity of conduct. If it is the motive or intention of the agent that gives moral value to his deeds, if it is the quality of the heart that determines the merit of the hand, then the problem of moral judgment is necessarily complicated by epistemological factors. It may be true, as Barrow says, that "sincere" alms-giving is the only meritorious kind of alms-giving. But how, in practice, do we distinguish the sincere from the insincere? How can we infer the quality of the heart from the activities of the hand, or (in Pope's phrase) "Infer the Motive from the Deed"?<sup>46</sup> Fielding's constant preoccupation with this kind of epistemological problem reflects and underlines the ethical premises of his work. The problematic intersection of morality with epistemology is hinted at in the poem "Of Good-Nature". "No Virtue from Mistakes is less secure", says Fielding —

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<sup>46</sup> Moral Essays, I ("To Cobham"), 53. The Poems of Alexander Pope, ed. John Butt, 1963, p. 551.



Good-nature often we those Actions name,  
 Which flow from Friendship, or a softer Flame.  
 Pride may the Friend to noblest Efforts thrust,  
 Or Salvages grow gentle out of Lust.  
 The meanest Passion may this best appear,  
 And Men may seem good-natur'd from their Fear.

(11. 16-22: Miscellanies I, p. 31)

The "best" and the "meanest" of passions can, in particular circumstances, generate exactly the same kind of conduct. Very different motives or intentions are often practically indistinguishable. This ambiguity presents the observer with serious judicial difficulties: while the motive is the proper object of moral judgment, we can gain access to it only indirectly, by inference from the deed. In Amelia, more than anywhere else, Fielding lays a great deal of emphasis on this kind of ambiguity and the judicial problems it raises, especially in his handling of the anonymous aristocratic seducer, whom Amelia takes for a paragon of tender-hearted good nature.<sup>47</sup> Her strong and proper sense of obligation to the peer dissolves, understandably, when her impression of his heart is corrected. In effect, his practical benefactions to the Booths and their children are rendered morally worthless by the brutally self-interested motives which inspired them. In a truly benevolent individual, the very same benefactions would have constituted a high degree of merit. This is but an extreme instance of a ubiquitous moral-epistemological problem.

According to Hutcheson, likewise, the merit of any action is directly proportionate to the benevolence of the agent, and this merit is compromised or attenuated according to the degree of deliberate self-interest involved in the production of the action. But how, in practice, can we tell that a particular beneficial action is "disinterested", or genuinely benevolent, and therefore meritorious? In the Inquiry, Hutcheson acknowledges the intractability of this chronic epistemological problem,<sup>48</sup> but attempts to construct "a universal Canon to compute the Morality of any Actions, with all their Circumstances, when we judge of the Actions done by our selves, or by others": to this

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<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Amelia, VI, ii, p. 235.

<sup>48</sup> In these matters, strictly speaking, "no Mortal is capable of judging another" (VII, vii, pp. 266-7): we "do not see into each others Hearts" (III, xi, p. 171).

end, he formulates an extraordinary series of mathematical "Propositions, or Axioms".<sup>49</sup> The algebraic idiom is surprising, but usefully unambiguous. Hutcheson begins with a simple utilitarian equation:

THE moral Importance of any Character, or the Quantity of publick Good produc'd by him, is in a compound Ratio of his Benevolence and Abilitys: or (by substituting the initial Letters for the Words, as  $M = \text{Moment of Good}$ , and  $\mu = \text{Moment of Evil}$ )  $M = B \times A$ . (Inquiry, III, xi, p. 168)

This is straightforward enough: the quantity of natural good (pleasure, happiness, social benefit) produced by any individual is "in a compound Ratio of his Benevolence" (or will to do good) "and Abilitys" (or power to do good); and it is this ratio that determines the individual's "moral Importance", or utility. In the case of two equally benevolent individuals, the product of  $B \times A$  (the "Moment of Good") will vary according to the abilities of each individual. Or, as Hutcheson puts it: "WHEN Benevolence in two Agents is equal, and other Circumstances alike, the Moment of publick Good is as the Abilitys: or  $M = A \times 1$ " (III, xi, p. 169). It follows, therefore, that the benevolence — the moral goodness — of any agent can be quantified by calculating the proportion which the "Moment of Good" bears to his "Abilitys":

THE Virtue then of Agents, or their Benevolence, is always directly as the Moment of Good produc'd in like Circumstances, and inversly as their Abilitys: or  $B = \frac{M}{A}$ . (III, xi, p. 169)

The degree or quantity of benevolence behind any deed cannot be measured directly, since we, as observers and judges, have no direct access to the agent's heart. Hutcheson is suggesting that we can overcome this epistemological difficulty, to a greater or lesser extent, by measuring the natural benefits of any good deed ( $M$ ) against the means or abilities of the doer ( $A$ ). The ethical point is less complicated than the algebraic medium suggests. An illustration may be useful. Two individuals are asked for money to save the lives of starving Ethiopian children. Each of them donates the sum of £10. This sum will buy a certain quantity of life-saving nourishment, and in this sense each donor produces the same

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<sup>49</sup> See Inquiry, III, xi-xii; VII, vii. (I quote from III, xi, p. 168.)



"Moment of Good", the same "Quantity of publick Good". These two good deeds are therefore objectively, or 'naturally', identical. But suppose that one of our benefactors is miserably poor, and the other immensely wealthy. Here, according to Hutcheson, would be a great moral difference between the two donors and their good deeds. The paucity of the poor man's means or "Abilitys", relative to the quantity of his donation, is what indicates a high degree of benevolence in the deed. In the same way, the rich man's wealth diminishes the moral value of his liberality: the ten pounds he gave is morally less significant than the thousands of pounds he did not give. In short,  $B = \frac{M}{A}$ .

Algebra may not seem to be the most appropriate language in which to analyze Christian morality. But the very same ethical principle is surely enshrined in the biblical story of the widow's two mites (Luke 21:1-4). The poor widow gives away all she has, little though it is. For Hutcheson, this is "the Perfection of Virtue":

SINCE then Benevolence, or Virtue in any Agent, is as  $\frac{M}{A}$ ...  
and no Being can act above his natural Ability, that must be the Perfection of Virtue where  $M=A$ , or when the Being acts to the utmost of its Power for the publick Good; and hence the Perfection of Virtue in this Case, or  $\frac{M}{A}$  is as Unity.

(Inquiry, III, xi, p. 172)

For Fielding, likewise, this is the only true Christian liberality, by which "is not meant the ostentatious giving a penny to a beggar in the street...as if charity was change for sixpence, but the relieving the wants and sufferings of one another to the utmost of our abilities": "It is to be limited by our power, I say, only" (Champion, 5 April 1740: Henley, XV, 270: my emphasis). Such an ethic makes equally great demands upon high and low, rich and poor. On the other hand, by making virtue entirely independent on our actual "abilities", it means that the poor widow is no less capable of moral excellence than the wealthy grandee: as Fielding says, true virtue "lies in will, and not at all in power" (Champion, 27 March 1739/40: Henley, XV, 260). Hutcheson concedes that the application of "a mathematical Calculation to moral Subjects, may appear perhaps at first extravagant and wild", but feels that the proof of this one point would be sufficient vindication —

That no external Circumstances of Fortune, no involuntary Disadvantages, can exclude any Mortal from the most heroick Virtue: For how small soever the Moment of publick Good be, which any one can accomplish, yet if his Abilitys be proportionably small, the Quotient, which expresses the Degree of Virtue, may be as great as any whatsoever. Thus, not only the Prince, the Statesman, the General, are capable of true Heroism... (Inquiry, III, xv, p. 178)

For Hutcheson, it seems, true virtue ("where  $M=A$ ") is "heroick" precisely because it involves total, disinterested commitment to the good of others. Virtue, as Hutcheson understands it, implies material self-sacrifice. Wherever "M" is less than "A", it can be inferred that "B" is not quite "the Perfection of Virtue". More precisely, it can be inferred that "B" is being circumscribed by self-interest. Even in our genuinely benevolent actions, however, "the entire Motive...is not always Benevolence alone":

But in most Actions we must look upon Self-Love as another Force, sometimes conspiring with Benevolence, and assisting it, when we are excited by Views of private Interest, as well as publick Good; and sometimes opposing Benevolence, when the good Action is any way difficult or painful in the Performance, or detrimental in its Consequences to the Agent. (III, xi, p. 169)

Hutcheson concedes that self-interest can co-operate with benevolence, and assist in the production of "publick Good" (many actions are "useful both to our selves and others"). Like the prudentialists, he does not accept that there is any natural tension between virtue and interest. But the merit of any particular beneficial action is inversely proportionate to the degree of deliberate self-interest which was necessary to produce it. In a case where "selfish Motives" do conspire with benevolence, "the Interest must be deducted to find the true Effect of the Benevolence, or Virtue" (that is, to decide the merit of the agent) (III, xi, pp. 169, 170).

And in the same manner, when Interest is opposite to Benevolence, and yet is surmounted by it, this Interest must be added to the Moment, to increase the Virtue of the Action, or the Strength of the Benevolence: Or thus, in advantageous Virtue  $B = \frac{M-I}{A}$ . And in laborious, painful, dangerous or expensive Virtue  $B = \frac{M+I}{A}$ . By Interest, in this last Case, is



understood all the Advantage which the Agent might have obtained by omitting the Action, which is a negative Motive to it... (III, xi, p. 170)

Hutcheson's logic is not inconsistent with the prudentialists' view that virtue and interest are naturally coincident (a view which he actually shared). In its consequences, benevolence may well be the most advantageous of practices. But Hutcheson is analyzing not consequences but motives or intentions, not effects but causes. He insists explicitly that "no Advantage, not intended, altho casually, or naturally redounding to us from the Action, does at all affect its Morality". In the case of advantageous virtue, "Interest" is to be "deducted" only when it is an essential motive to the action: "Nay, Self-Interest only then diminishes the Benevolence, when without this View of Interest the Action would not have been undertaken, or so much Good would not have been produc'd by the Agent" (III, xi, p. 171).<sup>50</sup> The consequential advantages of a particular benevolent action may well be considerable, but these are ethically immaterial if they form no part of the agent's ends or intentions. Thus, whatever these advantages, the action may still involve a consciously self-sacrificial contempt for "worldly Losses, Toil, &c.", and this "increases the Virtue of a benevolent Action" (VII, vii, pp. 267-8). "OFFICES of no Toil or Expence", on the other hand, "have little Virtue generally, because the Ability is very great, and there is no contrary Interest surmounted" (VII, vii, p. 268). Thus, the virtue or merit of any beneficial action is diminished according to the degree of self-interest involved and the quantity of untapped ability ( $B = \frac{M-I}{A}$ ). Conversely, the virtue or merit is increased according to the quantity of ability expressed in the deed ("that must be the Perfection of Virtue where  $M=A$ ") and the degree of self-sacrifice involved (or  $B = \frac{M+I}{A}$ ). Where  $\frac{M}{A}$  is "as Unity" (such is the case of the poor widow), self-sacrifice will necessarily be involved — however advantageous this "heroick" virtue might be in its consequences.

Hutcheson's idiosyncratic moral algebra may seem to have taken us a long way from Fielding's comic fiction. The differences of language and idiom could hardly be more extreme.<sup>51</sup> But it seems to me that many of

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Inquiry, VII, vii, pp. 266-7: that an action is, in its consequences, beneficial to the agent — and even expected to be so — is no diminution of the merit of that action, unless those consequential benefits were the true end of the action.

<sup>51</sup> This is presumably what prompted Miller to argue that Fielding

the ethical principles of Hutcheson's Inquiry are reflected in Fielding's fictive handling of character and conduct, and sometimes in his explicit contributions to ethical debate. In Tom Jones, for instance, Allworthy and Captain Blifil debate the morality of charitable alms-giving (II, v, pp. 93-7). Blifil contends, rightly and wrongly, that Christian charity is "a Virtue much higher, and more extensive in its Nature, than a pitiful Distribution of Alms", believing that "there is...little Merit in these Benefactions" (p. 94). On both points Allworthy readily agrees, though on very different ethical grounds. The initial concession serves to introduce a moral homily which is entirely typical of Fielding's views on this issue:

'As to the meritorious Part,' he said, 'he readily agreed with the Captain; for where could be the Merit of barely discharging a Duty; which (he said) let the Word Charity have what Construction it would, it sufficiently appeared to be from the whole Tenor of the New Testament. And as he thought it an indispensable Duty, enjoined both by the Christian Law, and by the Law of Nature itself; so was it withal so pleasant, that if any Duty could be said to be its own Reward, or to pay us while we are discharging it, it was this.

'To confess the Truth,' said he, 'there is one Degree of Generosity, (of Charity I would have called it) which seems to have some Shew of Merit, and that is, where from a Principle of Benevolence, and Christian Love, we bestow on another what we really want ourselves; where, in order to lessen the Distresses of another, we condescend to share some Part of them by giving what even our own Necessities cannot well spare. This is, I think, meritorious; but to relieve our Brethren only with our Superfluities; to be charitable (I must use the Word) rather at the Expence of our Coffers than ourselves..., this seems to be being only Christians, nay indeed, only human Creatures. (pp. 95-6)

The surprising notion that there is nothing meritorious in "discharging a Duty" is (as we shall see) characteristic of Fielding. For the moment, it will be enough to note that Allworthy's first paragraph presents an ethical challenge to both the legalistic and the quasi-hedonistic aspects of prudentialism. Alms-giving is not only required of us as an "indispensable Duty", but is also naturally self-rewarding: for Allworthy, apparently, both of these features of mere bounty to the needy make it less than strictly meritorious. (In Allworthy's reference to the pleasure of alms-giving, there is perhaps a hint of Hutcheson's  $B = \frac{M-I}{A}$ .) Liberality

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"agrees (strictly) in almost no important respect with the approach of Hutcheson, whose ethics of feeling is very nearly as rigorous and rationalistic as the scheme of Clarke and his followers" (Essays, p. 69). Miller seems to have confused the medium with the message.



becomes truly charitable, and therefore meritorious, only when more is involved than "barely discharging a Duty", only when "from a Principle of Benevolence, and Christian Love, we bestow on another what we really want ourselves; where, in order to lessen the Distresses of another, we condescend to share some Part of them". In short, the only meritorious alms-giving is that which entails some degree of material self-sacrifice. To be truly benevolent (which is apparently more than "to be only... Christians") is to do good not only with our "Superfluities" but with our "Necessities". A mere act of charity, however beneficial, is in itself morally ambiguous. Like Hutcheson, Allworthy is insisting that the motives and the means of the agent must be taken into account. His reasoning implies that merit is constituted by benevolence, that  $B = \frac{M}{A}$ , that true virtue is where  $M=A$ , and that  $B = \frac{M+I}{A}$ . The greater the sacrifice, apparently, the greater the merit.

Lest all this should seem to contradict my earlier arguments about the coincidence of self-love and social, it may be worth digressing briefly to make some further distinctions. Even Isaac Barrow concedes that there can be a kind of conflict between charity and self-love. As he says, charity tends to "enlarge our minds beyond private considerations, conferring on them an universal interest...so that a man's self is a very small and inconsiderable portion of his regard":

This indeed is a property of charity, to make a man deny himself, to neglect his own interest, yea, to despise all selfish regards, for the benefit of his neighbour: to him that is inspired with charity, his own good is not good, when it standeth in competition with the more considerable good of another; nothing is so dear to him, which he gladly will not part with upon such considerations. ("Charity", Works, I, 242, 244-5)

In cases of conflict or "competition", it would seem that self-love is properly overridden by charity. Self-sacrifice appears to be a distinctive function of charity, as it is of Hutchesonian virtue. Elsewhere, Barrow makes this implication explicit, when he notes that there "hath...scarce ever appeared any heroical virtue or memorable piety, whereof charity overbearing selfishness, and sacrificing private interest to public benefit, hath not been a main ingredient": in Christ himself, "did not... virtue conquer nature, and charity triumph over self-love?" ("Love", Works, I, 230, 232).

All this does look like grist to the mill of those who suppose that self-love and social are inevitably contradictory. But Barrow has other strings to his bow. Paradoxical though it may seem to modern sensibilities, Barrow argues consistently that there is no necessary contradiction between self-love and self-sacrifice. Genuine benevolence as Fielding understands it is distinctively self-sacrificial, and yet he argues again and again that benevolence is the guarantor of the good man's highest and purest worldly satisfactions. Barrow makes out exactly the same case for charity. Even in this world, charitable self-sacrifice is perfectly consistent with true self-love. Another important premise of this argument, for Barrow as for Fielding, is the ubiquitous proposition that charity actually breaks down the distinction between self and other, establishing a psychological community of interests:

It is generally a property of love to appropriate its object; in apprehension and affection embracing it, possessing it, enjoying it as its own: so charity doth make our neighbour to be ours, engaging us to tender his case and his concerns as our own; so that we shall exercise about them the same affections of soul (the same desires, the same hopes and fears, the same joys and sorrows), as about our own nearest and most peculiar interest; so that...his profit is gain, and his losses are damages to us...; his enjoyments afford pleasure, and his sufferings bring pain to us. ("Charity", Works, I, 242)

Given this psychological scenario, the very concept of self-sacrifice loses much of its meaning: the charitable man is, as Fielding would say, radically "interested" in the good of others, and in this sense "it will be an instance of self-love to exercise charity" (I, 237). And quite apart from this psychological bond between self-love and social, their coincidence is guaranteed by the various consequential rewards of charity, culminating in the infinite riches of heaven: "the fruits and recompenses of love to others in advantage to ourselves do far surpass all present interests and enjoyments: whence in effect the more or less we love others, answerably the more or less we love ourselves" ("Love", Works, I, 230). In this sense, "to love our neighbour doth involve the truest love to ourselves" ("Charity", Works, I, 251). There can be no conflict between "true" self-love and social. Any kind or degree of self-love which does conflict irresolvably with charity is not only "corrupt" but "spurious" ("Love", Works, I, 234). I hope I have already demonstrated Fielding's agreement with this typical Anglican argument. The point seemed to deserve reiteration, if only to confirm that Fielding's



radical commitment to a quasi-Hutchesonian ethic in no way compromises his equal commitment to the view that virtue and interest, self-love and social, are thoroughly coincident. For Fielding, as for Barrow, material self-sacrifice is itself entirely consistent with true self-love.

The self-sacrificial quality of genuine benevolence, or "Christian Love", is continually exemplified in the character and conduct of Tom Jones himself, and most conspicuously in his spontaneous offer of £50 for the relief of the Enderson family (TJ, XIII, viii, p. 721). Mrs Miller, on behalf of the beneficiaries, will accept only ten guineas. But the point is clear, and becomes clearer when Fielding implicitly contrasts Jones's heroic altruism with Nightingale's half-hearted offer of one guinea (pp. 721-2). To help the Endersons, Jones was prepared to render himself penniless again (as he would have been if the whole sum had been accepted), and in this sense his generosity was beyond the call of mere "Duty". This, perhaps, is what Fielding has in mind when he remarks, of Nightingale, that "the Liberality of Jones...was not an Example which he had any Obligation to follow" (p. 722). Fielding's commentary on this episode suggests, however, that there was something ironic in that apology:

I have in Truth observed...that the World are in general divided into two Opinions concerning Charity, which are the very reverse of each other. One Party seems to hold, that all Acts of this Kind are to be esteemed as voluntary Gifts, and however little you give (if indeed no more than your good Wishes) you acquire a great Degree of Merit in so doing. — Others, on the contrary, appear to be as firmly persuaded, that Beneficence is a positive Duty, and that whenever the Rich fall greatly short of their Ability in relieving the Distresses of the Poor, their pitiful Largesses are so far from being meritorious, that they have only performed their Duty by Halves, and are in some Sense more contemptible than those who have entirely neglected it.

To reconcile these different Opinions is not in my Power. I shall only add, that the Givers are generally of the former Sentiment, and the Receivers are almost universally inclined to the latter. (p. 722)

Fielding's detached impartiality is surely ironic. Of these two irreconcilable "Opinions" his is clearly the second. The theoretical distinctions correspond directly to the dramatic contrast between Jones's diffident generosity and Nightingale's complacent tokenism. Fielding's commentary features an extension of Allworthy's views on the ethics of

beneficence. While the rich applaud themselves for their "pitiful Largesses", Fielding condemns them for falling "greatly short of their Ability in relieving the Distresses of the Poor". Once again, the moral ambiguity of the good deed is implicitly underlined. And, once again, Fielding invokes the Hutchesonian principle that  $B = \frac{M}{A}$ . True Christian liberality, as he says elsewhere, involves "the relieving the wants and sufferings of one another to the utmost of our abilities": "It is to be limited by our power, I say, only" (Champion, 5 April 1740: Henley, XV, 270). Anything short of this is mere "common Humanity", in Tom Jones's phrase (TJ, XIII, viii, p. 721).

Practical beneficence is, according to Fielding, an "indispensable Duty", a "positive Duty" — required of us "both by the Christian Law, and by the Law of Nature itself". For this very reason, bounty to the poor and indigent is in itself less than strictly meritorious. This ethical logic makes sense only when Fielding's notion of "positive" duties is understood. In the Covent-Garden Journal (No. 39), he argues at length that alms-giving is just such a duty, beginning from the Ciceronian premise that "NOTHING...is more agreeable to the Nature of Man than Liberality", that "to confer Benefits on each other" is "as agreeable to Nature, as for the right Hand to assist the left, or for any one Member of the human Body to administer to the Use and Good of another" (Jensen, I, 354). (This kind of belief is what Fielding has in mind when he has Tom Jones refer his own charities to "common Humanity".) And, if liberality is radically natural to man, to be without it is to be — literally — inhuman: "If this Doctrine be admitted, the Person who is void of all Liberality, is not worthy the Name of a Man; but is to be considered as an unnatural Monster, below the Dignity of Humanity" (Jensen, I, 354). More than this, he is also positively unjust. According to the theorists of "the Law of Nature", Fielding points out, "the Man who refuses to relieve the Wants of another with his own Superfluities, is guilty of great Injustice" (Jensen, I, 355). Fielding goes on to quote at length from Locke, Cumberland, Grotius, Pufendorf, and Barbeyrac, to the effect that conventional laws of property can be modified or suspended by the natural necessities of the indigent. Barbeyrac, for instance, contends that "Necessity gives a Man a perfect Right to require what he wants". According to the law of nature, Fielding insists, the needy have a positive right to the "Superfluities" of the wealthy:



Upon the whole, it seems to be agreed by all these great Men, that those who want, have by the Laws of Nature A RIGHT to a Relief from the Superfluities of those who abound; by those Laws therefore it is not left to the Option of the Rich, whether they will relieve the Poor and Distressed, but those who refuse to do it, become unjust Men, and in reality deserve to be considered as ROGUES AND ROBBERS OF THE PUBLIC. (Jensen, I, 357)

The poor man's "perfect Right to require what he wants" is what makes liberality a "positive Duty" for those who have more than they require. Liberality is not a matter for conscience to decide. The rich man is bound, by the laws of nature as much as by those of Christianity, to "relieve the Poor and Distressed". This helps to explain Allworthy's view that there can be nothing meritorious in "barely discharging a Duty". There is not commonly thought to be any merit in discharging one's financial debts, precisely because the creditor has a right to be repaid. For Fielding, the natural contract between rich and poor is directly analogous, and equally binding. "IN general", as Hutcheson says, "the fulfilling the perfect Rights of others has little Virtue in it"; but on the other hand "the violating perfect Rights...is always exceedingly evil" (Inquiry, VII, vii, pp. 268, 269). Similarly, according to Fielding, there is no real virtue in relieving the miserable, but a great deal of real vice in refusing to do it.

Benevolence exerts itself beyond the demands of mere legality, by prompting us to give "what even our own Necessities cannot well spare". Only at this point does practical liberality become truly meritorious. On the other hand, as Allworthy says, liberality is such a "pleasant" duty that it "could be said to be its own Reward": this, Fielding implies, is another reason why it should not be supposed to deserve any other reward. But there is a more subtle point here. Fielding consistently implies that a conscious preoccupation with the merit, or desert, of our own actions is an index of moral inferiority — of an incapacity to pursue the good life for its own sake, to rest satisfied with the natural pleasures of virtue itself. This kind of ethical reasoning is implicit in Fielding's handling of Sophia Western's attitude to filial duty. Until he demands of her a degree of self-sacrifice which she (rightly) finds impossibly unreasonable, and sets up an unnatural conflict between filial duty and her duty to herself, Sophia is happy to obey her father in all things:

She had preserved the most inviolable Duty to him in all Things: and this her Love made not only easy, but so

delightful, that when one of her Companions laughed at her for placing so much Merit in such scrupulous Obedience, as that young Lady called it, Sophia answered, 'You mistake me, Madam, if you think I value myself upon this Account: For besides that I am barely discharging my Duty, I am likewise pleasing myself. I can truly say, I have no Delight equal to that of contributing to my Father's Happiness; and if I value myself, my Dear, it is on having this Power, and not on executing it.' (TJ, IV, x, p. 191)

Sophia's genuine "Love" for her father makes obedience to him both "easy" and "delightful". Because such obedience is a positive duty, and a pleasant one at that, she finds no merit in it. Her reasoning on this point is surely intended to be exemplary. At the same time, Fielding is clearly presenting Sophia as a moral paragon: it is her "Love" itself, her natural will to please and obey — rather than its practical expression — upon which Fielding values his heroine. Sophia's merit consists in precisely this, just as Jones's moral greatness consists in his benevolence, in his natural will to contribute to the happiness of men in general. Both hero and heroine are characterized by a tendency to disclaim the merit of their good deeds, and this — perhaps paradoxically — appears to be one of the functions of true merit.

Fielding's basic commitment to quasi-Hutchesonian ethical principles is manifest in many aspects of his work. He clearly shares Hutcheson's view that benevolence, the altruistic heart, is the sine qua non of virtue and merit. Even practical liberality falls among the so-called splendida peccata if it does not reflect and serve the purposes of a genuinely benevolent heart. In utilitarian terms, all beneficence is 'good'; but where it is motivated or attenuated by deliberate self-interest, its moral status is proportionately diminished. The good deed is, in itself, ambiguous: moral judgment involves attention to the motives and abilities of the doer, to the quality of his "will" and the quantity of his "power" to do good. In this sense, as we have seen, Fielding's criteria of merit are extremely rigorous and demanding. But on the other hand, his characteristically tolerant (sometimes notoriously liberal) attitude towards certain kinds of practical immorality is in some respects a function of the same ethical values. While he is sparing in his praise of certain practical virtues, Fielding is equally sparing in his censure of certain practical vices. His judicial attention to motives and abilities tends to diminish the merit of the average good deed, but tends equally to mitigate the demerit of some moral frailties.



With vices, as with virtues, it is the heart that counts. Consider the following passage from Amelia, where the heroine defends her husband against suspected resentment in Mrs Ellison:

'...You do not know him Mrs. Ellison, he is the best, the kindest, the worthiest of all his Sex... If he hath said or done any thing to disoblige you, I am sure I can justly acquit him of Design. His extreme Vivacity makes him sometimes a little too heedless; but, I am convinced, a more innocent Heart, or one more void of Offence, was never in a human Bosom.' (Amelia, VI, iii, p. 239)

Whatever Booth may have said or done to "disoblige" Mrs Ellison, Amelia's privileged knowledge of Booth's "Heart" allows her to infer quite confidently that the offence was not a product of "Design", or intention. There are two important suppositions here, one psychological and the other ethical. First, Amelia assumes that "Design" is a function of the "Heart", and has a necessary connexion with it. Second, and more important, she assumes that "Design" — the intention rather than the deed — is the proper object of moral judgment: to acquit the offender of "Design" is in effect to acquit him of the deed itself. The innocence of the "Heart" is thus an argument for the innocence of the deed. Amelia's moral-psychological suppositions are quite in keeping with the most basic ethical premises of Fielding's work. Later in Amelia, the narrator employs a variation on her argument to vindicate Booth's essential fidelity to his wife: "though he was a gay Man", says Fielding, "he was in reality so fond of his Amelia, that he thought of no other Woman; wherefore, though not absolutely a Joseph, as we have already seen; yet could he not be guilty of a premeditated Inconstancy" (X, ii, p. 417). The "Heart" is faithful, though the man himself is not: he could not be "guilty of a premeditated Inconstancy" any more than he could have disobligeed Mrs Ellison by "Design". Again, Fielding seems to be implying that the "Heart" is the proper and ultimate object of moral judgment. If Booth's affair with Miss Mathews was a misrepresentation of his "Heart", it was also an ambiguous and misleading index of his moral stature as a husband. Given the bitterness of Fielding's animus against adultery and adulterers,<sup>52</sup> this qualified apology for Booth's frailty is a significant application of the casuistical principle under discussion.

The kind of judicial "Candour" displayed by Allworthy — and implicitly

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<sup>52</sup> See Amelia, IX, v, pp. 374-5; X, ii, pp. 413-6; and CGJ, Nos. 67-8.

prescribed by Fielding — at the end of Tom Jones (XVIII, x, p. 960) is also put to the test in Amelia. Here, again, the prudential concerns of the novel involve the characteristic, quasi-Aristotelian discrimination between mere "Vices" and Vice per se, between "those Faults which Candour may construe into Imprudence" and those which betoken something worse. The history of Mrs Bennet is Fielding's severest test of this distinction. To Amelia's horror, she prefaces her autobiographical narrative by declaring herself "an Adulteress and a Murderer" (Amelia, VII, i, p. 267). But she goes on to qualify this sensational confession:

'...I hope you will not think me guilty of these Crimes in the blackest Degree.' — 'Guilty!' cries Amelia. 'Oh Heavens!' 'I believe indeed your Candour,' continued Mrs. Bennet, 'will be readier to acquit me than I am to acquit myself — Indiscretion, at least, the highest, most unpardonable Indiscretion, I shall always lay to my own Charge; and when I reflect on the fatal Consequences, I can never, never forgive myself.' Here she again began to lament in so bitter a manner, that Amelia endeavoured, as much as she could (for she was herself greatly shocked) to sooth and comfort her; telling her, that if Indiscretion was her highest Crime, the unhappy Consequences made her rather an unfortunate than a guilty Person... (p. 267)

Is Mrs Bennet "guilty" or "unfortunate"? Was she wicked or merely imprudent? These are the questions raised by this prefatory exchange, and in this sense the subsequent narrative is designed to test the reader's "Candour" as well as Amelia's. The consequences of Mrs Bennet's so-called "Indiscretion" are certainly "unhappy", and ultimately "fatal". But does her one liaison with a ruthless aristocratic rapist make her an "Adulteress"? And does her husband's subsequent death make her a "Murderer", even if it could be viewed as an indirect consequence of that liaison? Fielding represents the "Indiscretion" itself in such a way as to invoke the reader's "Candour", and to discourage judicial severity. At the masquerade, her giddiness was owing largely to the fact that she was "entirely void of all Suspicion": as she herself says, "Innocence... possessed my Heart; but it was Innocence unguarded, intoxicated with foolish Desires, and liable to every Temptation" (VII, vii, p. 294). Her desires and pleasures were "foolish" but not essentially vicious: "I assure you...my Intentions were never to exceed the Bounds of Innocence". But the mere indulgence of "Vanity", in this "foolish, thoughtless Turn of Mind", was enough to "betray the Citadel": one thing led to another, and her "Indiscretion" terminated in "the most dreadful



Ruin" — but a "Ruin", she insists, "to which, I can truly say, I never consented" (p. 295). In short, she never intended, and never chose, to commit adultery, any more than Richardson's *Clarissa* chose to be raped. (Though Richardson, of course, would never have allowed such a self-exculpation.) Having heard the whole wretched story, "fatal Consequences" and all, Amelia herself is more than ready to acquit Mrs Bennet:

'Indeed, Madam,' says she, 'you are much too severe a Judge on yourself: For they must have very little Candour, in my Opinion, who look upon your Case with any severe Eye. To me, I assure you, you appear highly the Object of Compassion; and I shall always esteem you, as an innocent and unfortunate Woman.' (VII, x, p. 304)

Amelia's "Candour" is surely intended to be exemplary, to direct the reader's own judgment of the case. No other reading makes sense if one remembers that Amelia (despite all her virtues, and partly because of her innocence) has been teetering on the brink of the same "Precipice" (VII, vii, p. 296).

In Amelia, and particularly in the history of Mrs Bennet, Fielding seems to emphasize that mere "Indiscretion" (or "Imprudence alone", in Allworthy's words) can have "unhappy Consequences" not only for the self but for others, that it can destroy the "Domestic Happiness" which, according to Dr Harrison, is "the End of almost all our Pursuits, and the common Reward of all our Pains" (Amelia, X, ii, p. 414). In its effects, imprudence can be quite as destructive as villainy. This emphatic lesson accounts in part for the moral complexity (and some of the gloom) of Fielding's last novel.<sup>53</sup> Unlike Tom Jones, Booth involves a wife and children in his self-inflicted misfortunes, and this bestows a greater moral ambiguity on his "foolish Conduct" (I, i, p. 16). And yet this is the conduct of an essentially good man.<sup>54</sup> Despite the dire consequences of his follies, the long-suffering Amelia remains convinced that "a Man of... Justice and Candour would entirely acquit him, and would consider him as an innocent unfortunate Man, who was the Object of a good Man's

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Sacks, Shape of Belief, pp. 147-8; Coolidge, "'Conservation of Character'", pp. 254-5; and Alter, Fielding and the Nature of the Novel, pp. 153-4.

<sup>54</sup> Booth, Fielding tells us, "was a Man of consummate Good-nature" (Amelia, III, xii, p. 150). In the world of Amelia, this is clearly not enough.

Compassion, not of his Anger or Resentment" (IX, i, p. 359). Thus, while insisting more gravely than ever on the good man's need for prudence, and highlighting the real moral compromises engendered by imprudence, Fielding still insists on maintaining a distinction between moral and prudential failure, between the man and his conduct.

Fielding's handling of Booth's adulterous affair seems to me to be ethically continuous with his presentation of Tom Jones's moral frailties. In Tom Jones, characteristically, Fielding exonerates his hero's sexual infidelities by insisting on the virtuous orientation of his "Heart".<sup>55</sup> At their first, accidental meeting in London — the first since the Upton débâcle — Jones and Sophia talk at cross-purposes about "what past at Upton". Embarrassed by shame, he begs her to forget both himself and his transgressions:

Sophia stood trembling all this while. Her Face was whiter than Snow, and her Heart was throbbing through her Stays. But at the mention of Upton, a Blush arose in her Cheeks, and her Eyes...were turned upon Jones with a Glance of Disdain. He understood this silent Reproach, and replied to it thus: 'O my Sophia, my only Love, you cannot hate or despise me more for what happened there, than I do myself: But yet do me the Justice to think, that my Heart was never unfaithful to you. That had no share in the Folly I was guilty of...' (XIII, xi, pp. 731-2)

Sophia, Fielding tells us, is "in her Heart...very glad to hear this". But Jones has been defending himself against a charge that she had no intention of making. Sophia, "forcing into her Face an Air of...Coldness" (the verb is significant),<sup>56</sup> now introduces the real and "unpardonable"

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<sup>55</sup> Both Murry and Rawson base their moral defences of Tom Jones on the fact that his sexual activities are bound up with the energies of good nature (see above, p. 180, n. 16). This is reasonable, but it is worth noting that Jones's principal line of self-defence is a denial of the involvement of the "Heart" in these liaisons (principally the affair with Mrs Waters): apart from the passage quoted above, see TJ, XVIII, xii, p. 973. On the latter occasion, Sophia declares herself not entirely happy with this plea. The "Heart" is of course an ambiguous concept, embracing both Eros and agapē: perhaps we could say that Jones's self-exonerations involve an appeal to the "Heart" in the former sense, and that Fielding typically excuses Jones's sins by appealing to the "Heart" in the latter sense. But the matter is no doubt more complicated than this.

<sup>56</sup> Note the way in which Fielding talks of Sophia "forcing...her Brow into a Frown" at a similar interview in TJ, XVIII, xii, p. 973. Despite her attempts to maintain a properly severe attitude to Jones's "Profligacy of Manners" (XVIII, x, p. 962), these conventional postures are



charge — that Jones has been taking her name in vain. As Fielding told the reader earlier, à propos the Upton episode, Sophia was "in reality... much more offended at the Freedoms which she thought...he had taken with her Name and Character, than at any Freedoms, in which, under his present Circumstances, he had indulged himself with the person of another Woman" (TJ, XII, viii, p. 651). When confronted with the charge, Jones easily convinces her that "he was entirely innocent of an Offence so foreign to his Character" (the culprit was, of course, Partridge) (XIII, xi, p. 732). In short, Sophia finds Jones innocent of the "unpardonable" offence, and clearly finds the other offence (of which he is guilty) pardonable. Having "cleared up" the misapprehension, as Fielding tells us, "they soon found themselves...well pleased with each other" (p. 733).

Fielding implies that Jones, like Booth, "could...not be guilty of a premeditated Inconstancy": if he has sinned against Sophia, it is not by "Design"; if he is "sometimes a little too heedless", his practical waywardness merely disguises an essentially "innocent Heart". In any candid moral judgment, the orientation of the agent's heart — his passions and affections, his disposition or essential character — must be taken into account. If Jones were constitutionally perfidious, his practical infidelities would no doubt be viewed with far greater severity by Fielding. But it might be argued that sexual infidelity is not in any case the most serious of Jones's moral offences. The puritanical moralist might object that Jones is palpably guilty of fornication per se, and that Sophia is in no position to forgive him for this particular "Crime".<sup>57</sup> It might be objected that there can be no degrees of legality or illegality, and that Jones is undeniably guilty of transgressing a divine prohibition. But Fielding is neither a puritan nor a legalist. He would insist that Jones's practical frailties, whether viewed as infidelities or as simple immoralities, are subject to the same mitigating pleas. Like Dr Johnson's Savage, he would appeal to the distinction "between offences, which arise out of premeditation, and a disposition habituated to vice or immorality, and transgressions, which are the unhappy and unforeseen effects of

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repeatedly questioned by Fielding's playful ironies, and ultimately overturned altogether by the manner of her final decision to marry Jones (see XVIII, xii). As Ehrenpreis puts it: "By gracefully obeying the will of her parent, Sophia gives the fullest expression to her own" (Fielding: TJ, p. 77). On Sophia's volte face, see also M. B. Williams, Marriage, pp. 84 ff. (esp. p. 89); and Sacks, Shape of Belief, pp. 124-5.

<sup>57</sup> The term is Allworthy's, from his sermon to Jenny Jones: TJ, I, vii, p. 51.

casual absence of reason, and sudden impulse of passion".<sup>58</sup> Given Johnson's rigoristic literary strictures in Rambler 4, there is something ironic in the appropriateness of this distinction; but the same is even more true of his moral verdict on Collins:

That this man...passed always unentangled through the snares of life, it would be prejudice and temerity to affirm; but it may be said that at least he preserved the source of action unpolluted, that his principles were never shaken, that his distinctions of right and wrong were never confounded, and that his faults had nothing of malignity or design, but proceeded from some unexpected pressure, or casual temptation.<sup>59</sup>

This exemplifies exactly the kind of judicial "Candour" that Fielding demanded of the reader of Tom Jones, and evidently failed to get from Johnson. The distinctions between action and its "source", between conduct and "principles", between event and "design", are all ones to which Fielding characteristically appeals in his handling of Jones's "faults". Johnson's point is, essentially, that Collins's heart was always in the right place. Like Fielding, he differentiates between those practical "faults" which proceed from "design", "premeditation", or "disposition", and those produced by "casual temptation" and the "sudden impulse of passion". Conduct is morally ambiguous. It is possible to be good and at the same time to do ill. And the commonest cause of such a disjunction between character and conduct, between the man and his deeds, is the very force of "casual temptation" and the powerful sway of passion. Even the best of men can be carried away by a "sudden impulse".

Here lies the positive ethical significance of Fielding's apology for Jones's most damaging failure to exercise the "wonderful Power of Reason" (TJ, V, x, p. 257). The hero's retirement into the thickest part of the grove with Molly Seagrim does indeed proceed from "casual absence of reason, and sudden impulse of passion". As a dramatic enforcement of "that glorious precept vince teipsum" (Champion, 2 February 1739/40: Henley, XV, 178), this episode is partly prescriptive. But Fielding's ultimate point seems to be that self-conquest was, at this moment and in these circumstances, humanly impossible. Despite his rhetorical (but surely genuine) feelings of loyalty towards Sophia, Jones is betrayed

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<sup>58</sup> Lives, ed. Birkbeck Hill, II, 350.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., III, 338.



into faithless fornication by the wonderful power of passion (inflamed, of course, by alcohol). "Reason" and romantic sentiment are spontaneously subverted by Nature. Here, and elsewhere, Fielding's psychological emphasis on the irresistible force of passion (particularly sexual passion) is a premise of his argument for the cultivation of judicial "Candour". The ethical point is explicitly clear in his apology for the treachery of Black George:

A single bad Act no more constitutes a Villain in Life, than a single bad Part on the Stage. The Passions, like the Managers of a Playhouse, often force Men upon Parts, without consulting their Judgement, and sometimes without any Regard to their Talents. Thus the Man, as well as the Player, may condemn what he himself acts; nay, it is common to see Vice sit as awkwardly on some Men, as the Character of Iago would on the honest Face of Mr. William Mills. (TJ, VII, i, pp. 328-9)

Judicial candour demands that the man be carefully distinguished from his deeds, just as we would distinguish the dramatic actor from the rôle he plays in the theatre. The candid moral judge must take into account the tyrannical force of the passions, must accommodate the possibility that the "Part" misrepresents the "Player". Fielding deliberately understates Black George's treacheries, in order both to enforce and (perhaps ironically?) to exemplify this general principle of moral judgment:

Upon the whole then, the Man of Candour, and of true Understanding, is never hasty to condemn. He can censure an Imperfection, or even a Vice, without Rage against the guilty Party... The worst of Men generally have the Words Rogue and Villain most in their Mouths, as the lowest of all Wretches are the aptest to cry out low in the Pit. (p. 329)

Fielding's reasoning might be said to tend towards the Christian injunction, 'Judge not': he recognizes, and continually draws attention to, the inescapable ambiguity of both 'good' and 'bad' conduct.<sup>60</sup> In either case, justice demands that the action be judged in relation to the qualities and capacities of the agent — and these are often difficult to come at. The "Design" or intention of the action, and therefore the "Heart" (the character or disposition) of the agent, must be taken into

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<sup>60</sup> This has implications for the satirist: see Ronald Paulson, Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England, 1967, Ch. iv, esp. pp. 141-50.

account: the 'good' or 'bad' deed is justly subject to praise or blame only when it directly reflects a good or bad intention, or disposition. On the other hand, the abilities or capacities of the agent must be taken into account. The merit of any 'good' deed can properly be measured only by reference to the agent's power to do good. Fielding's emphasis on the potentially tyrannical influence of "casual temptation" and "sudden impulse of passion" seems to me to introduce a similar criterion into assessments of demerit or guilt. Where a "sudden impulse" impels the agent to do wrong, it also diminishes his power to do right (as in the case of Jones and Molly Seagrim). While the moral rigorist would see such passionate compulsion as the very quintessence of vice (and certainly as no excuse for vicious conduct), Fielding views it as a fact of nature, and one which actually mitigates the viciousness of many practical vices.

For Fielding, as for Hutcheson, the sine qua non of virtue and merit is benevolence, a generous and compassionate orientation of the affections relative to others. The moral stature of any individual is determined, first and foremost, by the quality of his "Heart". Fielding's decidedly anti-puritanical handling of sexual conduct surely reflects and enforces this ethical priority. Temperance, as a divine prescription and a primary function of the duty which we owe to ourselves, is certainly a 'virtue', and in this sense promiscuous fornication is equally certainly a 'vice'. But sexual continence has no necessary psychological connexion with benevolence, and therefore no necessary ethical connexion with moral goodness as Fielding understands it.<sup>61</sup> Where benevolence is wanting, the 'virtue' of chastity becomes a morally empty accomplishment. This is a lesson that Fielding dramatizes quite unambiguously in A Journey from this World to the Next, where a series of human spirits seek entry to Elysium, and are obliged to persuade Minos of their merits. The verdicts of Minos clearly and directly reflect Fielding's own ethical priorities. One of

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<sup>61</sup> This is a very important ethical point. Cf. Rawson, "Empson's TJ", esp. pp. 403-4, and "Fielding and Smollett", pp. 276-8; Price, Palace of Wisdom, pp. 290-92; Passmore, "The Malleability of Man", pp. 33-4; Williams, Marriage, p. 80; and Harrison, The Novelist as Moral Philosopher, pp. 109-112. Miller discusses the issue at some length in Essays, pp. 76-83. In Fielding's tendency to devalue the private, reflexive virtues, Miller sees a significant departure from the "rigorous conception of moral duty" which he believes "implicit in Christianity" (p. 79). I am not sure that Fielding would accept this neo-Richardsonian view. His real point — that chastity is a relatively trivial accomplishment — is surely a function of his Christian values, though a departure from the more rigorous traditions of Christian teaching.



the spirits boasts not only of his own life-long temperance but also of having struck a blow against the sin of fornication in others:

The second exhibited, that he had constantly frequented his church, been a rigid observer of fast-days. He likewise represented the great animosity he had shewn to vice in others, which never escaped his severest censure; and, as to his own behaviour, he had never been once guilty of whoring, drinking, gluttony, or any other excess. He said, he had disinherited his son for getting a bastard — "Have you so," said Minos, "then pray return into the other world and beget another; for such an unnatural rascal shall never pass this gate." (Ch. vii: Henley, II, 240-41)

The suitor's 'virtues' are emptied of merit by his far more considerable and substantial vices. And, typically, Fielding associates this censorious puritanism with pharisaical ill-nature. Having wrongly put chastity before charity, this man is bluntly turned away by Minos. He is followed by another 'chaste' spirit, a beautiful female who "said she hoped there was some merit in refusing a great number of lovers, and dying a maid, though she had had the choice of a hundred" (Henley, II, 241). Her chastity is morally worthless because heartless — she too is turned away. Minos is looking not for chastity but for charity.<sup>62</sup> He finds it in the spirit-narrator himself, who, despite his 'vices', gains easy access to Elysium:

The judge then addressed himself to me, who little expected to pass this fiery trial. I confessed I had indulged myself very freely with wine and women in my youth, but had never done an injury to any man living, nor avoided an opportunity of doing good, that I pretended to very little virtue more than general philanthropy and private friendship. — I was proceeding when Minos bid me enter the gate, and not indulge myself with trumpeting forth my virtues. (Henley, II, 245)

Whatever oblique biographical significance might be found in this passage, its ethical implications are clear enough. The spirit-narrator's merit is constituted by benevolence, philanthropy and friendship, and is evidently neither modified nor compromised by his youthful 'vices'. The intemperate enjoyment of wine and women is, in itself, of no greater moral significance than puritanical abstention. If it is possible to be chaste but uncharitable, it is equally possible to be charitable but unchaste.

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<sup>62</sup> As Minos declares to one of the spirits, "no man enters that gate without charity" (Henley, II, 244).

Again, Fielding underlines the moral ambiguity of certain practical 'virtues' and 'vices', and typically insists that charity is a virtue of an infinitely higher order than chastity. The anti-puritanical tendencies of Fielding's work reflect a consistent preoccupation with the enforcement of this moral priority.

The judgments of Minos give concentrated expression to the most fundamental moral assumptions of Fielding's fiction. Tom Jones is not his only meritorious fornicator. In Joseph Andrews there is Betty the chambermaid, who "had Good-nature, Generosity and Compassion" as well as a rampant sexual appetite (I, xviii, pp. 86 ff.). In Tom Jones there is Mrs Waters, whose honest and undemanding sexuality Fielding clearly finds more acceptable than certain kinds of chastity:

She could feast heartily at the Table of Love, without reflecting that some other already had been, or hereafter might be, feasted with the same Repast. A Sentiment which, if it deals but little in Refinement, deals however much in Substance; and is less capricious, and perhaps less ill-natured and selfish than the Desires of those Females who can be contented enough to abstain from the Possession of their Lovers, provided they are sufficiently satisfied that no one else possesses them. (IX, vi, p. 518)

For Fielding, "ill-natured and selfish" physical purity is more (far more) inexcusable than open-hearted fornication. It is the orientation of the "Heart" that counts. This, of course, is a principle to which Fielding gives full-bodied expression in the career of Tom Jones himself, who "had the Vices of a warm Disposition" but "was entirely free from those of a cold one" (TJ, XII, xiii, p. 677). In the final two books of Tom Jones, one character after another pays tribute to the virtues of the hero, in a sequence which clearly constitutes a process of vindication. In Mrs Miller's eyes, Jones is "the best natured Creature that ever was born", "the best and worthiest of all Human Beings" (XVII, vi, p. 896). Mrs Waters assures Allworthy that Jones is "the worthiest of Men": "No young Gentleman of his Age is, I believe, freer from Vice, and few have the twentieth Part of his Virtues..." (XVIII, viii, p. 946). Tendentious though we may suspect this opinion to be, it is endorsed even by Square, who finally concedes that Jones "hath some Faults" but also confidently assures Allworthy that "this young Man hath the noblest Generosity of Heart, the most perfect Capacity for Friendship, the highest Integrity, and indeed every Virtue which can enoble a Man" (XVIII, iv, p. 927). Every virtue but chastity, he might have said. But by comparison with



the others, this is not a particularly "noble" virtue. This is precisely Square's (and surely Fielding's) point — that Jones's "Faults" and "Vices" pale into virtual insignificance when measured against his constitutional virtues. Mrs Miller makes this logic explicit, when pleading to Allworthy in the hero's defence:

'...I do not pretend to say the young Man is without Faults; but they are all the Faults of Wildness and of Youth; Faults which he may, nay which I am certain he will relinquish, and if he should not, they are vastly over-ballanced by one of the most humane tender honest Hearts that ever Man was blessed with.' (XVII, ii, p. 878)<sup>63</sup>

The man is meritorious: his "Heart", at least, is invariably in the right place. Allworthy is eventually convinced, and Jones's "Faults" are emphatically attributed to "Imprudence alone" (XVIII, x, p. 960). The hero is virtuous in spite of his "Vices", which are of most interest to Fielding as instances of prudential rather than moral failure. Jones's foolish head almost deprives him of the happiness which his "humane tender honest" heart always deserved.

Tom Jones may be an anti-puritanical work, but it is certainly not anti-prudential. If fornication is in itself a venial offence, because consistent with the fulfilment of our duties towards others, it is in many cases inconsistent with the imperatives of prudence, the dictator of our duties towards ourselves. Jones may be a friend to everyone else, but he is his own worst enemy. Many of Fielding's critics appear reluctant to accept that enlightened self-interest is an essential constituent of perfected virtue — that it is a moral as well as a practical necessity. Modern commentators tend persistently to associate prudence with selfishness, and therefore also tend to view it as a quality which inevitably interferes with the functions of the Good Heart. In this connexion, they might perhaps cite Voltaire's distinction between virtue and prudence: "Le prudent se fait du bien, le vertueux en fait aux

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Allworthy's originally generous view of Jones's occasional "Incontinence" (despite his "Detestation" of the vice itself): his anger is mitigated by a recognition of Jones's "Honour and Honesty", and thus "in ballancing his Faults with his Perfections, the latter seemed rather to preponderate" (TJ, IV, xi, p. 194). The context suggests that this sanely balanced judgment is intended to be exemplary. See also Allworthy's vindictive appeal to Sophia in XVIII, ix, p. 954.

hommes".<sup>64</sup> Expressed in these terms, the distinction implies some degree of tension or opposition — it perhaps suggests that virtue and prudence are mutually exclusive. But this would be a non sequitur. Why should not the man who does good "aux hommes" also do good to himself? The question is one which has not been properly confronted by those who prefer to cherish the putative opposition between self-love and social. As R. F. Atkinson has said, in an elementary textbook of moral philosophy, we really should ask ourselves "how far morality can be conceived simply as a regard for the welfare of others", and "whether it is other-regarding actions alone that come up for moral assessment".<sup>65</sup> In 1736, Bishop Butler also thought this question worth asking:

It deserves to be considered, whether men are more at liberty, in point of morals, to make themselves miserable without reason, than to make other people so: or dissolutely to neglect their own greater good, for the sake of a present lesser gratification, than they are to neglect the good of others, whom Nature has committed to their care. (Dissertation, para. 6: 15 Sermons, p. 150)

This, again, is a question which ethically-inclined readers of Tom Jones have consistently failed to ask themselves. The general presupposition seems to be that morality can be "conceived simply as a regard for the welfare of others", that men are "more at liberty, in point of morals, to make themselves miserable without reason, than to make other people so". This was not Butler's view of the matter:

It should seem, that a due concern about our own interest or happiness, and a reasonable endeavour to secure and promote it, which is, I think, very much the meaning of the word prudence, in our language; it should seem, that this is virtue, and the contrary behaviour faulty and blameable; since, in the calmest way of reflection, we approve of the first, and condemn the other conduct, both in ourselves and others. (loc. cit.)

Typically, Butler grounds his argument in the empirical facts of human psychology, in our experience of moral judgment: "the faculty within us, which is the judge of actions, approves of prudent actions, and

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<sup>64</sup> "Vertu", Dictionnaire Philosophique (1764), in Oeuvres Complètes de Voltaire, Paris, 1879, IV, 573-4.

<sup>65</sup> Conduct, pp. 33-4.



disapproves imprudent ones", and in this sense "it appears, that prudence is a species of virtue, and folly of vice".<sup>66</sup> This is undeniably true, Butler insists, whether or not we think "the words Virtue and Vice... applicable to prudence and folly" (Dissertation, paras. 6-7: 15 Sermons, p. 151). Atkinson issues the same warning against simplistic distinctions between the moral and the prudential:

By all means, as a beginning, let us distinguish morality and prudence, but having done so we will still have to allow that, if prudential considerations are important at all, morality must have regard to them. It will not do to stipulate tidily that prudence is concern for one's own welfare, morality for that of other people — it must at least be the case that morality is concern for the welfare of everybody, one's own therefore being included.<sup>67</sup>

This last view of the matter is one which Atkinson calls "ethical neutralism". When Butler postulated the same inclusive obligation, it was not a new idea. Barrow, for instance, had no difficulty reconciling "neutralism" with Christian precept. "God himself", says Barrow, "hath... declared it to be his will and pleasure, that we should tender our real and final good":

He also expressly hath commanded us to love all men, not excluding ourselves from the number; to love our neighbour, and therefore ourselves; who of all are nearest to ourselves; who occur as the first objects of humanity and charity; whose needs we most sensibly feel; whose good is in itself no less considerable than the single good of any other person... ("Self-Love", Works, I, 535)

And why should we exclude ourselves? It may of course be objected that this is a natural and predictable position for the Christian prudentialist to adopt, since it nicely evades the self-other conflict which many of Fielding's readers suppose to be the very backbone of morality. But the same neutralist position can be found in John Balguy's The Foundation of Moral Goodness (1728-9), hardly the work of a prudentialist. According to Balguy, "there may be real Virtue in such Actions as respect the Agent himself, and are directed to his own Advantage". The agent is no less "sensible" than his "Fellow-Creatures", and is therefore an equally

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<sup>66</sup> Cf. Hume's psychologically-grounded argument for the moral status of prudence: Treatise, III.3.iv, esp. pp. 609-10.

<sup>67</sup> Conduct, p. 36.

proper object of his own benevolence. There are "Self-Duties" as well as social:

The Coexistence of innumerable Fellow-Creatures makes room for other Duties, and another kind of Virtue; but does not cancel the Obligation we are speaking of, nor extinguish the Merit and Moral Rectitude of such Actions as respect ourselves.

The primary Dictate of Right Reason is, that every Moral Agent intend the Good of the Whole, or aim at Universal Good. In this Universal Good the private Good of every Individual is included. From hence it follows, that if any Agent in the View and Pursuit of common Good, could be supposed to exclude his own; such an Intention and such a Conduct would be less Virtuous than if he had included it. It must therefore be granted, that for any Man to aim at his own Welfare, in Subordination to that of the Publick, is not only innocent, but morally good.<sup>68</sup>

Like the prudentialists, Balguy sees no necessary tension between self-love and social. To promote the happiness of others (the "common Good") does not, either naturally or morally, entail indifference to the happiness of the self. Far from it. Social obligations and "Self-Duties" may be distinct, but they are certainly not discordant. In fact, the "Self-Duties" are an ethical function of our general obligation to promote the "common Good": "In this Universal Good the private Good of every Individual is included". If we are genuinely concerned about the welfare of our fellow-creatures, we must also be concerned about our own. Self-as-subject has a duty to promote the happiness of self-as-object. To pursue the general good, and neglect one's own particular good, is therefore "less Virtuous" than the pursuit of both. Virtue (even in the Hutchesonian sense) implies self-love as well as social. Benevolence itself implies the fulfilment of what Balguy calls the "Self-Duties", and what Fielding calls "the Duty which we owe to ourselves". Here, then, is another sense in which the imprudence of Tom Jones can be viewed as a moral failing.

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<sup>68</sup> John Balguy, The Foundation of Moral Goodness: or, A Further Inquiry into the Original of Our Idea of Virtue, [Part I], 1728, pp. 63, 62, 65-6. Cited hereafter as Foundation, Pt. I.



## CHAPTER V

### REASON AND MORALITY

The generous, anti-puritanical moral logic of Tom Jones is what provoked Sir John Hawkins's well-known diatribe against Fielding:

He was the author of a romance, intituled... 'The Foundling, or the history of Tom Jones', a book seemingly intended to sap the foundation of that morality which it is the duty of parents and all public instructors to inculcate in the minds of young people, by teaching that virtue upon principle is imposture, that generous qualities alone constitute true worth, and that a young man may love and be loved, and at the same time associate with the loosest women. His morality, in respect that it resolves virtue into good affections, in contradiction to moral obligation and a sense of duty, is that of Lord Shaftesbury vulgarised, and is a system of excellent use in palliating the vices most injurious to society. He was the inventor of that cant-phrase, goodness of heart, which is every day used as a substitute for probity, and means little more than the virtue of a horse or a dog...<sup>1</sup>

This formidable piece of invective is in many ways unfair to Fielding, but it is of considerable interest as an example of the kind of criticism that was levelled at benevolist ethics in the eighteenth century. In more than one respect, it could be said that Hawkins's critique of Tom Jones is anticipated in Balguy's The Foundation of Moral Goodness, a work devoted exclusively to refuting the principal arguments of Hutcheson's Inquiry. Since Fielding's own ethics are in so many respects quasi-Hutchesonian, Balguy's work can help us to understand the terms of Fielding's disagreement with the rationalist tradition, and perhaps to imagine how Tom Jones might have been received by the rationalists among its readership.

Balguy is a rigorous rationalist (and a disciple of Clarke), for whom "VIRTUE, or Moral Goodness, is the Conformity of our Moral Actions to the Reasons of Things", consisting psychologically in "the Conformity of our Wills to our Understandings" (Foundation, Pt. I, pp. 29-30). It is not that Balguy harbours any prejudice against benevolence per se. Far from it: "The primary Dictate of Right Reason is, that every moral Agent intend the

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<sup>1</sup> The Works of Samuel Johnson, 1787, I, 214-5. Quoted from Ronald Paulson and Thomas Lockwood, eds., Henry Fielding: The Critical Heritage, 1969, p. 446.

Good of the Whole, or aim at universal Good" (p. 65). Virtue is, in this sense, the same thing as "a rational Endeavour of producing Happiness in capable Subjects" (p. 30). Hutcheson and Balguy seem to agree about the (essentially utilitarian) ends of morality. More than this, they agree that virtue involves the intentional promotion of happiness. What they fundamentally disagree about is the proper psychological source of benevolent intentions. Balguy does not deny the reality of natural social affections: "That the Author of Nature has planted in our Minds benevolent Affections towards others, cannot be denied without contradicting Experience, and falsifying our own Perceptions" (p. 7). Nor does he deny the usefulness of these God-implanted affections. What he denies (and denies vehemently) is that virtue does or can consist in a mere "benevolent Instinct": "this Impulse, or Bias, is not Virtue; nor can any thing be Virtue, but what consists in a Rational Determination of the Mind" (pp. 39, 41). The only kind of benevolence which can be regarded as virtuous, or meritorious, is rational benevolence:

It seems to me an useful and material Distinction, to consider the Affection of Benevolence, either as instinctive, or as rational; as natural, or as acquired. Acquired I mean by Reason, Reflection, and a consequent Practice. If we attend to the Reasons on which Moral Goodness is founded, we discover its Rectitude and intrinsic Fitness. Why then may not this very Perception produce benevolent Affection, or a real Desire of public Good?...Is not such a Rational Benevolence more agreeable to Rational Natures, and more meritorious, than a blind Instinct that we have in common with inferior Creatures; and which operates, as it were, mechanically, both on their Minds, and ours? (pp. 40-41)

In fact there can be no merit at all in the exercise of a "blind Instinct that we have in common with inferior Creatures". Natural benevolence is (in Hawkins's phrase) "little more than the virtue of a horse or a dog".<sup>2</sup> Like all other natural instincts, it operates merely "mechanically".

This brings us to the heart of Balguy's case against Hutcheson. In the "Scheme" of the Inquiry, he complains, "Virtue is...resolved ultimately into mere Instinct, and made to consist in it" (Foundation, Pt. I, p. 20). But this is to make a virtue of necessity. For Balguy, "every Instinct is a physical Principle of Action", under the influence of which "the Mind

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<sup>2</sup> On "virtue" and animals, see Foundation, Pt. I, pp. 14-15; and The Second Part of the Foundation of Moral Goodness (cited hereafter as Foundation, Pt. II), 1729, pp. 84-5.



may possibly be altogether passive" (Pt. II, p. 76). Natural benevolence is a product not of human volition but of mechanical necessity. And "it seems utterly impossible to reconcile Virtue with any kind of Necessity": "As far as any Actions spring from a necessary Principle, so far they must be, in a Moral Sense, worthless" (Pt. I, p. 21). Virtue or merit must always imply rational volition. Thus, while "instinctive" benevolence may be entirely consistent with the "primary Dictate of Right Reason", it is neither virtuous nor meritorious, since it involves no exertion of the rational will:

Moral Virtue is Moral Worth, which entirely consists in the Conformity of our Actions to Reason; that is, to the true Reasons and Relations of Things... Without a Conformity to Reason, no Action can be right; without an Exertion of the Will, it could not really be an Action. And as Action and Passiveness are inconsistent Ideas, so are Passiveness and Merit. For no Man can be said to act laudably, who acts not at all... As far as he is passive, so far himself can pretend to no Praise... (Pt. II, p. 74)

In a philosophical sense, the man who acts merely instinctively "acts not at all" — he is not an agent but a patient. "What is merely effected by Instinct" cannot therefore "be in any Degree meritorious" (Pt. II, pp. 87-8). Virtue consists neither in gratuitous volition nor in natural affection, but in the practical conjunction of reason and freedom:

Now I readily grant there is no Merit in acting without any Motive or Reason. On the other hand it may be affirmed, that neither is there any Merit in Actions to which an Agent is driven by natural Instinct. The one of these is a worthless Use of Freedom; the other no Freedom at all. In the former case the Man acts, but to no purpose. In the latter he does not act, but is acted upon. Or however he is passive in proportion to the Influence and Operation of the Instinct. — But determining our selves freely to act and do what appears conformable to Reason, is making the best Use of both Faculties that we possibly can. And if there be no Merit in such a Conduct, we are capable of none... It is only Reason, or the Appearance of Reason, that can justify the Choice of a Moral Agent; who is no further Praise-worthy, than as he acts in Conformity thereto. Instinctive Goodness is the Creator's Goodness, not the Creature's... (Pt. I, pp. 58-9)

Balguy talks of the functions of Nature just as earlier theologians would have talked of the operations of Grace, urging us to consider "whether some of those instinctive Actions which are commonly ascribed to his

Creatures, may not more properly be ascribed to the Creator": the effects of Nature are to be attributed directly to its "Almighty Author" (Pt. II, p. 75). Thus, "the End or the Intention" of natural benevolence is "confessedly good", but "the Praise of it belongs to the Creator, not to the Creature" (Pt. II, p. 79).

Balguy's logic has some important implications. As he says, the man who is "driven by natural Instinct" cannot strictly be regarded as an agent at all, since he is "passive in proportion to the Influence and Operation of the Instinct". To the extent that instinct is involved, "he does not act, but is acted upon". And since the ideas of "Passiveness and Merit" are philosophically "inconsistent", it follows that the merit of any particular good deed is inversely proportionate to the degree of natural benevolence involved in the production of it. As a general rule, "we always account those Actions most virtuous, which have the least Dependence upon Instincts" (Pt. I, p. 22). And this is as true of beneficent actions as it is of others: "As far as we are influenced by Instincts and Affections, so much is to be discounted in the Estimate of our Beneficence" (Pt. I, p. 17: my emphasis). The benevolent "Instincts and Impulses of Nature" are in many cases compulsively strong, and the virtue of any "good Offices" is "therefore...diminished in proportion to the Strength of this Natural Bias" (Pt. I, p. 18: my emphasis). Balguy thus entirely inverts the principal moral thesis of Hutcheson's Inquiry. The only meritorious good deed is one which is not produced by the natural affections: "as far as our Wills are determined, either by Instinct, or any thing else besides Reason, so far, I think, we can have no Pretension to Merit or Moral Goodness" (Pt. I, p. 40). Merit is directly proportionate not to benevolence but to rationality.

It is not difficult to estimate what Balguy, rationalist par excellence, would have made of Tom Jones. He would have found little merit, if any, in what are (for Fielding) Jones's principal virtues. The hero's good affections are, after all, entirely natural. Whatever merit there might be in any of his good deeds would be inversely proportionate to the strength of these affections. In his virtues, as in his vices, "he does not act, but is acted upon". Insofar as his benevolence is natural, it is, "in a Moral Sense, worthless". Fielding's fictive representation of the meritorious man could hardly be more at odds with Balguy's rigoristic rationalism.<sup>3</sup> On

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Miller, Essays, pp. 68-9.



occasions, indeed, Fielding can be seen to be consciously and deliberately engaging in debate with the rigorist opposition. In the Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers, for instance, he argues that "the passion of love or benevolence...seems to be the only human passion that is in itself simply and absolutely good". That it is a passion, that it is fundamentally "natural", is immaterial. What is "certain", insists Fielding, is "that a tender-hearted and compassionate disposition...is of all tempers of mind the most amiable; and though it seldom receives much honour, is worthy of the highest":

The natural energies of this temper are indeed the very virtues principally inculcated in our excellent religion; and those who, because they are natural, have denied them the name of virtues seem not, I think, to be aware of the direct and impious tendency of a doctrine that denies all merit to a mind which is naturally, I may say necessarily, good.  
(Henley, XIII, 110, 109)

Fielding's own position begs some important questions. The notion that an individual may be "necessarily" meritorious is barely more intelligible than the theological doctrine of predestination.<sup>4</sup> This is consistent with the thread of determinism which runs through Fielding's work,<sup>5</sup> but hardly less problematic for that. Here, perhaps, there are signs of an obstinate reluctance to confront a question with which the rationalists were always implicitly preoccupied. (For Balguy, clearly, the concept of merit is philosophically dependent on the concept of responsibility — hence his aggressive confinement of morality to the domain of the rational will, and his denial of all merit to that which is "naturally" or "necessarily" good. How can we be worthy of reward for that which we do "mechanically"?) But Fielding's own point is basically sound, and presents a serious challenge to the very idea of Christian rationalism. The "natural energies" of benevolence "are indeed the very virtues principally inculcated" by Christianity, and this is something that Balguy (perhaps understandably)

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Empson's suggestive remarks on Fielding and Calvin: "Tom Jones", in Paulson, ed., Fielding, p. 129.

<sup>5</sup> See esp. the debate on education in JA, III, v (where Fielding clearly sides with Joseph); and cf. "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men", Miscellanies I, pp. 153-4. On this aspect of Fielding, and/or its educational implications, see George Sherburn, "Fielding's Social Outlook", PQ, 35 (1956), 1-23 (pp. 7-13); Miller, Essays, pp. 215 ff.; Kropf, "Educational Theory and Human Nature", *passim*; Ribble, "Aristotle", pp. 35-8; and Hodges, "NE and TJ", pp. 229-33.

tends to overlook. Where does the New Testament exhort us to cultivate rationality? Or to love one another only with our heads? What it does call for, as Fielding rightly insists, is love, benevolence, compassion — for charity, the perfection of the heart. This simple reminder constitutes a penetrating critique of arguments such as Balguy's. Given his moral-psychological postulates, this Christian rationalist is compelled to argue that charity which comes from the heart is effectively less meritorious than that which comes from the head:

Let us suppose two Persons equally producing any given Quantity of Beneficence, or Moment of Good; the one merely from a sweet Disposition, and a high Degree of Good-Nature; the other from Reason, Reflection, and Resolution, without any such good Natural Disposition, or in opposition to a bad one; do I need to ask whether of these Characters is more meritorious and virtuous?... They may appear perhaps equally amiable in the undistinguishing Eye of the World; but far otherwise in the sight of Heaven. (Foundation, Pt. I, pp. 59-60)<sup>6</sup>

A "sweet Disposition" and "a high Degree of Good-Nature": these are the essential qualities of Fielding's Good Man. But clearly not of Balguy's. The "Reason, Reflection, and Resolution" of the indifferent or ill-natured individual constitute a far greater degree of merit. But why? Because "Moral Merit" is a matter of "conforming, or endeavouring to conform our Actions to the Reasons of Things"? (Pt. I, p. 60). Perhaps, but does not the good-natured man's beneficent action equally conform to the reasons of things? Is it not equally consistent with the dictates of absolute, objective morality? In fact, his good deed is morally inferior precisely because he does it naturally, because he "steers his Course with the Advantage of a fair Wind, and a strong Tide", while the other individual "works his Way through a rough and stormy Sea, with great Care, Industry, and Application" (Pt. I, pp. 59-60). In other words, it seems, virtue or merit is proportionate to the degree of effort involved in the production of any good action, or in the living of a good life. Virtue entails not only the exertion of free will but also the exertion of what we now call will-power.

This revealing turn in Balguy's argument hints at the strong historical connexion between rationalism and asceticism. F. B. Kaye has pointed out how the former tended naturally to align itself with the latter: "Again

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<sup>6</sup> See also Pt. I, pp. 41-2.



and again it is manifest upon analysis that action according to reason is thought of (even by thinkers who sometimes take a different position) as action done despite the insistence of natural impulse".<sup>7</sup> The very psychology of rationalism, with its hierarchy of reason, will, and appetite, implies and presupposes that virtue involves some kind of self-conquest or self-denial. In turn, this supposition harmonizes with the orthodox theological view of human nature, and the related notion that virtue can never be a product of that nature.<sup>8</sup> Whether "Right Reason" or grace is proposed as the only true and reliable moral director, the rigorists and the Augustinians agree on this point, that mere "nature" is there to be subdued or transcended. Balguy, as an eighteenth-century Anglican, is heir to a rather more optimistic set of beliefs about human nature, and, as we have seen, is happy to concede the existence of God-implanted "benevolent Affections". As an ethical rationalist, however, he believes that reason is "our governing Principle, our supreme Guide": "All the other Principles in our Nature are placed in Subordination and Subjection to this. As an Army is to move and act in Obedience to its General, and by his Direction; so ought all the Powers of our Minds to be subject to Reason" (Foundation, Pt. II, p. 90). "Natural Affection", however desirable, is itself an "inferior Principle" and as such "must be intended as subservient to the superior" (Pt. I, p. 39). In this way, Balguy's quasi-Platonic moral psychology generates the crucial paradox to which Fielding alludes: what kind of Christian virtue can there be in subjugating "the passion of love or benevolence"? Here, perhaps, we see an example of the radical and inevitable tension between Christianity, with its unique emphasis on the 'heart', and the orthodox moral psychology of Western rationalism. By ranking the charitable natural affections with the other "inferior", sub-rational impulses, this psychological model tends to generate ethical implications which are not strictly compatible with Christian teaching. Most incongruous of all is its implicit stoical tendency. In arguing that benevolence is virtuous only insofar as it is rational, Balguy tends inevitably towards agreement with the characteristic doctrines of classical Stoicism.<sup>9</sup> Certainly, his definition of virtue has

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<sup>7</sup> Fable, I, cxxii (my emphasis).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Kaye, Fable, I, cxxi-cxxii. See also Harrison, The Novelist as Moral Philosopher, Ch. iv, esp. pp. 74-82.

<sup>9</sup> Ribble suggests that eighteenth-century ethical rigorism represents "a natural development of certain Stoic tendencies", and cites Balguy in this connexion ("Aristotle", p. 30).

very little to do with feeling. It would be unjust to suggest that Balguy's rationalism implies a quasi-stoical contempt for the natural affections. My point is that the very psychology of rationalism involves a devaluation of exactly those qualities which Christianity demands. According to Balguy, our actions are morally worthless "as far as our Wills are determined, either by Instinct, or any thing else besides Reason" (Foundation, Pt. I, p. 40: my emphasis). It must be assumed that this includes what Fielding calls "the passion of love or benevolence".

As we have seen, Balguy's moral psychology also generates the quasi-ascetic insinuation that virtue necessarily involves a denial or defiance of nature. The merit of any action is directly proportionate to the degree of effort it requires of the agent. If it comes "naturally" (or "necessarily") it is morally worthless. What this suggests, in turn, is that virtue is by definition a hard, laborious, and presumably unpleasant business — not a matter of gratifying the natural affections but of defying them. If it is not painful, Balguy implies, it cannot be virtuous. Here is another ethical principle with which Fielding consistently disagreed. In fact, the ascetic function of rationalism is one of the most conspicuous objects of moral polemic in his work. Everywhere he opposes the view that a man cannot be counted virtuous for doing that which he enjoys doing. His very definition of virtue ("a delight in doing good") turns the rigorist principle on its head: for Fielding, the merit of our good deeds is directly proportionate to the pleasure we find in them.<sup>10</sup> Virtue is not a function of reason but of the natural affections. In this sense, the highest virtue is that which does come "naturally", and therefore effortlessly. Fielding has no time for those "morose and austere Men" who "preach up Mortification and Self-Denial", who "insinuate that a Man cannot be good and happy at the same Time, and...deny all Merit to all Actions which are not done in Contradiction to Nature" (CGJ, No. 29: Jensen, I, 309). Elsewhere, Fielding plays with the rigorist principle by inverting it: "Happy the Man with Passions blest like you, / Who to be ill, his Nature must subdue" ("Of Good-Nature", ll. 40-41: Miscellanies I,

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Wendt, "Naked Virtue", p. 133 ("For Fielding...virtue involved the fulfillment of man's nature rather than its denial"). In this respect, as Wendt goes on to note, Fielding's moral position is decidedly anti-Richardsonian. See also Price, Palace of Wisdom, pp. 288-9; Williams, Marriage, p. 47; Harrison, op. cit., p. 113; and esp. Ribble, "Aristotle", pp. 30-33, 36-8, 46, on Fielding's characteristic opposition to rigorism, and its Aristotelian parallels.



p. 32).<sup>11</sup> For Fielding, the "Perfection of human Nature" is not reason but benevolence, "that Passion...of which the Delight is in doing Good" (CGJ, No. 29: Jensen, I, 308). This is "Virtue's Self" ("Of Good-Nature", l. 7: Miscellanies I, p. 30). The quintessence of moral goodness is a natural passion, and one which (like all others) has its proper pleasure. True virtue consists not in self-conquest but in a special kind of self-gratification. The ethical substance of Fielding's work is, both directly and indirectly, anti-rigoristic and anti-ascetic.

In the light of all this, it is a little surprising to find that Balguy's conception of virtue ("the Conformity of our Wills to our Understandings", "determining our selves freely to act and do what appears conformable to Reason") is precisely the one attributed to Fielding by a great many of his modern critics.<sup>12</sup> Again and again, the commentators have found what J. V. Price calls "a traditional opposition between reason and the passions" in Fielding's handling of character and conduct, with all that this implies.<sup>13</sup> Battestin, in particular, has made a great deal of this reason-passions "opposition". He represents Fielding as an orthodox rationalist who believed in "the attainment of virtue through the shaping powers of reason and free will".<sup>14</sup> For Fielding, we are told, the virtuous man is the "prudent" man, who "recognizes that the passions, the irrational impulses of the natural man, are his enemies": prudence (as Battestin understands it) implies rigorous "self-discipline".<sup>15</sup> In Tom Jones, particularly, Fielding insists that virtue is "as much a matter of the

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Miller's footnote on these lines (loc. cit., n. 2).

<sup>12</sup> Sacks is a significant exception, recognizing that Fielding displays "little faith in the efficacy of reason and, indeed, much dissatisfaction with an ethic predicated on the notion that rational denial of the dictates of passion leads to good action" (Shape of Belief, p. 116).

<sup>13</sup> "Sex and the Foundling Boy", p. 44. See also Wendt, "Naked Virtue", pp. 140-41 (n. 14); Miller, Essays pp. 225, 267 (though Miller does qualify the opposition); Ehrenpreis, Fielding: TJ, p. 36; Thomas, "Fortune and the Passions", pp. 184-7; Golden, Fielding's Moral Psychology, Chs. ii, iv, passim; Alter, Nature of the Novel, pp. 88-93; Williams, Marriage, pp. 55-6; Karl, Reader's Guide, pp. 152, 167 ff.; and Tuvia Bloch, "Amelia and Booth's Doctrine of the Passions", SEL, 13 (1973), 461-73 (pp. 461-2).

<sup>14</sup> Moral Basis, p. 80, n. 86 (p. 175). See also pp. 59, 84, 152.

<sup>15</sup> Providence, pp. 168, 170.

understanding and the will as of the heart": Jones "must perfect his 'Understanding', as Sophia herself insists (XI, vii), must learn not only to distinguish between the values of the spirit and those of the flesh... but to discipline his will so that his knowledge may govern his life" —

What Tom Jones fundamentally lacks, of course, is prudentia: moral vision and self-discipline. Although he intuitively perceives the difference between Sophia and the daughters of Eve, he is too much the creature of his own passions to act upon that knowledge... Only in prison, at the nadir of his misfortunes, does the full meaning of his imprudence appear to him... Jones arrives at last at that crucial moment of self-awareness toward which the novel has been moving... Here is at once the climax and the resolution of the theme of prudentia in the novel... Prudence... is the supreme virtue of the Christian humanist tradition, entailing knowledge and discipline of the self and the awareness that our lives, ultimately, are shaped less by circumstances, than by reason and the will.<sup>16</sup>

All these spirit-flesh dichotomies, the ideals of self-knowledge and rational self-discipline, the notion that reason is the source of virtuous conduct and that the passions are therefore the "enemies" of virtue — all these things are essentially alien to the ethical traditions which find expression in Tom Jones.<sup>17</sup> Battestin is only the most insistent of many who have aligned Fielding's work with the Western rationalist tradition initiated by Plato. The putative psychic conflict between reason and the passions (or, as Christianity translated it, between the spirit and the flesh) belongs to that tradition. The locus classicus is Plato's Republic. Here, using an extremely influential extended analogy between the structure of the political state and the structure of the human psyche, Plato defines the ideal psychological hierarchy. Reason is the supreme Authority of the soul, while the desires and appetites, en masse, constitute the forces of potential anarchy, and continually threaten subversion or usurpation. Here, in political terms, are the two radically

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 179, 185, 176-7.

<sup>17</sup> Alter rightly notes Fielding's basic "denial of spirit-flesh dichotomies", but seems to me to compromise this insight by translating the traditional oppositions into an "interplay between energy and restraint" (Nature of the Novel, pp. 16, 88). Harrison is impressed by Fielding's desertion of moral-psychological dichotomies (but fails, I think, to theorize the psychology that Fielding put in their place): see The Novelist as Moral Philosopher, pp. 27, 111, 113-4. See also Miller, Essays, pp. 266-71; and Ribble, "Aristotle", p. 47.



opposed powers of the soul: "We may call that part of the soul whereby it reflects, rational; and the other, with which it feels hunger and thirst and is distracted by sexual passion and all other desires, we will call irrational appetite, associated with pleasure in the replenishment of certain wants".<sup>18</sup> The healthy soul (like the healthy state) depends upon the maintenance of law and order: the lower elements of the psyche must be obedient to rational authority. In the soul of the virtuous individual, reason always prevails over appetite, as Plato explains elsewhere:

We must observe that in each one of us there are two ruling and leading principles, which we follow whithersoever they lead; one is the innate desire for pleasures, the other an acquired opinion which strives for the best. These two sometimes agree within us and are sometimes in strife; and sometimes one, and sometimes the other has the greater power. Now when opinion leads through reason toward the best and is more powerful, its power is called self-restraint, but when desire irrationally drags us toward pleasures and rules within us, its rule is called excess.<sup>19</sup>

The pursuit of virtue, which involves the dominion of reason over irrational appetite, clearly implies a continual "strife" between these two opposed principles. For Plato, the passions are properly the slaves of reason. Virtue is a matter of translating knowledge (or "opinion") into practice, and the desires can only interfere with this rational mechanism.

The moral psychology of Platonism — which was of course adopted and consolidated by the Stoic moralists — is palpably difficult to square with the quasi-Hutchesonian ethics to which Fielding was committed. Battestin's 'rationalist' reading of Tom Jones appears to be another function of his dependence upon Cicero. In moral-psychological terms, what we find in De Officiis is essentially the stern rationalism of Plato and the Stoics:

Now we find that the essential activity of the spirit is twofold: one force is appetite..., which impels a man this way and that; the other is reason [ratio]..., which teaches and explains what should be done and what should be left undone. The result is that reason commands, appetite obeys. (I, xxviii, 101)

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<sup>18</sup> Republic, IV, 439d. I quote from The Republic of Plato, ed. and trans. F. M. Cornford, Oxford, 1941, II, xiii, p. 133.

<sup>19</sup> Phaedrus, trans. Harold North Fowler, Loeb Classical Library, 1947, 237e-238a.

The appetites...must be made to obey the reins of reason and neither allowed to run ahead of it nor...to lag behind; but people should enjoy calm of soul and be free from every sort of passion... For when appetites overstep their bounds and, galloping away, so to speak, whether in desire or aversion, are not well held in hand by reason, they clearly overleap all bound and measure; for they throw obedience off...and refuse to obey the reins of reason, to which they are subject by Nature's laws. (I, xxix, 102)

Ciceronian prudentia is a direct descendant of Aristotelian phronēsis, and does indeed have much in common with Fielding's idea of prudence. But the moral psychology of De Officiis is clearly derived from the Platonic rather than the Aristotelian tradition: Ciceronian virtue is an essentially rational accomplishment, involving the subordination of every appetite to the sovereign commands of reason. Battestin's choice of Cicero as his principle ethical authority is inappropriate in itself.<sup>20</sup> Matters are made worse by his loose handling of Ciceronian terms: he confuses and conflates prudentia not only with sapientia but also with ratio,<sup>21</sup> as if prudentia could be substituted for ratio in the passages quoted above, without any significant change of meaning. In his essay on Tom Jones, Battestin imports Cicero's quasi-Platonic psychology along with his definition of prudentia and mingles the two, a move which (given the premise that Cicero was "principally responsible" for the meaning of prudence in Tom Jones)<sup>22</sup> naturally leads to the conclusion that Fielding was an orthodox ethical rationalist.

Battestin's reasoning is not only unsound in itself, but flies in the face of all the plainest evidence. To view Fielding as a literary cousin of Samuel Clarke or John Balguy involves ignoring (among other things) the very broad streak of anti-rationalist satire that runs through his work. Fielding's sympathy with Billy Booth's view that "we reason from our Heads, but act from our Hearts" (Amelia, VIII, x, p. 350) is manifest

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<sup>20</sup> This has also been pointed out by Ribble, "Aristotle", pp. 28, 44-5.

<sup>21</sup> On one occasion Battestin actually substitutes the term "Right Reason" for "prudence" (Providence, p. 176).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 167.



throughout his oeuvre.<sup>23</sup> How would the rationalist critics account for Fielding's treatment of the "Rule of Right-men" in Joseph Andrews (III, iii)? This is a characteristic satiric reflection on the limitations of reason and the impracticalities of ethical rationalism. "These Gentlemen", explains Wilson, "governed themselves only by the infallible Guide of Human Reason" (p. 212). Wilson enjoys this "delightful Dream" while it lasts, but soon finds that their rational accomplishments do not prevent these amateur philosophers from abducting each others' wives and stealing each others' money: "These several Practices", remarks Wilson, "so inconsistent with our golden Rule, made me begin to suspect its Infallibility" (p. 213). The point of this ironic understatement is of course that "Human Reason" is very far from being an "infallible Guide" in matters of practical morality. The same kind of moral-psychological satire is featured in Fielding's representation of Square, the arch-rationalist of Tom Jones. This "wise and grave Man", who speaks the same language as Clarke and Balguy, "measured all Actions by the unalterable Rule of Right, and the eternal Fitness of Things" (TJ, V, v, p. 230; III, iii, p. 126).<sup>24</sup> He is "deeply read in the Antients, and a profest Master of all the Works of Plato and Aristotle"; and, significantly enough, he is "a profest Platonist" in "Morals":

But tho' he had...formed his Morals on the Platonic Model, yet he perfectly agreed with the Opinion of Aristotle, in considering that great Man rather in the Quality of a Philosopher or a Speculatist, than as a Legislator. This Sentiment he carried a great way; indeed, so far, as to regard

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<sup>23</sup> Battestin himself has noted this, associating it with the anti-Stoical tendencies of Fielding's ethics: see Moral Basis, pp. 66-9. It is hard to see how this can be squared with Battestin's later, rationalistic reading of Tom Jones.

<sup>24</sup> The locus classicus of Square's typical moral vocabulary is Clarke's Discourse: see esp. Prop. I, pp. 45-116. For an account of the philosophical tradition to which this vocabulary belonged, see A. R. Humphreys, "'The Eternal Fitness of Things': An Aspect of Eighteenth-Century Thought", MLR, 42 (1947), 188-98. See also A. R. Towers, "Fielding and Dr. Samuel Clarke", MLN, 70 (1955), 257-60; and Ruthven, "Fielding, Square, and the Fitness of Things", *passim*. It should be said that Fielding's rough handling of Square does not amount to a generalized indictment of Clarke's rational theology. There is much in Clarke besides extreme ethical intellectualism (much, indeed, that Fielding would have wholeheartedly accepted); and it should of course be remembered that Square's cant-phrases are no less important as indices of his own ridiculous intellectual vanity than as critical reflections on Clarke's ethical theories.

all Virtue as a Matter of Theory only. This, it is true, he never affirmed, as I have heard, to any one; and yet upon the least Attention to his Conduct, I cannot help thinking, it was his real Opinion, as it will perfectly reconcile some Contradictions which might otherwise appear in his Character. (TJ, III, iii, pp. 124-5)

In no sense is this a critical reflection on Aristotle. If there is a satirical butt other than Square himself, it is surely Plato. But this is to understate the complexity of the joke. The real irony lies in Square's choice of Plato as his ethical "Model", in spite of his respect for Aristotle's critique of Platonism. According to Aristotle, Platonic rationalism is speculative and impractical, and Square accepts this; at the same time, he rejects Aristotle himself as an ethical "Model" and, in preferring Plato, deliberately pursues a course of practical impracticality. With these two "Antients" as his (incompatible) authorities, Square can regard himself as a paradigm of classical virtue. The basic point behind all this, however, is that Square — whatever his classical models — is the rationalist par excellence: as with the freethinkers in Joseph Andrews, there are certain "Contradictions" in his conduct which lead one to suspect that his "Morals" are "a Matter of Theory only".

Before we look at these little "Contradictions", it will be useful to review Tom Jones's "Accident" with Molly Seagrim, where Fielding seems indeed to explain his hero's behaviour in terms of what J. V. Price calls "a traditional opposition between reason and the passions". He reminds us that Jones "was not at this Time perfect Master of that wonderful Power of Reason, which so well enables grave and wise Men to subdue their unruly Passions, and to decline any of these prohibited Amusements" (TJ, V, x, p. 257). Price apparently takes this at face value, and one suspects that others have done the same. This, no doubt, is the kind of thing that has led many of Fielding's critics to portray him as an orthodox rationalist. But the meaning — and indeed the comedy — of this passage is almost entirely dependent upon the reader's memory of an earlier scene: the exposure of Square in Molly Seagrim's garret-boudoir. All the important ironies in Fielding's apology for Jones's "Accident" disappear if the implied reference to this earlier episode is neglected. Here, then, is Fielding's apology for Square's own "Accident":

I question not but the Surprise of the Reader will be here equal to that of Jones; as the Suspicions which must arise



from the Appearance of this wise and grave Man in such a Place, may seem so inconsistent with that Character, which he hath, doubtless, maintained hitherto, in the Opinion of every one.

But to confess the Truth, this Inconsistency is rather imaginary than real. Philosophers are composed of Flesh and Blood as well as other human Creatures; and however sublimated and refined the Theory of these may be, a little practical Frailty is as incident to them as to other Mortals. It is, indeed, in Theory only and not in Practice, as we have before hinted, that consists the Difference: For tho' such great Beings think much better and more wisely, they always act exactly like other Men. They know very well how to subdue all Appetites and Passions, and to despise both Pain and Pleasure; and this Knowledge affords much delightful Contemplation, and is easily acquired; but the Practice would be vexatious and troublesome; and, therefore, the same Wisdom which teaches them to know this, teaches them to avoid carrying it into Execution. (TJ, V, v, p. 230)

If we read the later scene with all this in mind (as we clearly should), the ironies in Fielding's commentary are thrown into bold relief. With the ironic subtext taken into account, the apology for Jones's "Accident" actually reads as follows: Jones "was not at this time perfect master of that so-called wonderful power of reason, which in any case always fails to enable so-called grave and wise men to subdue their unruly passions, or to decline any of these prohibited amusements". The real point of the passage lies in these ironies and indirections. The later scene is in effect an extension of the anti-rationalist satire directed at Square in the earlier scene. And it might be said that Jones is exculpated less by Fielding's explicit pleading than by these implicit references to the precedent set by Square.

But there are further ironies in Fielding's treatment of this wise and grave man. Explaining, retrospectively, how Square came to be in Molly's room, Fielding tells us that the philosopher was at first reluctant to attempt seduction, though he was not restrained by any "sublimated and refined" principles:

Among other Particulars which constituted the Unfitness of Things in Mr. Square's Opinion, Danger and Difficulty were two. The Difficulty, therefore, which he apprehended there might be in corrupting this young Wench, and the Danger which would accrue to his Character on the Discovery, were such strong Dissuasives, that it is probable, he at first intended to have contented himself with the pleasing Ideas which the Sight of Beauty furnishes us with. (TJ, V, v, p. 230)

In short, this ethical rationalist is in practice a prudentialist: the "unfit" is the difficult and the dangerous, and the "fit" (presumably) the easy and the safe.<sup>25</sup> Square's practical morality is identical with that of Partridge, the arch-prudentialist, who is "one of those who have more Consideration of the Gallows than of the Fitness of Things" (TJ, X, vi, p. 547). The only difference is that Partridge has the honesty to own his principles.

Square was not the first of Fielding's doctrinal rationalists to be treated with ridicule. The Christian stoicism of Parson Adams, who was "a great Enemy to the Passions, and preached nothing more than the Conquest of them by Reason and Grace" (JA, IV, viii, p. 309), suffers a similarly humiliating exposure. Again, the clash between theory and practice, reason and nature, is contrived as a satiric reflection on the impractical and impracticable demands of ethical rationalism.<sup>26</sup> Like Square, Adams reasons from his head but acts from his heart. Much of the comedy in Joseph Andrews is generated by this kind of disjunction. Parson Adams is not alone. The regular psychic conflicts suffered by Lady Booby, for instance, are full of playful satire on the so-called "wonderful Power of Reason". At one point she achieves a glorious conquest over her passion for Joseph, which, in proposing that she consider marrying him, has really gone too far:

'...How I detest the Thought! How much more exquisite is the Pleasure resulting from the Reflection of Virtue and Prudence, than the faint Relish of what flows from Vice and Folly! Whither did I suffer this improper, this mad Passion to hurry me, only by neglecting to summon the Aids of Reason to my Assistance? Reason, which hath now set before me my Desires in their proper Colours, and immediately helped me to expel them. Yes, I thank Heaven and my Pride, I have now perfectly conquered this unworthy Passion...' (JA, IV, xiii, p. 328)

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<sup>25</sup> Square, like the freethinkers in Joseph Andrews, understands the concept of "Fitness" in whatever way is most convenient at the time. Later in the exposure scene, he declares "Nothing is, indeed, unfit which is not unnatural" (TJ, V, v, p. 232). Here, his ethic shades illogically into pseudo-Hobbesian libertinism: cf. the "Rule of Right-men and the putative "Right from Nature" to relieve any physical need (JA, III, iii, p. 213).

<sup>26</sup> Miller would apparently question this: see Essays, pp. 262-3, 264-6. I share Sacks's view that the kind of comic self-contradiction displayed by Adams is designed to reflect less on the aspiring Stoic than on Stoicism itself: see Shape of Belief, pp. 180-81, 188-90.



Taken out of context, this might conceivably be taken for an example of straightforward ethical rationalism, perhaps even Christian rationalism. That Lady Booby thanks her own "Pride" as well as "Heaven" furnishes a clue to what is really going on here. What she achieves — temporarily — is a prudential self-conquest. Reason is involved to the extent that she estimates the socially humiliating consequences of marrying a mere footman: "Distraction! Can I afterwards bear the Eyes of my Acquaintance?" (p. 327). Providence engages pride. And pride, in turn, is what really conquers her "mean and vile Appetite" for Joseph (p. 328). Lady Booby's pious attribution of this victory to "Reason" is a significant part of the joke. But Fielding goes further, by having Slipslop interrupt the self-congratulations with the news that Joseph and Fanny have been found to be brother and sister:

This unexpected Account entirely obliterated all those admirable Reflections which the supreme Power of Reason had so wisely made just before. (p. 328)

Here is a further clue to what Fielding really meant in Tom Jones when he spoke of the "wonderful Power of Reason". Here, as there, its putative wonderful supremacy is the subject of ironic ridicule. Lady Booby cannot even cleave to her prudential resolution: lust inevitably gets the better of social self-love. Fielding is not representing a conflict between reason and the passions, but (as it were) a civil war of the heart, a conflict between one passion and another.<sup>27</sup> At other times, Lady Booby enlists other passions on the side of pride:

Reflection then...told her she must see this beautiful Youth no more, nay, suggested to her, that she herself had dismissed him for no other Fault, than probably that of too violent an Awe and Respect for herself...; she then blamed, she cursed the hasty Rashness of her Temper; her Fury was vented all on herself, and Joseph appeared innocent in her Eyes. Her Passion at length grew so violent that it forced her on seeking Relief, and now she thought of recalling him: But Pride forbad that, Pride which soon drove all softer Passions from her Soul, and represented to her the Meanness of him she was fond of. That Thought soon began to obscure his Beauties; Contempt succeeded next, and then Disdain, which presently introduced her Hatred of the Creature who had given her so much Uneasiness... Revenge now came to her Assistance; and she considered her Dismission of him stript ...with the utmost Pleasure. She rioted in the several kinds

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<sup>27</sup> Note the similar conflict in JA, I, viii, p. 42.

of Misery, which her Imagination suggested to her, might be his Fate; and with a Smile composed of Anger, Mirth, and Scorn, viewed him in the Rags in which her Fancy had drest him.

Mrs. Slipslop being summoned, attended her Mistress, who had now in her own Opinion totally subdued this Passion... (JA, IV, i, pp. 278-9)

It takes no fewer than seven discrete passions, besides pride, to secure the victory. Reason is simply not involved, except insofar as "Imagination" is here vaguely akin to the rational providence recommended by the prudentialists. What we actually see is again a conflict between self-love and the passions. And again the so-called self-conquest is dramatically threatened by news from Slipslop: "Now ensued a second Conflict... It may suffice to say, that Lady Booby found good Reason to doubt whether she had so absolutely conquered her Passion, as she had flattered herself" (p. 280). The very notion of self-conquest, never mind rational self-conquest, is held up as an aspect of human self-flattery. In this sense, it might almost be said to be an example of "the true Ridiculous" (JA, Preface, p. 7).

There are many other satirical glances at rationalism in Fielding's work. Many of these involve the attribution of rational self-command to rogues and (especially) villains. Jonathan Wild, for instance, is "truly superior...to all the efforts of passion", "superior to all the energies of fear and pity" (JW, II, viii: Henley, II, 82; II, x: Henley, II, 86). To be self-consistent, Fielding's rationalist critics would have to view this as evidence of some kind of (quasi-stoical) virtue in Wild. In the first case, however, Fielding is referring to Wild's prudent postponement of his projected seduction of Mrs Heartfree; and in the second, he is paying ironic tribute to the great man's single-minded inhumanity (Wild resolves not only to rape Mrs Heartfree, but to do it in the midst of a storm at sea). To be "superior...to all the efforts of passion" — of some passions, at least — is a qualification "necessary to a hero" (JW, II, x: Henley, II, 86). But a "hero" in this novel is of course a villain. It is hardly surprising, then, to find that the villain of Tom Jones is also an accomplished self-conqueror. Unlike Wild, Blifil is never even tempted to commit rape (not, at least, outside the pale of holy matrimony):

The Charms of Sophia had not made the least Impression on Blifil; not that his Heart was pre-engaged; neither was he totally insensible of Beauty, or had any Aversion to Women;



but his Appetites were, by Nature, so moderate, that he was able by Philosophy or by Study, or by some other Method, easily to subdue them... (TJ, VI, iv, pp. 283-4: my emphasis)

The effect of this sly indirection is, at the very least, to cast doubt on the efficacy of "Philosophy" and "Study", and to draw the reader's attention and curiosity to the "other Method" of self-conquest. When the reader has concluded (as he surely must) that Fielding means masturbation (as he surely does), the tribute to Blifil's rational accomplishments begins to look decidedly back-handed.<sup>28</sup>

Battestin repeatedly finds Fielding "commending the stoic view that virtue is an art to be acquired only by opposing reason to our natural impulses and inclinations".<sup>29</sup> But for Fielding, ally of the sentimental benevolists, virtue is essentially a natural inclination. His work does recommend certain kinds of self-conquest, but these have less to do with Stoicism than with prudentialism. Fielding's attitude to the Stoic ideal of rational self-command is evidently typical of contemporary Anglican attitudes.<sup>30</sup> Bishop Butler, for instance, regarded the ideal of apatheia as both impracticable and undesirable:

In general, experience will shew, that as want of natural appetite to food supposes and proceeds from some bodily disease; so that apathy the Stoics talk of, as much supposes, or is accompanied with, somewhat amiss in the moral character, in that which is the health of the mind. Those who formerly aimed at this upon the foot of philosophy, appear to have had better success in eradicating the affections of tenderness and compassion, than they had with the passions of envy, pride, and resentment: these latter, at best, were but concealed, and that imperfectly too. ("Upon Compassion", 15 Sermons, V, 11: my emphasis)

Butler not only questions the moral value of apathy, but questions the

<sup>28</sup> See above, p. 141. And cf. Square's clandestine penchant for pornography, and "a certain liquorish Part of natural Philosophy": TJ, V, v, p. 231.

<sup>29</sup> "The Problem of Amelia: Hume, Barrow, and the Conversion of Captain Booth", ELH, 41 (1974), 613-48 (p. 618). Cited hereafter as "Problem".

<sup>30</sup> For the best general account of Fielding's attitude to Stoicism, and its contemporary contexts, see Miller, Essays, pp. 228-71, esp. 253 ff. (Miller's Fielding is however somewhat more sympathetic with this aspect of Stoicism than I find him).

truth of Stoic claims to have actually exercised this virtue, and implicitly questions whether it can ever be exercised. Fielding is similarly sceptical about this, often viewing pretended self-conquest as actual self-concealment. In the Champion, for instance, he considers the universal prevalence of fear and vanity in human nature, and suggests that "we are not distinguished from one another by the degrees of these passions, but by the power of subduing, or rather concealing them" (15 April 1740: Henley, XV, 279: my emphasis). The change of verb amounts to a characteristic reflection on the impracticability of stoical self-command. What is more significant, however, is that Fielding typically attributes this kind of self-control ("the power of...concealing" passions) to the less desirable characters in his fiction. Jonathan Wild is distinguished by a "perfect mastery of his temper, or rather of his muscles" (JW, II, iii: Henley, II, 63). This self-mastery is of course a distinctive characteristic of the accomplished hypocrite. On one occasion, the treacherous Wild visits one of his scapegoats in Newgate: he "found Mr. Bagshot in expectation of his bail, and, with a countenance full of concern, which he could at any time, with wonderful art, put on, told him that all was discovered" (II, ii: Henley, II, 55). This "art", Fielding tells us, "is as necessary to the forming a great character as to the personating it on the stage" (II, iii: Henley, II, 63).<sup>31</sup> This is the "noble Art" of hypocrisy, as Fielding calls it in Amelia — an "Art" exemplified by Colonel James in keeping up the pretence of friendship to Booth while contemplating the seduction of his wife: in this, James displays "a great Command of himself" (IX, ii, p. 361). It goes without saying that the greatest master of this "noble Art" in Fielding's fiction is young Master Blifil himself. Again and again Fielding debunks the myth of stoical self-command by reducing it to the mere manipulation of appearances.

This, for Fielding, is perhaps the only sense in which reason can exert any direct, unmediated influence on conduct. It cannot 'conquer', 'subdue' or (least of all) eradicate the passions; but it can direct our behaviour in such a way as to conceal or disguise those passions. In short, it modifies only the public expression of the passions: practical 'rationality' of this kind amounts to nothing more than intelligent and imaginative self-presentation. As such, it is a morally neutral

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Champion, 15 December 1739, on the "art of politics" (Henley, XV, 103-4): "the art of grinning with a heavy heart", says Fielding, "is the very greatest qualification of a statesman" (p. 104).



accomplishment, but one equally necessary to both the good man and the villain. This is one of Fielding's principal concerns in Tom Jones. Here, he explains how alcohol tends to subvert this kind of self-mastery:

To say Truth, nothing is more erroneous than the common Observation, That Men who are ill-natured and quarrelsome when they are drunk, are very worthy Persons when they are sober: For Drink, in reality, doth not reverse Nature, or create Passions in Men, which did not exist in them before. It takes away the Guard of Reason, and consequently forces us to produce those Symptoms, which many, when sober, have Art enough to conceal. It heightens and inflames our Passions (generally indeed that Passion which is uppermost in our Mind) so that the angry Temper, the amorous, the generous, the good-humoured, the avaricious, and all other Dispositions of Men, are in their Cups heightened and exposed. (TJ, V, ix, p. 252: my emphases)

Reason is not a governor of the passions but a "Guard". It can evidently manage only the behavioural "Symptoms" of our passions or "Dispositions". This species of rationality is essentially only the "Art" of self-concealment or self-disguise. If the "Guard of Reason" is dropped, as a result of drink or anything else, our passions are "exposed" — but the passions were always there, and always active.

It is not insignificant that this essay on the effects of drink comes in the chapter immediately preceding Jones's "Accident" with Molly Seagrim. Here we are told that Jones "had naturally violent animal Spirits", and these, "being set on Float, and augmented by the Spirit of Wine, produced most extravagant Effects" (TJ, V, ix, p. 252). Just how "extravagant" becomes clear in the Molly Seagrim episode. Jones falls because the "wonderful Power of Reason" has lost command — not of his passions but of his muscles. The fall, with its dire consequences, is Fielding's most graphic illustration of the need for what he calls "Prudence and Circumspection" (III, vii, p. 141). It is not for his passions, or his "Disposition", that Jones is arraigned, condemned and punished, but for his "Wantonness, Wildness, and Want of Caution" — for his "extravagant" behaviour. This, says Fielding, will "afford a very useful Lesson to those well-disposed Youths, who shall hereafter be our Readers":

For they may here find that Goodness of Heart, and Openness of Temper, tho' these may give them great Comfort within, and administer to an honest Pride in their own Minds, will by no Means, alas! do their Business in the World. Prudence and

Circumspection are necessary even to the best of Men. They are indeed as it were a Guard to Virtue, without which she can never be safe. It is not enough that your Designs, nay that your Actions are intrinsically good, you must take Care they shall appear so. If your Inside be never so beautiful, you must preserve a fair Outside also. This must be constantly looked to, or Malice and Envy will take Care to blacken it so, that the Sagacity and Goodness of an Allworthy will not be able to see through it, and to discern the Beauties within. Let this, my young Readers, be your constant Maxim, That no Man can be good enough to enable him to neglect the Rules of Prudence; nor will Virtue herself look beautiful, unless she be bedecked with the outward Ornaments of Decency and Decorum. (TJ, III, vii, p. 141)

Here is Fielding attempting to make good men wise.<sup>32</sup> Among other things, this passage makes nonsense of the "notion" allegedly "developed in Tom Jones", that "morality resides in the power of prudence and the will to govern the passions".<sup>33</sup> Jones is already among "the best of Men", and his moral excellence is denoted here by "Goodness of Heart" and "Openness of Temper". He is clearly not going to become good by cultivating "Prudence and Circumspection", nor indeed by exerting his "will" (which Fielding mentions neither here nor anywhere else in Tom Jones). Jones's "morality" is taken for granted. But "Prudence and Circumspection" are "necessary even to the best of Men". These will have no real bearing on the quality of Jones's "Inside" (which is already "beautiful" in any case), but will beautify his "Outside", his behaviour. To "Virtue" must be added "Decency and Decorum". The proper domain of "Prudence and Circumspection" is not stoical self-command but social self-presentation, the management of appearances.

Blifil is a master of the "Art" of self-presentation. But while the disjunction between his "Inside" and "Outside" is contrived deliberately, Jones misrepresents himself inadvertently, through "Wantonness, Wildness, and Want of Caution". It is in this sense, and this sense alone, that "the task of the hero is to acquire one of the chief traits of the villain".<sup>34</sup> One of the principal mistakes of Fielding's critics has been to confuse

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<sup>32</sup> Kinkead-Weekes warns us against taking this passage seriously, arguing that it is in fact only a "comic parody" of "the moralising author of a conduct book for young people": see "Out of the Thicket", pp. 2-5 (I quote from p. 5).

<sup>33</sup> Battestin, "Problem", p. 635.

<sup>34</sup> Hutchens, "Connotative Irony", p. 501.



this circumspective function of prudence with the thing itself.<sup>35</sup> If Jones is already morally good, why should "Circumspection" or "Decency and Decorum" be "necessary", except as a function of rational self-interest? Insofar as Jones's wanton behaviour is what causes his downfall, it is a product of imprudence — contrary to his "true Interest" (TJ, Dedication, p. 7). Prudence could have averted this downfall, not by subduing his passions (not, at any rate, in the stoical sense) but by controlling the expression of them — and one of them in particular. The very point and end of this social self-management would have been to promote and secure his own "true Interest", to do his "Business in the World". To suggest that "Prudence and Circumspection" have nothing to do with simple self-interest is to render Fielding's "very useful Lesson" perfectly useless.

As I have said, the kind of self-command with which Fielding is principally concerned in Tom Jones is a species of self-presentation. Reason can subdue the passions only in a metonymic sense, by prescribing behaviour which will deny or disguise their existence. In short, reason can compensate for its lack of control over nature by controlling manners. Consider the following passage from Tom Jones:

THOUGH Nature hath by no Means mixed up an equal Share either of Curiosity or Vanity in every human Composition, there is perhaps no Individual to whom she hath not allotted such a Proportion of both, as requires much Art, and Pains too, to subdue and keep under. A Conquest, however, absolutely necessary to every one who would in any Degree deserve the Characters of Wisdom or Good-Breeding.

As Jones therefore might very justly be called a well-bred Man, he had stifled all that Curiosity which the extraordinary Manner in which he had found Mrs. Waters, must be supposed to have occasioned. (IX, vii, p. 518)

"Wisdom" dictates the suppression of public vanities because, as Fielding had said in the Champion, "good sense will always teach us, that by betraying either fear or vanity, we expose both to the attacks of our enemies" (15 April 1740: Henley, XV, 279: my emphasis). Vanity is of course one of the twin sources of truly "ridiculous" behaviour.<sup>36</sup> To conceal it, therefore, is to secure oneself from the laughter of one's

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<sup>35</sup> See, for instance, Dudden, Henry Fielding, II, 684-5; Coolidge, "'Conservation of Character'", passim; Hatfield, Language of Irony, pp. 179-82; and Rawson, "Order and Misrule", pp. 484-5.

<sup>36</sup> See JA, Preface, pp. 7-9.

"enemies". "I have often thought", says Fielding, "that such wise men as conceal their vanity, make a large amends to themselves by feeding this passion with contemplation on the ridiculous appearance of it in others" (Henley, XV, 279: my emphasis). There is a delicious paradox here: by concealing his vanity, the "wise" man actually secures himself greater opportunities of gratifying it. One way or another, this kind of self-conquest is a function of self-interest. And if the suppression of vanity is an aspect of wisdom, the suppression of "Curiosity" is essential to "Good-Breeding". Jones has to exercise "Art" and "Pains" not to conquer or eradicate the passion, but to keep himself from asking embarrassing questions: his curiosity is not banished but merely denied expression — "stifled", as one would stifle a yawn. This is all that "Good-Breeding" demands.<sup>37</sup> To expect more would be to expect impossibilities, as Fielding himself implies later in Tom Jones:

THE elegant Lord Shaftesbury somewhere objects to telling too Much Truth: By which it may be fairly inferred, that, in some Cases, to lie, is not only excusable but commendable.

And surely there are no Persons who may so properly challenge a Right to this commendable Deviation from Truth, as young Women in the Affair of Love; for which they may plead Precept, Education, and above all, the Sanction, nay, I may say, the Necessity of Custom, by which they are restrained, not from submitting to the honest Impulses of Nature (for that would be a foolish Prohibition) but from owning them. (XIII, xii, p. 736)

Eighteenth-century feminine delicacy, like "Good-Breeding" in general, involves a kind of practical dishonesty — not the conquest but the concealment of "the honest Impulses of Nature". To demand more would be simply "foolish".

Again and again Fielding implies that rational self-conquest of the stoical kind is naturally impossible — that "reason alone" is, in Hume's words, "incapable of preventing volition, or of disputing the preference with any passion or emotion" (Treatise, II.3.iii, pp. 414-5). Fielding's working psychological assumptions are clearly (and sometimes aggressively) Humean in tendency. Consider this ironic eulogy on the force of avarice:

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. TJ, VI, x, p. 306, where Allworthy (resisting the temptation to laugh at Squire Western) exemplifies this kind of polite self-restraint.



By the Force of the true Catholic Faith, St. Anthony  
won upon the Fishes. Orpheus and Amphion went a little farther,  
and by the Charms of Music enchanted Things merely inanimate.  
Wonderful both! But neither History nor Fable have ever yet  
ventured to record an Instance of any one, who by Force of  
Argument and Reason hath triumphed over habitual Avarice.  
(TJ, XIV, viii, p. 777)<sup>38</sup>

Avarice may be a particularly domineering passion, but, as we have seen, Fielding's work suggests that "Reason" is equally incapable of triumphing directly over sexual desire, over grief, joy, vanity, curiosity, and presumably every other natural passion. Much of the comedy in Fielding's novels is in one way or another related to the natural ascendancy of the passions. It is certainly difficult to see how Fielding could be viewed as an ethical rationalist. His work repeatedly insinuates that the practical powers of reason are very far from "wonderful". And, even more important, Fielding believes virtue itself to consist quintessentially in the ascendancy of one particular passion: benevolence. Traditional rationalist moral psychology is peculiarly inappropriate as a comparative model.

How then do we account for the widespread critical tendency to Platonize Fielding's handling of character and conduct? Most rationalist interpretations of the novels appear to hinge on a single leader in the Champion (2 February 1739/40).<sup>39</sup> This essay has repeatedly been misread and misrepresented. The misreadings can be accounted for partly in terms of tone-deafness. Fielding's first five paragraphs are dominated by parodic hyperbole and critical irony: he exaggerates and ridicules the rhetorical clichés of ethical rationalism in an almost painful elaboration of the metaphor implied by the notion of self-conquest. An army of rebellious passions confronts reason, the beleaguered hero of the piece:

THE conquest of one's self is justly preferred by wise men  
to that of armies and kingdoms... Whoever carefully surveys  
his own mind, will find sufficient enemies to combat within;  
an army of obstinate passions that...will often force his

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. TJ, VIII, i, p. 405: "I will venture to say, that for a Man to act in direct Contradiction to the Dictates of his Nature, is, if not impossible, as improbable and miraculous as any Thing which can well be conceived."

<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, Wendt, "Naked Virtue", p. 141, n. 14; Miller, Essays, p. 218 (but see also pp. 262-3); Thomas, "Fortune and the Passions", p. 185; Golden, Fielding's Moral Psychology, p. 28; and above all Battestin: Moral Basis, p. 59; "Problem", p. 628; TJ, VII, i, p. 328, n. 1; Amelia, II, ii, p. 70, n. 1.

reason to retreat; and if they are at length subdued, it will not be without much labour and resolution.

This is a war, which cannot fail, I think, of affording great pleasure to the victorious, but is attended with infinite danger to the conquered...

And, since we have seen such dreadful instances of the tyranny of these victorious passions, what severe tribute they exact, how cruelly they torture those who submit to their yoke, it will be...found our interest to stand to the battle manfully, to give no ground to the assailant, nor quarter to the retreating. We can be guilty of no cruelty in the pursuit of these enemies... The severest slavery imposed by men on one another is light, in comparison of that under an overbearing passion.

Seeing, therefore, that this contention is so absolutely necessary, and at the same time so difficult, it is well worth our while to fortify ourselves against such attacks, to consider by what means we may best resist the impulse of these dangerous enemies, and arrive at that perfection which hath been recommended by the wisest of antiquity, and fulfil that glorious precept vince teipsum.

As it behoveth every prince, before he enters into a war, to examine his own force, and strengthen himself with the best and most powerful alliances, so it is the interest of this our warrior to study well the strength of his own mind, and to borrow all the assistance which philosophy can lend him on this occasion. (Henley, XV, 177-8)

Quite apart from the general bombast, there are a number of specific ironic indicators here. The very phrase "that glorious precept vince teipsum" is suspicious: is it not akin to "that wonderful Power of Reason" which Fielding ridicules in Tom Jones? Should we take seriously this talk of "philosophy" and "perfection"?<sup>40</sup> Is not the very metaphor of self-conquest being treated as a joke? Battestin, who draws on this essay so frequently, has never quoted further than the single, loaded phrase, "that glorious precept vince teipsum". Isolated thus, the phrase is conveniently disinfected of its sarcasm, which can properly be appreciated only in the light of Fielding's next paragraph, where the bombastic persona is dropped:

I have been often surprised, that among all the divines and philosophers, who have declaimed on this subject, few or none have laid down any good rules for the attaining so desirable a conquest. The former have ascribed all to grace, and the latter to that consummate virtue of the Stoics, which was able to do all things. They have both trumpeted out much on this head, and sufficiently demonstrated the great glory of our self-conquest.

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<sup>40</sup> Fielding explicitly scorns the notion of moral perfectibility in TJ, X, i, pp. 526-7.



But, by their leave, this is acting little unlike to a physician who should sing forth the praises of health, when he should prescribe men the method of attaining it...  
(Henley, XV, 178)

This is uncannily similar to Hume's impatient account of the "declamations" of the rationalists.<sup>41</sup> For Fielding, "vince teipsum" is, by itself, practically meaningless — little better than a cant-phrase. His critics, however, seem to find it self-explanatory, and have therefore found it unnecessary to follow the argument which Fielding presents in the rest of the essay. Unlike Hume, Fielding does not offer a direct philosophical challenge to the psychological commonplaces of ethical rationalism. Instead, he gives us a prudentialist's adaptation of them. It should be noted, to begin with, that his "rules" for self-conquest appear in the context of a simple, overriding prudential appeal: "it will be...found our interest", he says, "to stand to the battle manfully" (XV, 177-8). What Fielding is actually recommending is the kind of prudential self-denial which Butler talks of in the Analogy. And it is surely not insignificant (especially for the reader of Tom Jones) that sexual passion is singled out for special attention. Fielding begins by considering "the methods which our passions take in attacking us":

The most usual way is, I believe, to dazzle our eyes by the immediate glare of the object before us, so as to hurry us on to action, without giving our understanding leisure to consider and weigh the consequence. Lust especially acts in this way. I have heard the most abandoned libertines, when they have been drawn into the least cool consideration, confess their folly, and condemn themselves. Indeed, if a man would set before his eyes the ideas of pain, disease, dishonour, poverty, death, and all the frightful ideas of those miseries, which the least indulgence of this passion will almost certainly bring upon him, he must be very fool-hardy to give way to it; but he is allured and charmed with the hopes of the immediate possession of a desirable object, with the satisfaction of the

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<sup>41</sup> "NOTHING is more usual in philosophy, and even in common life, than to talk of the combat of passion and reason, to give the preference to reason, and to assert that men are only so far virtuous as they conform themselves to its dictates. Every rational creature, 'tis said, is oblig'd to regulate his actions by reason; and if any other motive or principle challenge the direction of his conduct, he ought to oppose it, 'till it be entirely subdu'd, or at least brought to a conformity with that superior principle. On this method of thinking the greatest part of moral philosophy, antient and modern, seems to be founded; nor is there an ampler field, as well for metaphysical arguments, as popular declamations, than this suppos'd pre-eminence of reason above passion" (Treatise, II.3.iii, p. 413).

most violent of all desires; he looks not beyond the present moment which promises him perfect happiness. Could his reason say to him,

"Aspice, namque oculis quae nunc obducta tuenti  
Mortales hebetat visus, clauditque videre  
—— Nubem eripiam,"

he would scarce fall into the snare. 42

This is clearly an account of prudential conflict, temptation, and repentance. The psychology is hardly that of ethical rationalism: "understanding", here, amounts to little more than rational foresight, which considers not the rightness or wrongness but "the consequence" of acting on a particular passion. Providence would thus raise certain "frightful ideas" in the imagination of the libertine, and these in turn would generate passions relative to the future. Fear, in this instance, would be a "reasonable" passion, because generated by the exercise of "understanding". But it would be in conflict with the lust for present gratification, and sexual passion is "the most violent of all desires". According to Locke, such "violent" desires tend to suppress rational foresight: "the desire being inflamed by a near and tempting Object; 'tis no wonder that that operates after the same manner Pain does, and lessens in our Thoughts, what is future; and so forces us, as it were, blindfold into its embraces" (Essay, II.xxi.64, p. 277). To say that the libertine experiences a conflict between reason and passion would be inaccurate. The exercise of "understanding" may indeed generate a conflict between the two passions of lust and fear. But if a 'self-conquest' were subsequently to be achieved, the part played by "reason" would have been merely indirect and instrumental: the true and immediate conqueror of the lust would have been the fear.

Since a kind of reasoning is involved in the generation and resolution of the libertine's dilemma, it is easy to see how this kind of conflict might be mistaken for a contest between reason and the passions. But the function of "understanding" is merely to calculate the probable consequences of yielding to the solicitous passion. This is essentially an exercise of the imagination. New desires or aversions will necessarily be generated by this kind of mental activity, and these may indeed "conquer" the original impulse. This is Fielding's real point: that lust, the "most violent of all desires", will lead directly to appropriate action unless

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<sup>42</sup> Henley, XV, 180. The Latin fragment is an approximate quotation of Virgil, Aeneid, II, 604-6. (Thanks to Mr J. D. Cloud.)



opposed by a contrary impulse. Reason supplies but does not constitute this impulse. Let me quote again from the Champion essay:

Did a man, when first attacked by avarice, consider the eternal watchings, care, fear, heart-aches, all the pains and terrors which that passion must infallibly bring upon him, he would be safe from its dominion; but his passions have dazzled his reason, with showing the beautiful objects near and in a full blaze, while the other ideas are kept at a distance, and out of his sight. (Henley, XV, 180)

Again, the only kind of rationality involved in the recommended self-conquest would seem to be foresight. To yield to lust or avarice, on the other hand, is irrational in the sense that it involves a failure to exercise this kind of "understanding" or "consideration". Reason can indeed be "dazzled" by the passions. But this ocular metaphor underlines the fact that "reason" here is nothing more than foresight, and certainly no kind of moral authority. There can surely be no such thing as a conflict between foresight and the passions? The only way in which "reason" can resist avarice or lust is by considering not the passion itself, nor the action it proposes, but the probable consequences of gratifying it, and thereby raising new and contrary motives — that is, aversions. If the passion is conquered at all, it is conquered not by reason but by other passions. "Reason" or "understanding" in this essay is not the "reason" of ethical rationalism but the "reason" of prudentialism. Fielding is recommending the exercise of rational self-love.

According to Miller, "it lay in the power of the active will to carry out" (and presumably to refuse to carry out) "'that glorious precept vince teipsum'".<sup>43</sup> He is ostensibly paraphrasing the Champion paper which we have been considering. In fact, there is no reference to the "will" in this essay. Yet Battestin paraphrases Fielding's argument in the same psychological terms: the "lesson" recommended by him is "'that glorious precept vince teipsum,' or the ability of the individual, by reason and will, to direct and order the passions".<sup>44</sup> Battestin is very firmly convinced that Fielding believed in "the attainment of virtue through the shaping powers of reason and free will".<sup>45</sup> Miller consistently implies as much: he concedes that Fielding, "like Booth in Amelia, tended to place

<sup>43</sup> Essays, p. 218.

<sup>44</sup> Moral Basis, p. 59.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 80, n. 86 (p. 175). Cf. "Problem", p. 617; and Amelia, I, i, p. 15, n. 3.

greater emphasis upon the passions than the will as the determinant of action"; but on the other hand Fielding "did not make Booth's mistake of forgetting that the latter faculty existed".<sup>46</sup> Miller implies that this "mistake" is the one corrected by Dr Harrison at the end of Amelia, when Booth confesses his former errors:<sup>47</sup>

'...Indeed I never was a rash Disbeliever; my chief Doubt was founded on this, that as Men appeared to me to act entirely from their Passions, their Actions could have neither Merit nor Demerit.' 'A very worthy Conclusion truly,' cries the Doctor; 'but if Men act, as I believe they do, from their Passions, it would be fair to conclude that Religion to be true which applies immediately to the strongest of these Passions, Hope and Fear, chusing rather to rely on its Rewards and Punishments, than on that native Beauty of Virtue which some of the antient Philosophers thought proper to recommend to their Disciples...' (XII, v, pp. 511-2)

It could hardly be said that Dr Harrison is impressing upon Booth the fact, and the force, of rational free will. More recently, Battestin and others have in fact been worried by this aspect of Amelia — not by Booth's "Doctrine of the Passions" per se (III, iv, p. 109), but by the fact that Fielding (in the guise of Dr Harrison) appears to agree with it. Booth "was convinced every Man acted entirely from that Passion which was uppermost", that "every Man acted merely from the Force of that Passion which was uppermost in his Mind, and could do no otherwise" (III, iv, p. 109; I, iii, p. 32). Among recent critics, Bernard Harrison is virtually alone in regarding Booth's eleventh-hour conversion as a renunciation of this doctrine: "the central error which Booth finally renounces to the delight of the good Dr Harrison is identified with Hobbes' doctrine that 'will is the last appetite of deliberation' (that we always act in accordance with our strongest desire)".<sup>48</sup> Most readers have

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<sup>46</sup> Essays, p. 217.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Battestin, Moral Basis, p. 59: "The lesson that Booth at last learned, of course, had been recommended much earlier in The Champion... — 'that glorious precept vince teipsum,' or the ability of the individual, by reason and will, to direct and order the passions." Battestin negates (but does not retract) this view in "The Problem of Amelia".

<sup>48</sup> The Novelist as Moral Philosopher, pp. 21-2 (apparently alluding to Leviathan, I, vi). Cf. Golden, who hedges his bets by arguing that Dr Harrison "temporarily accepts the notion of action from passion" (Fielding's Moral Psychology, p. 90: my emphasis). This is mystifying.



come to recognize that Dr Harrison happily accepts the psychological premises of Booth's scepticism.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, some find this rapprochement surprising. Battestin, for instance, finds it "remarkable" that Booth's psychology should be "accepted as valid...by Dr Harrison, Fielding's spokesman in the novel".<sup>50</sup> Tuvia Bloch finds it equally remarkable, and concludes that it must have been "with the utmost reluctance that Fielding came to believe in Booth's view of the passions".<sup>51</sup>

There are two principal reasons for this kind of critical consternation. In the first place, the Harrison-Booth rapprochement tends to be viewed as evidence of a "radical shift" in Fielding's attitude to the passions — as a contradiction of "his earlier belief in the power of reason and the will to control the passions".<sup>52</sup> This is why Battestin thinks Amelia Fielding's "most disconcerting novel": in "The Problem of Amelia", a substantial and scholarly essay, he anatomizes this putative self-contradiction and attributes it to a "crisis of belief" induced by Hume's philosophical iconoclasm.<sup>53</sup> In defiance of his creator's deepest convictions, Booth believes ("with Hume") "that the characters and actions of men are determined by passions which reason is powerless to control", that "reason and the will have no part in the moral life": "What is more, the Christian stoic injunction, vince teipsum, which Fielding had recommended in The Champion...is to Booth meaningless".<sup>54</sup> Given that Dr Harrison finally embraces Booth's psychological doctrine, Battestin therefore has to conclude that Fielding had relinquished his putative earlier belief in reason and the will. The critic is therefore left with the formidable problem of explaining this "radical shift" — hence Battestin's speculations about the influence of Hume.<sup>55</sup>

Bloch and Battestin complicate things even further, however, by finding evidence of ethical rationalism even in Amelia. According to Bloch "the very first page...suggests" that Fielding "retained his earlier belief in

<sup>49</sup> See, for instance, McKillop, Early Masters, pp. 140-41; Wendt, "Naked Virtue", pp. 140-41; Sacks, Shape of Belief, pp. 119, 145-9; Williams, Marriage, pp. 112-15; and Samuel E. Longmire, "Booth's Conversion in Amelia", SAQ, 40 (1975), 12-17.

<sup>50</sup> "Problem", p. 633.

<sup>51</sup> "Booth's Doctrine", p. 465.

<sup>52</sup> Bloch, op. cit., pp. 461, 462.

<sup>53</sup> "Problem", pp. 613, 615.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 618, 628.

<sup>55</sup> "Problem", pp. 642-8 ("Postscript: Fielding and Hume"), et passim.

the power of reason and the will to control the passions".<sup>56</sup> Bloch is alluding to a single sentence in Fielding's exordium:

I question much, whether we may not by natural Means account for the Success of Knaves, the Calamities of Fools, with all the Miseries in which Men of Sense sometimes involve themselves by quitting the Directions of Prudence, and following the blind Guidance of a predominant Passion... (Amelia, I, i, p. 16)

But there is no mention of the will here. Nor, indeed, is there any plain indication that "reason" does or should "control the passions". The implied psychology is the same as that of the vince teipsum essay in the Champion, which, as we have seen, has little to do with ethical rationalism.

Battestin reads the exordium in the same way. It is not surprising, then, that he finds a "curious ambivalency" in Amelia.<sup>57</sup> On the one hand, there is the exordium, which apparently endorses "the notion developed in Tom Jones that morality resides in the power of prudence and the will to govern the passions"; and on the other hand there is an implicit but unmistakable commitment to "a new psychology", to "the belief...that passion alone is the spring of human behaviour". Battestin is further perplexed by the fact that the "new" psychology was actually "commonplace" among the Latitudinarian divines, which would seem to make his speculations about the influence of Hume rather nugatory.<sup>58</sup>

The fact is that Booth's doctrine of the passions is essentially consistent with traditional Anglican psychology, and indeed with the psychology of Fielding's own earlier writings.<sup>59</sup> Having mistaken Tom Jones for the work of an ethical rationalist, Battestin and other critics

<sup>56</sup> "Booth's Doctrine", p. 462 (my emphasis).      <sup>57</sup> "Problem", p. 616.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp. 635, 640, 634. Battestin cites "The Problem of Amelia" no less than seven times in the footnotes of the Wesleyan Amelia (1983), where the main points of the essay are frequently reiterated. For this reason, I have devoted what may seem to be excessive attention to the weaknesses of a paper published in 1974.

<sup>59</sup> Battestin's reading of Amelia rests ultimately on the supposition that Humean practical psychology was revolutionary and subversive. But Hume's view that "reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will", that reason is in itself "perfectly inert" (Treatise, II.3.iii, p. 413; III.1.i, p. 458), can of course be traced back to Aristotle: "Thought by itself...moves nothing" (NE, VI, ii, 5). Desire is the primum mobile for Aristotle, as it is for the Anglicans who admired him. Hooker believed that "nothing can move unless there be some end, the desire



naturally have problems when Fielding's real psychological assumptions become prominently explicit in Amelia. But there is nothing recondite or eccentric about these assumptions. It seems to me that Lockean psychology is one of the most appropriate contexts in which to view the vince teipsum essay and Amelia. Locke, prudentialist par excellence, would have had no trouble with Booth's doctrine of the passions, which in essentials does no more than echo what the Essay concerning Human Understanding says about volition. Locke did not believe in "free will" as Fielding's rationalist critics understand it. In a monumental chapter of the Essay (II.xxi, "Of Power"), he sets about demolishing the traditional faculty psychology. Freedom and volition, he argues, are incompatible ideas. "Will" is only a name we give to our power of choosing: "whatever Agent has a power to think on its own Actions, and to preferr their doing or omission either to other, has that Faculty call'd Will"; "Will then is nothing but such a power". Freedom, on the other hand, is a quality attributable not to mental powers but to agents: "Liberty...is the power a Man has to do or forbear doing any particular Action, according as its doing or forbearance has the actual preference in the Mind, which is the same thing as to say, according as he himself wills it" (Essay, II.xxi.15, p. 241).<sup>60</sup> (Thus, for instance: I can have the will to fly, but am not at liberty to do it without the technology of aviation.) To wrangle about the "freedom" of the "will" is to wrangle about nonsense. It is time "to put an end to that long agitated, and, I think, unreasonable, because unintelligible, Question, viz. Whether Man's Will be free, or no":

For if I mistake not, it follows, from what I have said, that the Question it self is altogether improper; and it is as insignificant to ask, whether Man's Will be free, as to ask, whether his Sleep be Swift, or his Vertue square: Liberty being as little applicable to the Will, as swiftness of Motion is to Sleep, or squareness to Vertue. (II.xxi.14, p. 240)

Here, incidentally, is persuasive circumstantial evidence that Fielding was familiar with this chapter of the Essay: it is surely not implausible

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whereof provoketh unto motion" (Laws, I.vii.1: Works, I, 219-20). The same view can be found in Cudworth (Freewill, Ch. viii, where there is an explicit dependence on Aristotle); in Locke (Essay, II.vii.3-4); and in Butler (15 Sermons, V, 3, 10; IX, 21). It is also ubiquitously implicit in prudential homiletics.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. II.xxi.10: "Liberty is not an Idea belonging to Volition, or preferring; but to the Person having the Power of doing, or forbearing to do, according as the Mind shall chuse or direct. Our Idea of Liberty reaches as far as that Power, and no farther" (p. 238).

to suggest that the "square" philosopher of Tom Jones took his name from this passage?<sup>61</sup> Locke's point, like Fielding's, is that many of the theoretical commonplaces of the rationalist tradition are practically meaningless. He blames the philosophical confusion on a lazy attitude to language. Only the agent, not his "Will", can properly be described as "free": "For how can we think any one freer than to have the power to do what he will?" (II.xxi.21, p. 244).<sup>62</sup>

Locke takes issue with two particular notions of what "free will" consists in. First, he challenges the supposition "that a Man is not free to act at all, if he be not as free to will, as he is to act, what he wills" (my emphases): Locke answers emphatically that "a Man in respect of willing, or the Act of Volition, when any Action in his power is once proposed to his Thoughts, as presently to be done, cannot be free",

The reason whereof is very manifest: For...he cannot avoid willing the existence, or not existence, of that Action; it is absolutely necessary that he will the one, or the other, i.e. prefer the one to the other... For it is unavoidably necessary to prefer the doing, or forbearance, of an Action in a Man's power, which is once so proposed to his thoughts; a Man must necessarily will the one, or the other of them, upon which preference, or volition, the action, or its forbearance, certainly follows, and is truly voluntary: But the act of volition, or preferring one of the two, being that which he cannot avoid, a Man in respect of that act of willing, is under a necessity, and so cannot be free... (II.xxi.22-3, pp. 245-6)

Volition itself is "unavoidably necessary": we are naturally bound to "prefer" one or the other of any two proposed courses of action. Locke now comes to the kind of "free will" that is bestowed on Fielding's characters by his rationalist critics:

Since then it is plain, that in most cases a Man is not at liberty, whether he will Will, or no; the next thing demanded is, Whether a Man be at liberty to will which of the two he pleases, Motion or Rest. This Question carries the absurdity of it so manifestly in it self, that one might thereby be sufficiently convinced, that Liberty concerns not the Will. For to ask, whether a Man be at liberty to will either Motion, or Rest; Speaking, or Silence; which he

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<sup>61</sup> This suggestion has been anticipated by Valerie Grosvenor Myer, "His Virtue Square: A Note on Tom Jones", N&Q, 231 (1986), 58.

<sup>62</sup> Johnson quotes this rhetorical question in the Dictionary (1755), under "FREE".



pleases, is to ask, whether a Man can will, what he wills; or be pleased with what he is pleased with. A Question, which, I think, needs no answer... (II.xxi.25, p. 247)

The other Anglicans would probably have detected the same "absurdity" in this question. In the Aristotelian tradition, it is simply unintelligible.<sup>63</sup> The "Will" is not some kind of Olympian psychic arbiter, which sides gratuitously with one of two (or more) conflicting desires: the "Will" is desire.<sup>64</sup> To "will" one course of action in preference to another is to desire it in preference to the other. The action "certainly follows" this desire, "and is truly voluntary". In these terms, it does not make sense to ask whether a man is "free" to will one or the other: one might as well ask whether he is free to desire what he desires.

"Will", according to Locke, is nothing but active preference. All our actions (save those involving external or biological compulsion) are the products of "Will". (Locke's use of the term collapses Aristotle's distinction between choice and volition.) And "Will" itself is always constituted by desire:

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<sup>63</sup> According to Aristotle, all actions are "voluntary" which do not involve compulsion (NE, III, ii, 2). Choice is a special kind of "voluntary act": "Perhaps we may define it as voluntary action preceded by deliberation, since choice involves reasoning and some process of thought" (III, ii, 16-17). But deliberation itself originates and terminates in desire: "Hence Choice may be called either thought related to desire or desire related to thought" (VI, ii, 5). Choice is in effect "a deliberate desire of things in our power" (III, iii, 19: my emphasis), and is distinct from mere volition only in the sense that the desire which generates action is "preceded by deliberation", by "deliberation as regards what is advantageous" (VI, ix, 6). Virtually the same practical psychology can be found in Hooker (who substitutes the term "Will" for "Choice"): "The object of Appetite is whatever sensible good may be wished for; the object of Will is that good which Reason doth lead us to seek"; "neither is any other desire termed properly Will, but that where Reason and Understanding...prescribeth the thing desired" (Laws, I.vii.3: Works, I, 221). "Will", in other words, is a name for what Aristotle calls "deliberate desire". Viewed in this light, Hobbesian psychology looks almost traditional: "In deliberation, the last appetite, or aversion, immediately adhering to the action, or to the omission thereof, is that we call the WILL... The definition of the will, commonly given by the Schools, that it is a rational appetite, is not good... But if instead of a rational appetite, we shall say an appetite resulting from a precedent deliberation, then the definition is the same that I have given here. Will therefore is the last appetite in deliberating" (Leviathan, I, vi: Works, III, 48-9).

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Hobbes, Human Nature, Ch. xii: "Appetite, fear, hope, and the rest of the passions are not called voluntary; for they proceed not from, but are the will..." (Works, IV, 69).

The motive, for continuing in the same State or Action, is only the present satisfaction in it; The motive to change, is always some uneasiness. This is the great motive that works on the Mind to put it upon Action, which for shortness sake we will call determining of the Will... (II.xxi.29, p. 249)

This is that which successively determines the Will, and sets us upon those Actions, we perform. This Uneasiness we may call, as it is, Desire; which is an uneasiness of the Mind for want of some absent good... As much as we desire any absent good, so much are we in pain for it. (II.xxi.31, p. 251)

Good and Evil, present and absent, 'tis true, work upon the mind: But that which immediately determines the Will, from time to time, to every voluntary Action, is the uneasiness of desire, fixed on some absent good... (II.xxi.33, p. 252)

In other words, all human endeavour is directly produced by the passions: "'tis uneasiness alone determines the will" (II.xxi.37, p. 254). Any particular "good", says Locke, "does not determine the will, until our desire, raised proportionably to it, makes us uneasy in the want of it".<sup>65</sup> Until it "raises our desire, and the uneasiness of that has the prevalency in determining the will", the "Idea" of that good is present to the mind "only like other Ideas, the object of bare unactive speculation; but operates not on the will, nor sets us on work" (II.xxi.35, p. 253; II.xxi.37, p. 255). What determines the will "is not, as is generally supposed, the greater good in view", but "some (and for the most part the most pressing) uneasiness a Man is at present under" (II.xxi.31, pp. 250-51). In a general sense, it is enough to say that desire is what determines the will —

But we being in this World beset with sundry uneasinesses, distracted with different desires, the next enquiry naturally will be, which of them has the precedency in determining the will to the next action? and to that the answer is, that ordinarily, which is the most pressing of those, that are judged capable of being then removed... [Thus] the most important and urgent uneasiness, we at that time feel, is that, which ordinarily determines the will successively, in that train of voluntary actions, which make up our lives. The greatest present uneasiness is the spur to action, that is constantly felt; and...determines the will in its choice of the next action. (II.xxi.40, pp. 257-8)

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. Hooker, Laws, I.vii.2: "The good...causeth not action, unless apprehending it as good we so like and desire it" (Works, I, 220).



It would of course be pointless to speculate about the contents of Billy Booth's library. What is important is that his "Doctrine of the Passions" could — in its essentials — have been the fruit of an acquaintance with Locke's Essay. Where Booth goes wrong, and where he differs from Locke, is in viewing this doctrine as a proof of "the Necessity of human Actions", "Necessity arising from the Impulse of Passion" (Amelia, I, iii, p. 32). The true centre of philosophical controversy in Amelia is not Booth's psychological theory per se, which Fielding evidently accepts, but his denial of moral responsibility: "my chief Doubt was founded on this, that as Men appeared to me to act entirely from their Passions, their Actions could have neither Merit nor Demerit" (XII, v, p. 511: my emphasis). The psychological conviction is merely a premise of Booth's philosophical doctrine of "Necessity", and of the moral nihilism that goes with it. To say that he "denies the freedom of the will" would be inexact.<sup>66</sup> What he does implicitly deny is moral responsibility. "A very worthy Conclusion truly", replies Dr Harrison — it is not the psychology but the philosophical logic that Fielding is seeking to discredit.<sup>67</sup> To ignore this distinction is to miss the whole point of Fielding's treatment of Booth. His mistake was not to suppose that men "act entirely from their Passions", but to infer from this that men are powerless to exercise practical control over their own lives. Critics such as Battestin and Bloch, apparently assuming that Booth's psychology necessarily entails determinism, have casually replicated the very non sequitur which the novel sets out to challenge.

The counter-argument presented by the novel can be resolved into two principal points: first, that Booth's theory of the passions does not annihilate the concept of responsibility; and, second, that it does not therefore invalidate the functions of prudence. To regard the passions as the sole motivating forces in the psyche does not involve denying any practical functions to reason. "The greatest present uneasiness is the spur to action", says Locke; but it is also true that "by a due consideration and examining any good proposed, it is in our power, to raise our desires, in a due proportion to the value of that good, whereby in its turn, and place, it may come to work upon the will, and be pursued" (Essay, II.xxi.46, p. 262). Though the will is invariably determined by the predominant passion (or "greatest present uneasiness"), reason has

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<sup>66</sup> Battestin, "Problem", p. 630.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Sacks, Shape of Belief, pp. 119, 145-7.

the power to adjust the pecking-order of the passions or "uneasinesses". This is not to say that reason can peremptorily 'conquer' any solicitous passion, that it can lead us to act in spite of our desires, but only that the passions and appetites which determine the will are responsive to our judgments of good and evil — pleasure and pain, happiness and misery. For Locke, this is the very essence of freedom:

There being in us a great many uneasinesses always solliciting, and ready to determine the will, it is natural, as I have said, that the greatest, and most pressing should determine the will to the next action; and so it does for the most part, but not always. For the mind having in most cases...a power to suspend the execution and satisfaction of any of its desires, and so all, one after another, is at liberty to consider the objects of them; examine them on all sides, and weigh them with others. In this lies the liberty Man has... This seems to me the source of all liberty; in this seems to consist that, which is (as I think improperly) call'd Free will. (Essay, II.xxi.47, p. 263) 68

In the light of this, it is easy to see that Booth's inference from the ascendancy of the passions to psychological determinism is a philosophical non sequitur. All our actions are products of "uneasiness" — desire, passion, appetite. But this is no diminution of our freedom, which consists not in the power to act contrary to our desires, but in the power not to act on them at all. What is "improperly" called "Free will" is in reality no more than an ability to stop and think, to look before we leap. We are "endowed with a power to suspend any particular desire, and keep it from...engaging us in action":

This is the hinge on which turns the liberty of intellectual Beings in their constant endeavours after, and a steady prosecution of true felicity, that they can suspend this prosecution in particular cases, till they have looked before them, and informed themselves, whether that particular thing, which is then proposed, or desired, lie in the way to their main end, and make a real part of that which is their greatest good. For the inclination, and tendency of their nature to happiness is an obligation, and motive to them, to take care not to mistake, or miss it; and so necessarily puts them upon caution, deliberation, wariness, in the direction of their particular actions, which are the means to obtain it. Whatever necessity determines the pursuit of real Bliss, the same necessity...establishes suspence, deliberation, and scrutiny

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68 Johnson quotes this passage (rather "improperly") under "FREEWILL" in the Dictionary.



of each successive desire, whether the satisfaction of it, doth not interfere with our true happiness, and mislead us from it. (II.xxi.52, pp. 266-7)

Freedom, for Locke, is thus essentially a function of prudence. We "short-sighted Creatures" were endowed with this liberty to pause, and deliberate, that we "might not mistake true felicity" (II.xxi.50, pp. 265-6). Our freedom consists in the freedom to be prudent: "all that we can do, is to hold our wills undetermined, till we have examin'd the good and evil of what we desire" —

What follows after that, follows in a chain of Consequences linked one to another, all depending on the last determination of the Judgment, which whether it shall be upon an hasty and precipitate view, or upon a due and mature Examination, is in our power; Experience showing us, that in most cases we are able to suspend the present satisfaction of any desire. (II.xxi.52, p. 267)

The "forbearance of a too hasty compliance with our desires...so that our Understandings may be free to examine, and reason unbiassed give its judgment", is "that, whereon a right direction of our conduct to true Happiness, depends" (II.xxi.53, p. 268). This kind of freedom is exactly the kind implied by Fielding's vince teipsum essay, which warns of the danger of allowing our passions "to hurry us on to action, without giving our understanding leisure to consider and weigh the consequence" (Champion, 2 February 1739/40: Henley, XV, 180). Freedom involves not the exertion but the suspension of the "will", and reason (functioning as prudence) comes in only after this suspension. Fielding is clearly recommending precisely the kind of "suspence" described by Locke. Freedom is the power to stop, examine the objects of our desires, and estimate the consequences of acting on them:

In this lies the liberty Man has; and from the not using of it right comes all the variety of mistakes, errors, and faults which we run into, in the conduct of our lives, and our endeavours after happiness... (Essay, II.xxi.47, p. 263)

Here, surely, is a fitting context in which to read Fielding's complaint of "the Miseries in which Men of Sense sometimes involve themselves by quitting the Directions of Prudence, and following the blind Guidance of a predominant Passion" (Amelia, I, i, p. 16). Booth is the victim of a failure to understand the terms of his own liberty.

Again and again, Fielding's preoccupation with "that glorious precept vince teipsum" proves to be a function of his more general concern with practical wisdom: what we see in the Champion essay, no less than in Lady Booby's exquisite dilemmas, is a clear example of prudential psychology. "Reason", or "understanding", in these contexts, must not be confused with the moral authority constituted by "reason" in the rationalist tradition. Its functions, whether evaluative or providential, whether concerned with the "nature" of alternative objects or with "the effects resulting from them",<sup>69</sup> can be summed up as the enlightenment of self-love. Prudential decision-making typically involves a conflict not between reason and the passions but between and among the passions themselves. The job of "understanding" is merely to resolve this conflict by discovering which object, or course of action, promises the maximum degree of happiness or satisfaction. Ultimately, in this sense, the "reason" of prudentialism could be said not to govern but to serve the passions.

It may of course be objected that a conflict between lust and pride (Lady Booby), or between lust and fear (the libertine), is not one in which Fielding would be likely to have any great moral interest. In fact, however, he tends to view and represent genuine moral dilemmas in very much the same way. Since Fielding believes virtue to be constituted essentially by the passion of benevolence, this should not surprise us. Moral dilemmas differ most significantly from the merely prudential in that the interests of others are usually involved: in psychological terms, they therefore involve passions of another order — the social affections. But these are passions, no less than lust, pride, or fear are passions; and reason is in either kind of dilemma a 'neutral' party, concerning itself (strictly speaking) only with matters of fact, actual or estimated. Consider the following passage from Tom Jones, which opens with Jones's lamentations on his expulsion from Paradise Hall:

When he had...vented the first Emotions of Passion, he began to come a little to himself. His Grief now took another Turn, and discharged itself in a gentler Way, till he became at last cool enough to reason with his Passion, and to consider what Steps were proper to be taken in his deplorable Condition.

And now the great Doubt was how to act with regard to Sophia. The Thoughts of leaving her almost rent his Heart

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<sup>69</sup> Barrow's terms: see above, p. 42.



asunder; but the Consideration of reducing her to Ruin and Beggary still racked him, if possible, more; and if the violent Desire of possessing her Person could have induced him to listen one Moment to this Alternative, still he was by no means certain of her Resolution to indulge his Wishes at so high an Expence. The Resentment of Mr. Allworthy, and the Injury he must do to his Quiet, argued strongly against this latter; and lastly, the apparent Impossibility of Success, even if he would sacrifice all these Considerations to it, came to his Assistance; and thus Honour at last, backed with Despair, with Gratitude to his Benefactor, and with real Love to his Mistress, got the better of burning Desire, and he resolved rather to quit Sophia, than to pursue her to her Ruin.

It is difficult for any who have not felt it, to conceive the glowing Warmth which filled his Breast, on the first Contemplation of this Victory over his Passion...

(TJ, VI, xii, p. 312)

This self-conquest is essentially a sentimental process. Jones's "violent Desire of possessing" Sophia is conquered not by reason but by a cluster of passions: "Despair", "Gratitude", "real Love", and "Honour" (which is ambiguous but seems, in terms of the logic of the passage, to imply shame at the thought of being rejected by Sophia). In any case, the function of reason is clearly only neutral and intermediate, consisting entirely in the "Consideration" of the possible and probable consequences of acting on the solicitous "burning Desire". These imagined consequences (the ruin of Sophia, injury to Allworthy's "Quiet", eventual failure) are what stimulate the passions which ultimately prevail. The essential moral-psychological difference between this self-conquest and Lady Booby's is that at least one meritorious passion ("real Love") is involved.<sup>70</sup> ("Gratitude" would also qualify as a truly moral affection.) Neither kind of dilemma could be said to involve a conflict between reason and the passions. In each case the "Victory" over the solicitous passion can be attributed directly to the agency of other passions. In Jones's case, the victorious passions happen to be virtuous ones, and these are indeed rendered predominant by the process of "Consideration", but it would be highly misleading to describe this process in terms of "a traditional opposition between reason and the passions".<sup>71</sup> Love and gratitude seek their own gratification no less than the most purely selfish of passions.

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Booth's attempts at "Self-conquest" in Amelia, II, ii; and note that his very desire to vanquish his passion for Amelia "arose", as he says, "from the vast Affection I bore her" (II, i, p. 68).

<sup>71</sup> J. V. Price, "Sex and the Foundling Boy", p. 44.

The exercise of rational providence merely generates a conflict between one kind of proposed satisfaction and another. In that this is a conflict between different passions or affections, it could be said to be a prudential dilemma; in that some of these affections are virtuous ones, it is also a moral dilemma.<sup>72</sup> Virtue no less than vice is constituted by the predominance of certain passions or affections. All passions and affections seek their own gratification. This is an important sense in which the moral and the prudential are psychologically coincident.

While it is in one sense true that Fielding "resolves virtue into good affections" (Hawkins's phrase), that benevolence is in itself the psychological root and sine qua non of virtue, it is equally true that this is by no means the sum of moral excellence for Fielding.<sup>73</sup> Hawkins's account of Tom Jones is of course a caricature. In the passage I have just analyzed, Fielding makes a point of demonstrating that Jones is far from being a mere kind-hearted savage.<sup>74</sup> Virtue is for Fielding a complex accomplishment of the whole individual, heart and head.<sup>75</sup> He is well aware that the good heart, though indispensable in itself, can actually frustrate its own ends — the ends of benevolence and indeed the ends of morality — if it is not directed and assisted by practical reason.<sup>76</sup> Note the all-important qualifier in this early definition of good nature:

Good-nature is a delight in the happiness of mankind, and a concern at their misery, with a desire, as much as possible, to procure the former, and avert the latter; and this, with a constant regard to desert. (Champion, 27 March 1739-40: Henley, XV, 258: my emphasis)

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<sup>72</sup> For a rather different moral-psychological analysis of this crisis, see Harrison, The Novelist as Moral Philosopher, pp. 93-7.

<sup>73</sup> In the Preface to Miscellanies, Fielding declares "that Benevolence, Honour, Honesty, and Charity, make a good Man" — to these must be added "Parts" and "Courage" (the constituents of "Greatness") if the good man is to attain "the true Sublime in Human Nature" (Miscellanies I, pp. 11-12).

<sup>74</sup> Karl views Jones as the "natural man", "the 'wild boy' whose natural habitat is the forest" (Reader's Guide, pp. 169-70).

<sup>75</sup> This is the difference between "Goodness" and "Greatness": see Miscellanies I, Preface, pp. 11-12. True "Greatness" is "the Union of a good Heart with a good Head" ("An Essay on Conversation", *ibid.*, p. 135).

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Battestin, Moral Basis, pp. 72-5; Miller, Essays, pp. 60-61; and Wolfe, "Lessons in Evil", pp. 76-8.



The true and natural end of benevolence (and of virtue) is the production of maximum human happiness. But if the good heart is promiscuous, if it observes no distinction between "villainy" and "merit", it can actually be productive of injury to society as a whole. To be concerned at the misery of a condemned criminal is natural, and good; but to save one life at the expense of many others is contrary to the ends of good nature itself. This "admirable quality", says Fielding, ultimately "respects the whole", and must therefore "give up the particular, to the good of the general". Thus, "to bring a real and great criminal to justice is, perhaps, the best natured office we can perform to society": the office of the hangman himself, "if properly employed, may be in truth the best natured, as well as the highest post of honour in the kingdom". Given the possible consequences of misguided compassion, the objects of benevolence must be intelligently chosen. It is in this sense that "good-nature requires a distinguishing faculty, which is another word for judgment, and is perhaps the sole boundary between wisdom and folly" (Henley, XV, 258-9). While the good heart is unquestionably the very essence of virtue, the good heart alone is not enough.

Bishop Butler makes exactly this point in his second sermon "Upon the Love of Our Neighbour". Benevolence, he admits, is "the sum of virtue", but reason is its necessary instrument:

...when benevolence is said to be the sum of virtue, it is not spoken of as a blind propensity, but as a principle in reasonable creatures, and so to be directed by their reason: for reason and reflection comes into our notion of a moral agent. And that will lead us to consider distant consequences, as well as the immediate tendency of an action... Reason, considered merely as subservient to benevolence, as assisting to produce the greatest good, will teach us to have particular regard to...relations and circumstances; because it is plainly for the good of the world that they should be regarded. And as there are numberless cases, in which...we are not competent judges, whether a particular action will upon the whole do good or harm; reason in the same way will teach us to be cautious how we act in these cases of uncertainty... All these things must come into consideration, were it only in order to determine which way of acting is likely to produce the greatest good. Thus, upon supposition that it were in the strictest sense true...that benevolence includes in it all virtues; yet reason must come in as its guide and director, in order to attain its own end, the end of benevolence, the greatest public good. (15 Sermons, XII, 27: my emphasis)

Though reason is said to be the proper "guide and director" of benevolence, it bears little relation to the sovereign moral authority

of the rationalist tradition. Benevolence itself determines the ends of the moral agent; reason serves merely to determine the most productive means to the attainment of those ends, and does this by estimating the "tendency" or "consequences" of particular courses of action. In that this kind of reason is concerned exclusively with the determination of means to ends which are already desired, it is essentially a function of prudence. Benevolence seeks its own gratification no less than any other natural passion (that it finds this gratification in the good of others is immaterial). In its highest moral function, reason is "subservient" to this particular natural passion.

In Tom Jones, Fielding creates a hero who frequently exercises this kind of utilitarian "reason and reflection".<sup>77</sup> He does in fact deliberate very intelligently about "which way of acting is likely to produce the greatest good" for others, though less given to analyzing his own interests. He deals with moral dilemmas by thinking hard about the "tendency" of alternative courses of action, and to this extent he eminently conforms to Butler's "notion of a moral agent", in that reason is the "guide and director" of his altruistic passions. This moral intelligence is dramatized most conspicuously in his dealings with Enderson the reluctant highwayman (TJ, XII, xiv).<sup>78</sup> Here, Jones is careful to avoid that "false compassion" of which Fielding complains so bitterly in An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers, and which often frustrates the prosecution or execution of criminals (Henley, XIII, 118). A "tender-hearted and compassionate disposition" is, in itself, highly meritorious: "Indeed the passion of love or benevolence, whence this admirable disposition arises, seems to be the only human passion that is in itself simply and absolutely good",

and in Plato's commonwealth, or (which is more) in a society acting up to the rules of Christianity, no danger could arise from the highest excess of this virtue; nay, the more liberally it was indulged, and the more extensively it was expanded, the more would it contribute to the honour of the individual, and to the happiness of the whole. (Henley, XIII, 109-110)

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<sup>77</sup> Harrison rightly thinks this to be one of Jones's principal moral accomplishments: see The Novelist as Moral Philosopher, pp. 104-114. Oddly, Ribble thinks Jones distinguished by a chronic failure to exercise this kind of practical intelligence: see "Aristotle", pp. 42 ff.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Harrison, op. cit., pp. 105-6.



Ours is not, however, a Platonic or a Christian society: "it hath pleased God to permit human societies to be constituted in a different manner, and knaves to form a part...of every community". These are the enemies of "the honest part of mankind". In a knave-ridden society such as ours, therefore, a proper concern for the well-being of mankind will involve selective benevolence and compassion: "it becomes the good-natured and tender-hearted man to be watchful over his own temper; to restrain the impetuosity of his benevolence", and "carefully to select the objects of his passion". Fielding reminds us (alluding to Matthew 10:16) that this caution is not incompatible with the precepts of Christianity:

Our Saviour Himself inculcates this prudence among His disciples, telling them, that He "sent them forth like sheep among wolves; be ye therefore," says He, "wise as serpents, but innocent as doves."

And it is certainly not incompatible with benevolence. Without this "prudence", the good-natured individual is a liability not only to himself but to his fellow-men — the very objects of benevolence:

For want of this wisdom a benevolent and tender-hearted temper very often betrays men into errors not only hurtful to themselves but highly prejudicial to the society. (Henley, XIII, 110)

Only an "ill-judging tenderness and compassion" would persuade us not to prosecute those villains who prey upon "the honest part of mankind", and who thereby declare themselves enemies of "the public good":

To desire to save these wolves in society may arise from benevolence, but it must be the benevolence of a child or a fool, who, from want of sufficient reason, mistakes the true objects of his passion... Such tender-heartedness is indeed barbarity, and resembles the meek spirit of him who would not assist in blowing up his neighbour's house to save a whole city from the flames. (Henley, XIII, 110-111)

These, of course, are classic utilitarian arguments for capital punishment: the execution of the individual is justified first and foremost by its socially beneficial consequences. Fielding gives the same advice to magistrates as he does to potential prosecution witnesses — that "false compassion" is to be suppressed by true. The life of the

criminal is to be weighed against the lives of his many potential victims, and, if "necessary", sacrificed accordingly. As Fielding says, "though mercy may appear more amiable in a magistrate, severity is a more wholesome virtue; nay, severity to an individual may, perhaps, be in the end the greatest mercy...to the public in general" (Henley, XIII, 119). The good magistrate will feel a natural and proper compassion for the convicted criminal, but must attempt to "conquer that emotion" by "the force of reason":

And what can reason suggest on this occasion? First, that by saving this individual I shall bring many others into the same dreadful situation. That the passions of the man are to give way to the principles of the magistrate. Those may lament the criminal, but these must condemn him. (Henley, XIII, 119)

It is the "reason" of utilitarianism, not of ethical rationalism, by which the compassionate "emotion" must be conquered. Rational benevolence is that which takes account of its own likely consequences. The magistrate's concern for the individual will properly be conquered by his concern for the many — not only the future victims of crime but the criminals (and potential criminals) themselves. The ultimate utilitarian justification of capital punishment is deterrence, according to Fielding and his legal authorities:

Now what is the principal end of all punishment? is it not, as Lord Hale expresses it, "To deter men from the breach of laws, so that they may not offend, and so not suffer at all? And is not the inflicting of punishment more for example, and to prevent evil, than to punish?" And therefore, says he ..., "Death itself is necessary to be annexed to laws in many cases by the prudence of lawgivers, though possibly beyond the single merit of the offence simply considered." No man indeed of common humanity or common sense can think the life of a man and a few shillings to be of an equal consideration, or that the law in punishing theft with death proceeds...with any view to vengeance. The terror of the example is the only thing proposed, and one man is sacrificed to the preservation of thousands. (Henley, XIII, 120-21)

Such is rational benevolence. This passage raises some important ethical questions. Note, particularly, Hale's concession (subsequently echoed by Fielding) that the death penalty is often "beyond the single merit of the offence" to which it is annexed. In other words, the thief may not deserve to die for his crimes: in itself, his execution may be an act of lethal injustice. And yet, according to the "prudence" of certain



other individuals, that penalty may be practically "necessary". It is justified by its utility as a deterrent — "one man is sacrificed to the preservation of thousands" (in this case, to be accurate, thousands of pounds). The same utilitarian defence of capital punishment can be found in Butler's sermon "Upon Forgiveness of Injuries". According to Butler, we have a "general obligation to benevolence or good-will towards mankind", including convicted criminals. Our obligation towards any human individual "cannot be superseded by his moral character". (As Christians, in other words, we have a duty to love our enemies.) It can, however, be overridden by another obligation:

What justifies public executions is, not that the guilt or demerit of the criminal dispenses with the obligation of good-will, neither would this justify any severity; but, that his life is inconsistent with the quiet and happiness of the world: that is, a general and more enlarged obligation necessarily destroys a particular and more confined one of the same kind, inconsistent with it. (15 Sermons, IX, 15)

Butler has theorized the implied ethical premises of Fielding's own defence of the death penalty. Our Christian duties to the criminal are "superseded" not by his own "guilt or demerit" (which is in any case incommensurable with the penalty), but by our similar duties to others.<sup>79</sup> But since these obligations are (as Butler says) "of the same kind", what is it that determines this priority? Apparently, the "general and more enlarged obligation" is to take precedence over the "particular and more confined one". This distinction between the "general" and the "particular" obligation corresponds to the distinction between society and the individual. It would therefore seem that the practical force of any obligation between the self and others is directly proportionate to the number of others involved — in these terms, a conflict of duties can be resolved arithmetically. Thus Butler's argument brings us up against the fundamental paradox of utilitarian morality: our duties to any individual are always "superseded" by our duties to society, even though that society is made up of individuals, each of whom is subject to the same moral disability. All utilitarian obligations are ultimately provisional.

The implications of utilitarianism are thus not only paradoxical but also rather sinister. In his Enquiry, Fielding attempts to justify the unjust (because unmerited) slaughter of an individual by appealing to the

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. Dr Harrison's logic in Amelia, IX, viii, pp. 390-91.

concept of the Common Good. He is at least dealing with criminals. But the principle could be used to justify all manner of injustice and persecution. This was the argument that justified the atrocities of Nazi Germany. Today, the Common Good might be said to justify the extermination of AIDS carriers. If morality is subordinated to "the prudence of lawgivers", however well-intentioned, the consequences are potentially horrific. But the principle of the Common Good is no less inadequate when applied to the decisions and dilemmas of private life. As Butler himself points out (perhaps with Hutcheson in mind?), the utilitarian principle is ultimately dangerous:

...some [authors] of great and distinguished merit have, I think, expressed themselves in a manner, which may occasion some danger, to careless readers, of imagining the whole of virtue to consist in singly aiming, according to the best of their judgment, at promoting the happiness of mankind in the present state; and the whole of vice, in doing what they foresee, or might foresee, is likely to produce an overbalance of unhappiness in it; than which mistakes, none can be conceived more terrible. For it is certain, that some of the most shocking instances of injustice, adultery, murder, perjury, and even of persecution, may, in many supposable cases, not have the appearance of being likely to produce an overbalance of misery in the present state; perhaps sometimes may have the contrary appearance. (Dissertation, para. 10: 15 Sermons, p. 153)

In itself, and according to the best of some individual's judgment, the Greatest Happiness Principle might ("in many supposable cases") seem to dictate the commission of various "shocking" crimes. The end might seem, as it were, to justify the means. Ultimately, pure utilitarianism implies that no act is in itself virtuous or vicious, right or wrong: the morality of any deed or practice is determined only by reference to its actual or probable consequences for society or "mankind". This is what Butler finds so "terrible" about the Greatest Happiness Principle. If the quantity of happiness or misery produced by any deed is the only measure of its moral status, it follows that certain fundamental moral concepts — such as justice — are effectively emptied of practical meaning:

Again, suppose one man should, by fraud or violence, take from another the fruit of his labour, with intent to give it to a third, who he thought would have as much pleasure from it as would balance the pleasure which the first possessor would have had in the enjoyment, and his vexation in the loss of it; suppose also that no bad consequences would follow:



yet such an action would surely be vicious. Nay further, were treachery, violence and injustice, no otherwise vicious, than as foreseen likely to produce an overbalance of misery to society; then, if in any case a man could procure to himself as great advantage by an act of injustice, as the whole foreseen inconvenience, likely to be brought upon others by it, would amount to; such a piece of injustice would not be faulty or vicious at all: because it would be no more than, in any other case, for a man to prefer his own satisfaction to another's in equal degrees. (Dissertation, para. 8: 15 Sermons, p. 152)

Though in one sense a reductio ad absurdum, this last passage does accurately expose the practical implications of the utilitarian principle. It also confirms Butler's principal point, "that benevolence, and the want of it, singly considered, are in no sort the whole of virtue and vice":

For if this were the case, in the review of one's own character, or that of others, our moral understanding and moral sense would be indifferent to everything, but the degrees in which benevolence prevailed, and the degrees in which it was wanting. That is, we should neither approve of benevolence to some persons rather than to others, nor disapprove injustice and falsehood upon any other account, than merely as an overbalance of happiness was foreseen likely to be produced by the first, and of misery by the second. (Dissertation, para. 8: 15 Sermons, p. 151)

But these are self-evidently not the sole criteria of our moral judgments. Typically, Butler debunks the offending ethical principle by measuring it against the facts of psychological experience, against human nature: "The fact...appears to be, that we are constituted so as to condemn falsehood, unprovoked violence, injustice, and to approve of benevolence to some preferably to others, abstracted from all consideration, which conduct is likely to produce an overbalance of happiness or misery" (p. 152). This is an important qualification of Butler's concession, elsewhere, "that the common virtues, and the common vices of mankind, may be traced up to benevolence, or the want of it". As he says, this "manifest" truth is subject to certain "cautions and restrictions":

For instance: as we are not competent judges, what is upon the whole for the good of the world, there may be other immediate ends appointed us to pursue, besides that one of doing good, or producing happiness. Though the good of the creation be the only end of the Author of it, yet He may have laid us under particular obligations, which we may discern and feel ourselves under, quite distinct from a perception, that the observance or violation of them is for the happiness

or misery of our fellow-creatures. And this is in fact the case. For there are certain dispositions of mind, and certain actions, which are in themselves approved or disapproved by mankind, abstracted from the consideration of their tendency to the happiness or misery of the world; approved or disapproved by reflection, by that principle within, which is the guide of life, the judge of right and wrong. ("Upon the Love of Our Neighbour", 15 Sermons, XII, 31, 31n.: my emphasis)

"Fidelity, honour, strict justice", among other virtues, "are themselves approved in the highest degree, abstracted from the consideration of their tendency" (15 Sermons, XII, 31n.: my emphasis). In the same way, synteresis or moral choice is not simply a matter of estimating the "tendency" or utility of alternative courses of action: there are many "particular obligations, which we may discern and feel ourselves under, quite distinct from a perception, that the observance or violation of them is for the happiness or misery of our fellow-creatures" (loc. cit.). In other words, many courses of action are chosen for their own sake, because they are perceived or felt to be right. Benevolence is for Butler the quintessential Christian virtue. But even the most "rational" benevolence must be directed and circumscribed by the edicts of conscience, by "that principle within, which is the guide of life, the judge of right and wrong". Utilitarian imperatives are always hypothetical (if I desire a particular state of affairs, I must perform a certain action), and are therefore subject to rational debate (is action A or action B the most promising means of attaining the desired end?). The imperatives of conscience, on the other hand, are immediate and categorical.<sup>80</sup> Butler persistently emphasizes the "absolute authority" of "the principle of reflection or conscience" (15 Sermons, Preface, paras. 24, 25).<sup>81</sup> It is by virtue of this principle, and this alone, that man is truly "a moral agent" and "in the strictest and most proper sense a law to himself" ("Upon Human Nature", 15 Sermons, II, 8; III, 3). The conscience "carries its own authority with it": "Your obligation to obey this law, is its being the law of your nature. That your conscience approves of and attests to such a course of action, is itself alone an obligation" (15 Sermons, III, 5). It is not possible to argue about this kind of obligation.

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<sup>80</sup> I use the terms "hypothetical" and "categorical" in their Kantian senses. See Immanuel Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals, ed. and trans. H. J. Paton under the title The Moral Law, 1948, Ch. ii, pp. 78-80.

<sup>81</sup> See also Preface, 13-26, and Sermons II and III "Upon Human Nature".



Butler's account of synteresis is thus decidedly anti-utilitarian. It also raises questions about the possibility of tension or conflict between rational benevolence and the conscience. In most ordinary cases, of course, the conscience will approve our benevolent purposes. But conscience is also the guarantor of justice, honour, and fidelity. It is not difficult to see how these absolute and categorical obligations might in some cases interfere with the operation of the Greatest Happiness Principle. As Butler himself complains, rational benevolence might — for the sake of the Common Good — dictate actions which are in themselves unjust, dishonourable, or treacherous. (Take, for instance, the rational benevolence of Shakespeare's Brutus, which dictates the betrayal and assassination of Caesar.) In such cases, the conscience would presumably issue a categorical prohibition of the proposed deed, however beneficial in "tendency". Might not the conscience therefore interfere with the utilitarian deliberations of Fielding's ideal magistrate, who is required to commit a murderous injustice for the sake of "the public good"?<sup>82</sup> As a defender of capital punishment on utilitarian grounds, Butler involves himself in self-contradiction by his very insistence that conscience is the ultimate natural "authority", to which even benevolence must be subject, and which forbids us to do good by doing wrong. But we are now verging on questions which are beyond the scope of the present study.

For Fielding, as for Butler, conscience is the "LORD HIGH CHANCELLOR" of the mind (TJ, IV, vi, p. 172). Hawkins is simply wrong when he complains that Fielding "resolves virtue into good affections, in contradiction to moral obligation and a sense of duty". In one respect, this complaint seems again to reflect a rigoristic conception of morality. What Hawkins really finds objectionable, I suspect, is that Tom Jones's palpable "sense of duty" does not directly interfere with his sexual proclivities. Jones's conscience is certainly not puritanical, apparently neither prohibiting nor punishing fornication per se.<sup>83</sup> In another respect, Hawkins's complaint could be said to confirm Fielding's divergence from the

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<sup>82</sup> For an interesting biographical perspective on this ethical tension, see Sacks, Shape of Belief, p. 118, on Fielding's handling of the case of Bosavern Penlez.

<sup>83</sup> The Lady Bellaston affair does present Jones with genuine and acute moral dilemmas, in which the conscience is directly engaged, but these have less to do with fornication per se than with the bonds of gratitude,

rationalist tradition with which so many modern critics align his work. Those who analyze Fielding's treatment of character and conduct in terms of rationalist moral psychology imply again and again that "reason" is some kind of moral authority, a faculty which distinguishes between right and wrong (rather than the hedonistic "good" and "evil" of prudentialism), and which subsequently issues moral prescriptions to the so-called "will". The rationalist model of the psyche (reason, will, appetite) implies rationalist epistemology: there would be no point in reason governing or conquering the passions unless reason were a discoverer and dictator of moral obligations.

Fielding clearly does not see reason as a moral authority of this kind. It seems to me, in fact, that his assumptions concerning the practical functions of reason are fundamentally akin to Hume's. This is certainly true of his psychology of action. According to Hume, "reason is perfectly inert, and can never either prevent or produce any action or affection": "reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will", and can therefore "never oppose passion in the direction of the will" (Treatise, III.1.i, p. 458: my emphasis; II.3.iii, p. 413). In a general sense, practical reason concerns itself only with matters of "fact" (Treatise, III.1.i, p. 460). I can find nothing in Fielding's work to suggest that he would disagree with this. And if his treatment of rational self-conquerors like Adams and Square suggests a general agreement with Hume's theory of action, there is much evidence to suggest that he would also have endorsed Hume's critique of rationalist moral epistemology. Tom Jones, in particular, displays a thorough kinship with the sentimentalism of the Treatise, and a notably 'Humean' impatience with the traditional pretensions of reason.

According to Hume, "nothing is ever present to the mind but its perceptions", and these "resolve themselves into two kinds, viz. impressions and ideas" (the former term embraces "all our sensations, passions and emotions"): this distinction corresponds in a general way to "the difference betwixt feeling and thinking" (Treatise, I.1.i, pp. 1-2). This gives rise to an important moral-psychological question: "Whether 'tis by means of our ideas or impressions we distinguish betwixt vice and virtue, and pronounce an action blameable or praise-worthy?" (III.1.i, p. 456: Hume's italics reversed). In other words, are moral

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honour and honesty; and they do of course dissolve when Jones's naive assumptions about the terms of his relationship with Lady Bellaston are corrected by Nightingale. See, e.g., TJ, XIII, ix, esp. pp. 723-5; XV, ix, esp. p. 821.



distinctions perceived by reason or by sentiment? "There has been an opinion very industriously propagated by certain philosophers", says Hume, "that morality is susceptible of demonstration; and... 'tis taken for granted, that this science may be brought to an equal certainty with geometry or algebra". Hume is clearly thinking of Samuel Clarke and his disciples:

Those who affirm that virtue is nothing but a conformity to reason; that there are eternal fitnesses and unfitnesses of things, which are the same to every rational being that considers them; that the immutable measures of right and wrong impose an obligation, not only on human creatures, but also on the Deity himself: All these systems concur in the opinion, that morality, like truth, is discern'd merely by ideas, and by their juxta-position and comparison. In order, therefore, to judge of these systems, we need only consider whether it be possible, from reason alone, to distinguish betwixt moral good and evil... (III.1.i, pp. 463, 456-7)

Hume is certain that the geometers have got it wrong. These "eternal immutable fitnesses and unfitnesses of things cannot be defended by sound philosophy". If the rationalists were right, "the character of virtuous and vicious either must lie in some relations of objects, or must be a matter of fact", since these are the only legitimate objects of reason: "the operations of human understanding divide themselves into two kinds, the comparing of ideas, and the inferring of matter of fact" (III.1.i, p. 463). The rationalists attribute moral perceptions to the former mental operation, "the comparing of ideas", and the discovery of "relations" between them. "'Tis impossible", complains Hume, "to refute a system, which has never yet been explain'd" (III.1.i, p. 464). His real point is that this "system" is inexplicable. He can discover no sense in which morality could consist in ideal "relations". The "most horrid and unnatural" of all human crimes is ingratitude, "especially when it is committed against parents". But the geometers cannot say why ingratitude is vicious — its criminality simply cannot be defined in terms of abstract relations (III.1.i, pp. 466 ff.).

Thus far, Hume's argument (indeed his very attitude to "those who maintain an abstract rational difference betwixt good and evil") (III.1.i, p. 465) clearly anticipates Fielding's satirical treatment of Square, the moral geometer of Tom Jones. Fielding makes the same point as Hume by dramatizing Square's eloquent ineptitude as a judge of practical rights and wrongs. He fails to appreciate the virtue (however misguided) in

Jones's refusal to betray Black George, while positively applauding Blifil's treacherous and malicious role as informer ("by the Philosopher this was declared to be highly conformable with the Rule of Right, and the eternal and unalterable Fitness of Things") (TJ, III, v, p. 132).<sup>84</sup> He makes the same kind of topsy-turvy judgment later, when Blifil maliciously releases Sophia's pet bird: again, "the eternal Fitness of Things" dictates that the hero of the episode was in the wrong, and the villain in the right (IV, iv, p. 161).<sup>85</sup> If Fielding is making any serious point at all in these prominent episodes, it is surely the same as Hume's — that morality is not "discerned merely by ideas, and by their juxta-position and comparison". Square, given the chance to apply his pet theories, merely proves himself a moral imbecile.

And if "morality consists not in any relations", argues Hume, it can be proved "with equal certainty, that it consists not in any matter of fact, which can be discovered by the understanding" (Treatise, III.1.i, p. 468). Hume effectively demonstrates (principally through an appeal to experience) that moral distinctions have no concrete, empirical referents. But his principal argument against rationalist epistemology in general is rooted in his own theory of action. The very fact that people conduct themselves morally is enough to indictate that morals are not essentially rational:

Since morals...have an influence on the actions and affections, it follows, that they cannot be deriv'd from reason; and that because reason alone...can never have any such influence. Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason.

As long as it is allow'd, that reason has no influence on our passions and actions, 'tis in vain to pretend, that morality is discover'd only by a deduction of reason. An active principle can never be founded on an inactive...  
(III.1.i, p. 457)

This is an ingeniously effective argument. If we accept Hume's theory of

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<sup>84</sup> See TJ, III, iii-v, for the context.

<sup>85</sup> See TJ, IV, iii-iv. For an impressive analysis of this episode, see Harrison, The Novelist as Moral Philosopher, pp. 28-36. Both Harrison and Ehrenpreis (Fielding: TJ, pp. 37-8) note the significance of the fact that Squire Western's judgment is, on this occasion, the soundest.



action ("reason is perfectly inert"), we must also accept that moral distinctions "are not the offspring of reason":

Reason is wholly inactive, and can never be the source of so active a principle as conscience, or a sense of morals.  
(III.1.i, p. 458)

Given that Fielding appears to accept Hume's psychological premises, we might also expect to find him agreeing with this conclusion. Agreement on this point is in fact implicit throughout Fielding's work, most conspicuously in Tom Jones. In a passage studded with subtle allusions and indirections, Fielding essays a description of the psychological "Somewhat" that makes his hero a moral being:

Mr. Jones had Somewhat about him, which, though I think Writers are not thoroughly agreed in its Name, doth certainly inhabit some human Breasts; whose Use is not so properly to distinguish Right from Wrong, as to prompt and incite them to the former, and to restrain and with-hold them from the latter. (TJ, IV, vi, pp. 171-2)

Fielding's remark on the "Use" of this "Somewhat" is surely another subtle piece of anti-rationalism.<sup>86</sup> It is "not so properly" a source of knowledge as a source of motives. The distinction is emphatically reiterated: "this, as I have said, is an active Principle, and doth not content itself with Knowledge or Belief only" (p. 173: my emphasis). The stressed distinction would be quite pointless if Fielding were an ethical rationalist. The point lies in the clear implication that "Knowledge or Belief" (both functions of reason), as Hume said, "can never be the source of so active a principle as conscience, or a sense of morals".

The "or" in Hume's appellation of this moral "principle" is also of some significance. As Fielding says of Jones's "Somewhat", "I think Writers are not thoroughly agreed in its Name". Battestin's explanatory footnote disregards this archly tactful allusion to contemporary ethical debate: "The usual name for the moral faculty to which Fielding here

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<sup>86</sup> Ribble gets this completely back-to-front, viewing Fielding's emphasis on the active and sentimental (as opposed to intellectual) status of Jones's "Somewhat" as a critical reflection on the hero's moral immaturity: see "Aristotle", p. 42. Harrison sees the anti-rationalist subtext here, but also (and wrongly) views it as specifically anti-Shaftesburian (op. cit., pp. 115-6).

refers is, of course, the 'conscience'..." (TJ, IV, vi, p. 171, n. 1).<sup>87</sup> There is no "of course" about it, as Fielding's own indirection implies. And Battestin demonstrates a further degree of indifference to the historical complexity of the matter by quoting 'comparative' material from two works published more than a century before Tom Jones.<sup>88</sup> These singularly inappropriate contextual quotations again serve to align Fielding with the rationalist tradition, and indeed to "suggest Fielding's general agreement" with the "pre-Lockean tradition" of innate ideas (loc. cit.).

Squire Allworthy's earlier reference to "the original Notions of Right and Wrong" (TJ, II, ii, p. 80) does indeed suggest a significant disagreement between Fielding and Locke.<sup>89</sup> In the Essay, Locke takes issue with the notion ("commonly taken for granted") that "there are certain Principles both Speculative and Practical...universally agreed upon by all Mankind: which...the Souls of Men receive in their first Beings, and which they bring into the World with them" (I.ii.2, p. 49).<sup>90</sup> By "innate practical Principles", Locke means natural moral principles. His demolition of the traditional doctrine of innate ideas is based on empirical evidence of cultural diversity, and begins with the question, "Where is that practical Truth, that is universally received without doubt or question, as it must be if innate?" (I.iii.2, p. 66). As an empiricist, Locke thinks "the Actions of Men the best Interpreters of their thoughts", and, "since it is certain, that most Men's Practice, and some Men's open Professions, have either questioned or denied these Principles", it is "impossible to conclude them innate" (I.iii.3, p. 67). To the probable objection that "the tacit assent of their Minds agrees to what their

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<sup>87</sup> But cf. Moral Basis, pp. 60, 76, where Battestin supposes that Fielding is actually referring to "good nature".

<sup>88</sup> Richard Carpenter, The Conscionable Christian (1623), and Thomas Nabbes, Microcosmus, A Morall Maske (1637). Battestin seems to have been led to these works — and these particular passages — by Yolton, John Locke and the Way of Ideas, pp. 31-2.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Examples of the Interposition of Providence in the Detection and Punishment of Murder, where Fielding refers to "those secret institutions, which God hath written in the heart and conscience of every man" (Henley, XVI, 119). The metaphor of inscription goes back to Romans 2:14-15, the text for Sermons II-III of Butler's 15 Sermons, both on the conscience (see esp. II, 8, for an exegesis of the text).

<sup>90</sup> On this tradition and Locke's controversial departure from it, see Yolton, op. cit., Ch. ii, passim.



Practice contradicts", Locke responds with the common-sense counter-objection that "'Tis very strange and unreasonable, to suppose innate practical Principles, that terminate only in Contemplation". A practical principle is, by definition, an active principle:

Practical Principles derived from Nature, are there for Operation, and must produce Conformity of Action, not barely speculative assent to their truth, or else they are in vain distinguish'd from speculative Maxims. Nature, I confess, has put into Man a desire of Happiness, and an aversion to Misery: These indeed are innate practical Principles, which (as practical Principles ought) do continue constantly to operate and influence all our Actions, without ceasing: These may be observ'd in all Persons and all Ages, steady and universal; but these are Inclinations of the Appetite to good, not Impressions of truth on the Understanding. I deny not, that there are natural tendencies imprinted on the Minds of Men; and that, from the very first instances of Sense and Perception, there are some things, that are grateful, and others unwelcome to them; some things that they incline to, and others that they fly: But this makes nothing for innate Characters on the Mind, which are to be the Principles of Knowledge, regulating our Practice. (I.iii.3, p. 67)

Locke's black-and-white, all-or-nothing distinctions between the "speculative" and the "practical", between "Understanding" and "Appetite", oversimplify and distort the naturalistic arguments of many of his adversaries. Cudworth's conception of innate practical principles is certainly resistant to this kind of dichotomizing. In A Treatise concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality, he argues that "the Soul is not a meer Rasa Tabula, a Naked and Passive Thing, which has no innate Furniture or Activity of its own, nor any thing at all in it, but what was impressed upon it without". If this were true, he believes, "there could not possibly be any such Thing as Moral Good and Evil, Just and Unjust", for these "Differences" arise from "a certain inward Determination in the Soul it self". As if to anticipate Locke, Cudworth emphasizes that this moral orientation of the soul is something more than "speculative" knowledge:

Not that the Anticipations of Morality spring meerly from intellectual Forms and notional Idea's of the Mind, or from certain Rules or Propositions, arbitrarily printed upon the Soul as upon a Book, but from some other more inward, and vital Principle, in intellectual Beings, as such, whereby they have a natural Determination in them to do some Things, and

to avoid others, which could not be, if they were mere  
naked Passive Things.<sup>91</sup>

Locke's critique of innate ideas is an inadequate response to this kind of argument. According to Cudworth, innate moral principles manifest themselves not as ideas but as energies, as a "vital" and "inward Determination" to do good and shun evil. Locke does concede, of course, that "there are natural tendencies imprinted on the Minds of Men; and that, from the very first instances of Sense and Perception, there are some things, that are grateful, and others unwelcome to them; some things that they incline to, and others that they fly". But this is basic hedonistic psychology: pleasure and pain, appetite and aversion, are the only "innate practical Principles" that are universally active. And these "tendencies" are morally neutral — they can generate virtuous conduct only in the context of an external framework of legislation and sanctions.<sup>92</sup> According to Cudworth, on the other hand, some of our "natural tendencies" — our desires and aversions — are moral tendencies. Though it cannot escape the appeal to cultural diversity, Cudworth's theory could be said to defy the terms of Locke's critique, as does Fielding's account of Tom Jones's moral "Somewhat". Like Cudworth's "inward Determination", this "Somewhat" is a distinctively active principle, "and doth not content itself with Knowledge or Belief only".<sup>93</sup> It motivates, restrains, rewards and punishes spontaneously, without reference to reason (however understood). Fielding would clearly sympathize with Locke's view that "innate practical Principles, that terminate only in Contemplation" are as good as useless. This is precisely why he makes a point of insisting that his "Somewhat" is a truly "practical" principle.

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<sup>91</sup> Ralph Cudworth, A Treatise concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality, 1731, Bk. IV, Ch. vi, pp. 287-8.

<sup>92</sup> See Essay, I.iii, esp. 5-6, pp. 68-9.

<sup>93</sup> Tillotson likewise distinguished conscience from reason by reference to its active, instinctual status: he speaks of it as "a kind of natural Instinct, by which I mean a secret Impression upon the Minds of Men, whereby they are naturally carried to approve some things as good and fit, and to dislike other things, as having a native evil and deformity in them. And this I call a natural Instinct, because it does not seem to proceed so much from the exercise of our Reason, as from a natural propension and inclination...". Quoted from Lessenich, Elements of Pulpit Oratory, p. 180. Neither Tillotson nor Fielding could be said to view the conscience as a repository of innate moral ideas, as such.



In moral-psychological terms, it is a little misleading to talk of Fielding's "general agreement" with the "pre-Lockean tradition" of innate ideas. But Battestin's most worrying implication is that 'conscience' was a fixed concept, unchanged by more than a hundred years of theological and philosophical history. Fielding himself clearly understood that this was not the case. Writers were not "thoroughly agreed" as to what to call the "Somewhat" in the human breast. Bishop Butler displays a similar awareness of this contemporary disagreement:

That which renders beings capable of moral government, is their having a moral nature, and moral faculties of perception and of action. Brute creatures are impressed and actuated by various instincts and propensions: so also are we. But additional to this, we have a capacity of reflecting upon actions and characters, and making them an object to our thought: and on doing this, we naturally and unavoidably approve some actions, under the peculiar view of their being virtuous and of good desert; and disapprove others, as vicious and of ill desert. That we have this moral approving and disapproving faculty, is certain from our experiencing it in ourselves, and recognising it in each other. It appears from our exercising it unavoidably, in the approbation and disapprobation even of feigned characters... It is manifest great part of common language, and of common behaviour over the world, is formed upon supposition of such a moral faculty; whether called conscience, moral reason, moral sense, or Divine reason; whether considered as a sentiment of the understanding, or as a perception of the heart; or, which seems the truth, as including both. (Dissertation, para. 1: 15 Sermons, p. 147)

Like Fielding, Butler acknowledges that this "moral faculty" can be, and is, "called" by a variety of names. Also like Fielding, he distinguishes man from the brutes not by his rationality per se, but by his possession of this "Somewhat": "This active Principle", as Fielding says, "may perhaps be said to constitute the most essential Barrier between us, and our Neighbours the Brutes" (TJ, IV, vi, p. 173). Butler obviously believes "Divine reason" and "moral sense" to be different names for essentially the same psychological functions; but the taxonomic uncertainty obliquely reflects the growing philosophical divide between Christian and secular ethics, and — more important — between rationalism and sentimentalism. Perhaps with this divergence in mind, Butler mischievously conflates the languages of rationalism and sentimentalism, in the phrases "sentiment of the understanding" and "perception of the heart". Hume would no doubt have appreciated this philosophical joke.

Mischievous and paradoxical though they are, Butler's phrases do help to clarify the question that Hume was to ask in the Treatise: is moral judgment a matter of the "understanding" or of the "heart", a matter of rational "perception" or of irrational "sentiment"? Butler purports to think of it "as including both". In a sense, the either/or terms of Hume's inquiry reflect a disintegration and contraction of the meaning of "reason" or "understanding".<sup>94</sup> In the wake of Lockean empiricism, with its attenuated conception of "rational" mind, Hume can find only two functions for "human understanding" — "the comparing of ideas, and the inferring of matters of fact" (Treatise, III.1.i, p. 463). All other mental operations fall into the category of appetite or passion, feeling or sentiment. Ironically, therefore, Butler's account of the "moral faculty" would probably have been viewed by Hume as a confirmation of his anti-rationalist arguments, and of his own theory of moral sentiments. The significant disagreement is over the question of whether moral judgments can be called "rational". According to Butler, "we naturally and unavoidably approve some actions...and disapprove others". Active, discursive reasoning, the only kind of rationality recognized by Hume, is not involved:<sup>95</sup> moral judgment is a natural and involuntary reflex, and therefore — in Humean terms — irrational. More than this, Butler's "moral faculty" is essentially no more than an "approving and disapproving faculty". Approval and disapproval have nothing to do with the manipulation of facts or ideas, and are therefore — in Humean terms — irrational. And for Butler, as for Hume and Fielding, this faculty is also distinctively active:

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<sup>94</sup> Among the Cambridge Platonists, for instance, "reason" was much more than a tool for thinking. Whichcote's use of the word in Select Sermons sometimes suggests that it comprehends virtually every human faculty which transcends the physical. "Reason" is often conflated with "Conscience", in phrases such as "the Light of Reason and Conscience" (I, iii, p. 63). And though rational in the highest sense, "the Principles of natural Conscience" are also frequently associated with "Sense" and even "Instinct": "Man by his Nature and Constitution...being an intelligent Agent, hath Sense of Good and Evil, upon a moral Account"; and "it is most certain that, in intelligent Agents, this...is INSTINCT" (Whichcote compares it with the instincts of animals): thus, man is "made to know the Difference of Things" (I, ii, p. 67; II, iii, pp. 232-3). Elsewhere, Whichcote effectively conflates "the Principles of Reason" with "the common Instincts of Good and Just" (I, iv, p. 101). Though natural and intuitive, our moral perceptions are for Whichcote among the highest functions of "Reason".

<sup>95</sup> "In all common ordinary cases", says Butler, "we see intuitively at first view what is our duty, what is the honest part" ("Upon the Character of Balaam", 15 Sermons, VII, 14: my emphasis).



There is a principle of reflection in men, by which they distinguish between, approve and disapprove their own actions. We are plainly constituted such sort of creatures as to reflect upon our own nature. The mind can take a view of what passes within itself, its propensions, aversions, passions, affections...and of the several actions consequent thereupon. In this survey it approves of one, disapproves of another, and towards a third is affected in neither of these ways, but is quite indifferent. This principle in man, by which he approves or disapproves his heart, temper, and actions, is conscience... And that this faculty tends to restrain men from doing mischief to each other, and leads them to do good, is too manifest to need being insisted upon. ("Upon Human Nature", 15 Sermons, I, 8)

Butler's "conscience" denotes the "approving and disapproving faculty" turned inwards by "reflection". Self-approval and -disapproval are functions of the same natural and unavoidable reflex. And its "Use", as Fielding puts it, "is not so properly to distinguish Right from Wrong, as to prompt and incite...and to restrain and with-hold" the agent. In other words, it is an "active Principle". And since reason, for Hume and Fielding, is "wholly inactive", it follows that Butlerian "conscience" is not a function of reason. The very concept of moral judgment might suggest rationality of some kind, but certainly not of the Humean kind. Let me quote further from Butler:

...there is a superior principle of reflection or conscience in every man, which distinguishes between the internal principles of his heart, as well as his external actions: which passes judgment upon himself and them; pronounces determinately some actions to be in themselves just, right, good; others to be in themselves evil, wrong, unjust: which, without being consulted...magisterially exerts itself, and approves or condemns him the doer of them accordingly... ("Upon Human Nature", 15 Sermons, II, 8)

This kind of judgment consists essentially in approbation and disapprobation; and the conscience exerts itself autonomously, "without being consulted" — that is, non-discursively, "naturally and unavoidably". Hence the adverb, "magisterially". Fielding's similes and metaphors serve to emphasize exactly the same psychological qualities of self-judgment:

This Somewhat may be indeed resembled to the famous Trunk-maker in the Playhouse: for whenever the Person who is possessed of it doth what is right, no ravished or friendly Spectator is so eager, or so loud in his Applause; on the contrary, when he doth wrong, no Critic is so apt to hiss

and explode him.

To give a higher Idea of the Principle I mean...it may be considered as sitting on its Throne in the Mind, like the LORD HIGH CHANCELLOR of this Kingdom in his Court; where it presides, governs, directs, judges, acquits and condemns according to Merit and Justice; with a Knowledge which nothing escapes, a Penetration which nothing can deceive, and an Integrity which nothing can corrupt. (TJ, IV, vi, p. 172) <sup>96</sup>

The point of the second metaphor is surely to emphasize not only the authority but the power of this "Principle" — in particular, its power to exert itself in spite of the agent's conscious and deliberate motives. The agent himself may be morally ignorant or corruptible, but this psychic Lord Chancellor is enthroned as it were above the personal mind.<sup>97</sup> Fielding is underlining the involuntary status of moral self-judgment, which is, as Butler says, a natural and unavoidable reflex. Black George is hardly what we would call a conscientious man, but even he is on occasion arrested by the "LORD HIGH CHANCELLOR". Fielding's theatrical simile, on the other hand, serves to confirm the essentially non-rational (certainly non-ratiocinative) quality of moral judgments: syneidesis consists entirely in mental clapping and hissing, in spontaneous and inarticulate noises of approval and disapproval.

Moral self-approbation or -disapprobation consists not only in affection or disaffection, but also — and consequently — in feelings of pleasure or pain. As Fielding says of Jones's "Somewhat": "Our Heroe... was very strongly under the Guidance of this Principle: for though he did not always act rightly, yet he never did otherwise without feeling and suffering for it" (TJ, IV, vi, p. 173). And when he did act "rightly", he

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<sup>96</sup> It has been suggested that Fielding is actually paraphrasing Butler here: see E. C. Mossner, Bishop Butler and the Age of Reason (1936), New York, 1971, p. 182. For an earlier reference to the "Trunk-maker", see the Champion leader for 31 May 1740: Henley, XV, 323. And, in addition to Battestin's footnote (TJ, IV, vi, p. 172, n. 1), see John J. Carroll, "Henry Fielding and the 'Trunk-Maker'", N&Q, 204 (1959), 213; and, especially, A. Lentin, "Fielding, Lord Chancellor Hardwicke and the 'Court of Conscience' in Tom Jones", N&Q, 225 (1980), 400-404 (a convincing historical interpretation of Fielding's reference to the "LORD HIGH CHANCELLOR"). For other significant references to the "Conscience" in Tom Jones, see XIV, ix, p. 779; XV, x, p. 823; XVII, iii, p. 883.

<sup>97</sup> There is "a Judge in every Man's Breast, which none can cheat nor corrupt, tho' perhaps it is the only uncorrupt Thing about him": this "Judge" remains "inflexible and honest", "however polluted the Bench be on which he sits" (Miscellanies I, Preface, p. 10).



felt a corresponding satisfaction. As Jones himself says (here in conversation with Dowling): "I know, I feel, — I feel my Innocence, my Friend; and I would not part with that Feeling for the World" (TJ, XII, x, p. 659). My emphasis indicates where the spoken emphasis would clearly lie. "Morality", declares Hume, "is more properly felt than judg'd of" (Treatise, III.1.ii, p. 470: my emphasis). The same point is perhaps being made implicitly in Jones's substitution of a sentimental for an intellectual verb.<sup>98</sup> According to Hume, it is only "by means of some impression or sentiment" occasioned by virtue or vice "that we are able to mark the difference betwixt them" (Treatise, III.1.ii, p. 470), and he sees a close connexion between these sentiments of approbation or disapprobation and the more basic sensations of pleasure and pain.<sup>99</sup> As he says, "we...must pronounce the impression arising from virtue, to be agreeable, and that proceeding from vice to be uneasy":

An action, or sentiment, or character is virtuous or vicious; why? because its view causes a pleasure or uneasiness of a particular kind. In giving a reason, therefore, for the pleasure or uneasiness, we sufficiently explain the vice or virtue. To have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to feel a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. The very feeling constitutes our praise or admiration... We do not infer a character to be virtuous, because it pleases: But in feeling that it pleases after such a particular manner, we in effect feel that it is virtuous. (III.1.ii, pp. 470, 471)

Fielding seems to imply exactly this: in effect, Jones knows his own "Innocence" only because he feels it. And, indeed, he feels it as a kind of pleasure. "There is no spectacle so fair and beautiful", says Hume, "as a noble and generous action", none which gives us so much "satisfaction" (III.1.ii, p. 470). Jones makes the same point in a characteristic flight of sentimental rhetoric:

What is the poor Pride arising from a magnificent House, a numerous Equipage, a splendid Table, and from all the other Advantages or Appearances of Fortune, compared to the warm, solid Content, the swelling Satisfaction, the thrilling Transports, and the exulting Triumphs, which a good Mind enjoys, in the Contemplation of a generous, virtuous, noble, benevolent Action? (TJ, XII, x, p. 659)

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<sup>98</sup> Note that Jones's (successful) attempts to reform Nightingale involve an appeal not to reason or principle but to his "Heart", his affections and sensibilities: see TJ, XIV, vi, p. 765; XIV, vii.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Shaftesbury on moral introspection in the Inquiry, II.2.i, 190.

Jones is here talking specifically about the incomparable pleasures of self-approval, the "Satisfaction" raised by contemplation of one's own noble and generous actions. This is an instance of the "self-approving joy" which Crane has associated with the origins of ethical sentimentalism.<sup>100</sup> And this, too, is a psychological phenomenon theorized by Hume in the Treatise. All the passions are "founded on pain and pleasure". Good and evil (that is, pleasure and pain) can give rise not only to the "direct" passions (desire and aversion, grief and joy, hope and fear), but also to the "indirect" passions, such as pride, humility, ambition, vanity, love, hatred, and the rest: "By direct passions I understand such as arise immediately from good or evil, from pain or pleasure. By indirect such as proceed from the same principles, but by the conjunction of other qualities..." (II.3.ix, p. 438; II.1.i, p. 276). For instance: pain will always give rise immediately to grief, pleasure to joy (these are basic natural mechanisms); but if human relations are involved, if that pain or pleasure is owing to the deliberate actions of another agent, it will also give rise to the "indirect" passions of love or hatred. These psychological processes are featured in Hume's account of moral pleasures and pains:

Pride and humility, love and hatred are excited, when there is any thing presented to us, that both bears a relation to the object of the passion, and produces a separate sensation related to the sensation of the passion. Now virtue and vice are attended with these circumstances. They must necessarily be placed either in ourselves or others, and excite either pleasure or uneasiness; and therefore must give rise to one of these four passions; which clearly distinguishes them from the pleasure and pain arising from inanimate objects, that often bear no relation to us: And this is, perhaps, the most considerable effect that virtue and vice have upon the human mind. (Treatise, III.1.ii, p. 473)

Virtue or vice in another will immediately give rise to the sensations of pleasure or pain, and of joy or grief; and these, in turn, will give rise to the relative passions of love or hatred. Virtue or vice in the self, on the other hand, will also cause pleasure or pain, and therefore the related direct passions of joy or grief; but here, too, they will also generate the passions of pride and humility — love or hatred relative to the self. This, complicated though it sounds, is no more than a systematic account of the psychology behind Tom Jones's talk of "the warm, rapturous

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<sup>100</sup> See "Genealogy", Essays, I, 210-213.



Sensations, which we feel from the Consciousness of an honest, noble, generous, benevolent Action" (TJ, XIV, vii, p. 768). It is a schematic analysis of Crane's "self-approving joy".

In these chapters of the Treatise, Hume is of course making a general epistemological point — that we cannot talk about morality as something distinct from our own moral sensations and sentiments. When we talk about "virtue" and "vice" we are actually talking about our own feelings, and nothing more. Fielding would probably have been worried and perplexed by this sceptical thesis. But Hume's moral psychology is in itself far from revolutionary. (He revolutionized it by divorcing it from its traditional religious and philosophical contexts.) The Treatise tends merely to draw out the philosophical implications of an ethical language that was already in widespread popular use. For Fielding, certainly, morality is "the object of feeling, not of reason" (Treatise, III.1.i, p. 469). It seems to me that Fielding's moral epistemology embraces the absolute God-implanted authority of Butlerian conscience and the sentimental psychology of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Hume. Like Fielding, Hume relates morality very closely to the natural and radical sympathy between man and man, to what the Anglicans would call "good nature".<sup>101</sup> This, according to Hume, is the "true origin of morals, and of that love or hatred, which arises from mental qualities" (Treatise, III.3.i, p. 575). And this is in fact "the chief source of moral distinctions":

Justice is certainly approv'd of for no other reason, than because it has a tendency to the public good: And the public good is indifferent to us, except so far as sympathy interests us in it. We may presume the like with all the other virtues, which have a like tendency to the public good. They must derive all their merit from our sympathy with those, who reap any advantage from them...

In short, the virtues are generally felt to be virtuous "because of their utility":

Now this being once admitted, the force of sympathy must necessarily be acknowledg'd. Virtue is consider'd as means to an end. Means to an end are only valued so far as the end is valued. But the happiness of strangers affects us by sympathy alone. To that principle, therefore, we are to ascribe the sentiment of approbation, which arises from the survey of all

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<sup>101</sup> For Hume's account of natural sympathy, benevolence and compassion, see Treatise, II.2.vi-vii, pp. 366-89.

those virtues, that are useful to society... These form the most considerable part of morality. (III.3.vi, pp. 618-9)

All this puts Hume's subjectivism in proper perspective. While morality is in one sense constituted by our own sentiments, these sentiments are far from arbitrary, and are in fact generally subject to the Greatest Happiness Principle. In a way, moral distinctions are determined not by sentiments of approval or disapproval but ultimately by fellow-feeling, compassion, sympathy. Virtue is "consider'd" and approved "as means to an end", but our prior concern for the end itself is constituted by natural sympathy. As Hume says, "moral distinctions arise, in a great measure, from the tendency of qualities and characters to the interest of society", but it is "our concern for that interest, which makes us approve or disapprove of them" (Treatise, III.3.i, p. 579). The same intimate connexion between benevolence (or good nature) and moral sentiment is implicit in everything Fielding wrote. In practice, this kind of approval (of virtues "as means to an end") involves the exercise of utilitarian reason, of what Barrow would call rational providence. Hume concedes that in many cases our moral sentiments are more immediate and spontaneous than this, involving little or no reflection on the "tendency" of a particular action or motive (in other words, some of these sentiments resemble the self-justifying verdicts of the Butlerian conscience); but in general this kind of reflection is an important psychological premise of our moral judgments:

There have been many systems of morality advanc'd by philosophers in all ages; but if they are strictly examin'd, they may be reduc'd to two, which alone merit our attention. Moral good and evil are certainly distinguish'd by our sentiments, not by reason: But these sentiments may arise either from the mere species or appearance of characters and passions, or from reflexions on their tendency to the happiness of mankind, and of particular persons. My opinion is, that both these causes are intermix'd in our judgments of morals... Tho' I am also of opinion, that reflexions on the tendencies of actions have by far the greatest influence, and determine all the great lines of our duty. (Treatise, III.3.i, pp. 589-90)

In effect, Hume has here defined the legitimate practical functions of reason in the moral life. The "great lines of our duty" are generally determined by "reflexions on the tendencies of actions". In other words, it is the job of reason to estimate the "utility" of particular practices, to calculate "their tendency to the happiness of mankind, and of



particular persons". But the end of these "reflexions" is constituted by sympathy, by our concern for the good of others. Reason is properly the slave of benevolence.

As we have seen, this is exactly how Butler and Fielding conceive the moral functions of reason. Moral judgments are derived from the active elements of the psyche: conscience, sentiment, affection, feeling. Reason is not the governor but the servant of these forces. In any case, the many points of agreement between Fielding and Hume surely demonstrate that Tom Jones is not the novel of an ethical rationalist but of a committed sentimentalist. As a whole, the novel appears to endorse Hume's anti-rationalist thesis: "The approbation of moral qualities most certainly is not deriv'd from reason, or any comparison of ideas; but proceeds entirely from a moral taste, and from certain sentiments of pleasure or disgust" (Treatise, II.3.i, p. 581). It has more in common with the appreciation of beauty than with the construction of geometrical equations. In Amelia, Fielding pays explicit tribute to this favourite analogy of ethical sentimentalism, with a descriptive passage designed to illustrate "the Truth of an Observation which I have read in some Ethic Writer, that a truly elegant Taste is generally accompanied with an Excellency of Heart; or in other Words, that true Virtue is, indeed, nothing else but true Taste" (IX, ix, p. 394). As Battestin's footnote on this passage rightly points out, Fielding could be alluding to Hume, or to Hutcheson, or to Shaftesbury. But it can be said with more certainty that this is not the observation of an ethical rationalist.

Shaftesbury is generally credited with having popularized, if not conceived, the so-called "moral sense".<sup>102</sup> It is true that he was the first to theorize this "NATURAL SENSE OF RIGHT AND WRONG" (Inquiry, I.3.i, 72) within a comprehensive system of sentimental moral psychology, and that — with Hutcheson's help — he did much to prepare the way for Humean sentimentalism.<sup>103</sup> But the Anglican divines had been talking about a moral "sense" long before the sentimentalists appropriated it.<sup>104</sup> "As

<sup>102</sup> For a recent account of Shaftesbury's moral epistemology and its historical contexts, see Voitle, The Third Earl, pp. 124-9.

<sup>103</sup> For Hutcheson's account of the moral sense, see Inquiry, Sect. I.

<sup>104</sup> For this and other reasons, Battestin's tendency to associate the moral sense (via Shaftesbury) with deism is historically misleading, and tends in turn to obscure Fielding's moral-psychological sympathies with Shaftesbury: see TJ, III, iii, p. 123, n. 1.

symmetry and harmony to the animal senses, so delectable is an even temper of soul and orderly tenour of actions to rational apprehensions", says Barrow ("Pleasantness", Works, I, 4):

The practice of benignity, of courtesy, of clemency at first sight, without any discursive reflection, doth obtain approbation and applause from us; being no less grateful and amiable to the mind than beauty to our eyes, harmony to our ears, fragrancy to our smell, and sweetness to our palate: and to the same mental sense, malignity, cruelty, harshness, all kinds of uncharitable dealing, are very disgusting and loathsome. ("Love", Works, I, 235: my emphases) 105

Among other things, here is the commonplace sentimentalist analogy between aesthetic and moral beauty. Typically, Barrow extends it to the non-aesthetic senses of taste and smell, apparently in order to emphasize the radically natural, instinctual and involuntary character of moral approval and disapproval. There was clearly nothing really new in these celebrated passages from Shaftesbury's Inquiry:

THE Case is the same in the mental or moral Subjects, as in the ordinary Bodys, or common Subjects of Sense. The Shapes, Motions, Colours, and Proportions of these latter being presented to our Eye; there necessarily results a Beauty or Deformity, according to the different Measure, Arrangement and Disposition of their several Parts. So in Behaviour and Actions, when presented to our Understanding, there must be found, of necessity, an apparent Difference, according to the Regularity or Irregularity of the Subjects. (I.2.iii, 48)

THE MIND...cannot be without its Eye and Ear; so as to discern Proportion, distinguish Sound, and scan each Sentiment or Thought which comes before it. It can let nothing escape its Censure. It feels the Soft and Harsh, the Agreeable and Disagreeable, in the Affections; and finds a Foul and Fair, a Harmonious and a Dissonant, as really and truly here, as in any musical Numbers, or in the outward Forms and Representations of sensible Things. Nor can it with-hold its Admiration and Exstasy, its Aversion and Scorn, any more what relates to one than to the other of these Subjects. (I.2.iii, 49)

Though a little more refined, the psychology and the analogies are essentially the same as Barrow's. Nor is Shaftesbury saying anything novel when he emphasizes the spontaneous and involuntary character of moral sentiments:

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<sup>105</sup> Cf. "Motives", Works, I, 249.



...the Heart cannot possibly remain neutral; but constantly takes part one way or other: However false or corrupt it be within it-self, it finds the Difference, as to Beauty, and Comeliness, between one Heart and another; and accordingly, in all disinterested Cases, must approve in some measure of what is natural and honest, and disapprove what is dishonest and corrupt. (Inquiry, I.2.iii, 51)

Barrow likewise regarded this as a natural feature of moral sensibility:

God hath impressed upon all virtue a majesty and beauty, which do command respect, and with a kindly violence extort veneration from men: such is the natural constitution of our souls, that as our sense necessarily liketh what is fair and sweet, so our mind unavoidably will esteem what is virtuous and worthy... ("Bounty", Works, I, 309)

Moral beauty is to our "mental sense" what physical or aesthetic beauty is to our other senses, and equally compelling. For Barrow, this is particularly true of the beauty of charity or benevolence. When we see these virtues being practised, we cannot avoid admiring and honouring them: "of all virtues, beneficence doth with most unquestionable right claim honour, and with irresistible force procures it" — all men "taste and feel" the goodness of it (loc. cit.). The moral beauty of charity is truly incomparable:

Charity rendereth us as angels... Nothing is more amiable, more admirable, more venerable, even in the common eye and opinion of men; it hath in it a beauty and a majesty apt to ravish every heart; even a spark of it in generosity of dealing breedeth admiration, a glimpse of it in formal courtesy of behaviour procureth much esteem... ("Motives", Works, I, 251) 106

The ravishing power of moral beauty is something that Fielding himself dramatizes in the person of Sophia Western. During the Upton episode, she exemplifies "the Loveliness of an affable Deportment", and Fielding seems intentionally to conflate the moral and aesthetic sentiments she invokes from the company. After Sophia had retired,

...the Conversation in the Kitchen was all upon the Charms of the young Lady. There is indeed in perfect Beauty a Power which none almost can withstand: For my Landlady, though she was not pleased with the Negative given to the Supper, declared she

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<sup>106</sup> Cf. I, 254; and see also "Profitableness", Works, I, 19.

had never seen so lovely a Creature. Partridge ran out into the most extravagant Encomiums on her Face...; the Post-boy sung forth the Praises of her Goodness, which were likewise echoed by the other Post-boy...

Such Charms are there in Affability, and so sure is it to attract the Praises of all Kinds of People.

(TJ, X, iii, pp. 537-8)

Sophia's physical "Charms" are enhanced by her social and moral graces, and vice versa. Moral and physical beauty are united and analogized in this incidental episode; and the natural basis of the analogy is reflected in the sentiments of Sophia's encomiasts, whose moral and aesthetic responses to her complex "Loveliness" are barely distinguishable. This is only an incidental episode, but Fielding is very fond of the analogy between moral and physical beauty, and frequently represents the one in terms of the other.<sup>107</sup> "It is truly said of Virtue, that could Men behold her naked, they would be all in love with her", says Fielding in "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" (Miscellanies I, p. 173).<sup>108</sup> The sentiment is ultimately Platonic in origin (Phaedrus, 250d), though Fielding would also have come across it in Cicero's De Officiis (I, v, 15) and elsewhere. However, as Miller points out, the idea of "nakedness" (which also occurs in the Dedication of Tom Jones) does seem to be Fielding's own (Miscellanies I, p. 173, n. 4). This is perhaps more than a titillating figure of speech. What makes moral and physical beauty precisely analogous for Fielding is their irresistible seductive power.<sup>109</sup> The conjunction of the two in the person of Tom Jones engenders a series of ironic confusions: the ladies find the combination irresistible and, losing sight of the distinction (or perhaps never seeing it), feast sexually upon the "naked Charms" of virtue (TJ, Dedication, p. 7). This comic moral paradox (which causes more serious problems for the heroine of

<sup>107</sup> In this, Fielding's literary practice is apparently in keeping with the aesthetic theories of Shaftesbury's eighteenth-century philosophical descendants, who made much of this analogy: see Earl R. Wasserman, "Nature Moralized: The Divine Analogy in the Eighteenth Century", ELH, 20 (1953), 39-76.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Champion, 24 January 1739/40: Henley, XV, 165-6 ff.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. TJ, XVI, ix: "To say Truth, perfect Beauty in both Sexes is a more irresistible Object than it is generally thought" (p. 870). See also Fielding's remarks on Sgt. Atkinson in Amelia, V, ii, p. 200; and the much graver observations on the power of beauty in Amelia, VI, i, esp. pp. 232-3.



Amelia) is clearly grounded in the psychological kinship between moral and aesthetic sensibilities: in "perfect Beauty" of both kinds there is "a Power which none almost can withstand", and in a sexual context this obviously has practical implications for both the beautiful object and the ravished spectator.

Tom Jones himself could be said to have an exceptional sensitivity to naked beauty of either kind. His attachment to the physical variety is natural enough, but manifests itself in lamentably imprudent sexual liaisons. His attachment to moral beauty, on the other hand, is the highest function of virtue. For Fielding, as for Shaftesbury, the virtuous individual is characterized not only by a love of his fellow-creatures (that is, by benevolence) but also by a love of Virtue itself, as an idea, and for its own sake. All men naturally see the beauty in virtue, but few can be said to love it in this sense. This aspect of Fielding's ethics tends to manifest itself only implicitly, and sometimes (there is no better word for it) allegorically. These manifestations come into sharper focus, and make better sense, when viewed in the light of Shaftesbury's Inquiry. Here, Shaftesbury anticipates Hawkins by making a clear distinction between "what is esteem'd mere Goodness, and lies within the reach and capacity of all sensible Creatures", and, on the other hand, "that which is call'd VIRTUE or MERIT, and is allow'd to Man only" (I.2.iii, 46). As he says, "tho we may vulgarly call an ill Horse vitious, yet we never say of a good-one, nor of any mere Beast..., tho ever so good-natur'd, that he is worthy or virtuous" (I.2.iii, 53). This, ironically, is precisely the point behind Hawkins's reference to mere "goodness of heart" as "the virtue of a horse or a dog". Shaftesbury concedes that "mere Goodness" lies within the capacity of horses and dogs. Virtue, on the other hand, is a peculiarly human accomplishment, and one which belongs to man by virtue of his rationality. The moral sense, though passive and intuitive, depends upon our capacity for reflection and conceptualization:

IN a Creature capable of forming general Notions of Things, not only the outward Beings which offer themselves to the Sense, are the Objects of the Affection; but the very Actions themselves, and the Affections of Pity, Kindness, Gratitude, and their Contrarys, being brought into the Mind by Reflection, become Objects. So that, by means of this reflected Sense, there arises another kind of Affection towards those very Affections themselves, which...are now become the Subject of a new Liking or Dislike. (Inquiry, I.2.iii, 47)

Goodness per se is constituted by the natural affections. Virtue, on the other hand, implies the proper orientation not only of the "sensible Affections" but also of the so-called "rational Affections" (I.2.iv, 62). When we reflect upon human character and conduct, our own or others', "there arises a new Trial or Exercise of the Heart: which must either rightly and soundly affect what is just and right, and disaffect what is contrary; or, corruptly affect what is ill, and disaffect what is worthy and good" (I.2.iii, 52). Unlike horses or dogs, man is capable of these "Affections towards moral Good", for its own sake (I.2.iv, 64). This second and higher order of "Affections" implies a capacity for reflection:

AND in this Case alone it is we call any Creature Worthy or Virtuous, when it can have the Notion of a publick Interest, and can attain the Speculation or Science of what is morally good or ill, admirable or blameable, right or wrong... (I.2.iii, 53)

SO that if a Creature be generous, kind, constant, compassionate; yet if he cannot reflect on what he himself does, or sees others do, so as to take notice of what is worthy or honest; and make that Notice or Conception of Worth and Honesty to be an Object of his Affection; he has not the Character of being virtuous: for thus, and no otherwise, he is capable of having a Sense of Right or Wrong... (I.2.iii, 54)

Horses, dogs and other brute creatures "are accordingly Good or Vicious, as the sensible Affections stand with them". But "in Creatures capable of framing rational Objects of moral Good" the orientation of the "rational Affections" is the ultimate determinant of the moral stature of the individual (I.2.iv, 62). Virtue involves a "Sense of Right and Wrong", and this consists in "a real Antipathy or Aversion to Injustice or Wrong, and in a real Affection or Love towards Equity and Right, for its own sake, and on the account of its own natural Beauty and Worth" (I.3.i, 75). Unlike their "natural" counterparts, Shaftesbury's "rational" or "moral" affections are truly disinterested — in themselves, they constitute an attachment not to any kind of natural good or interest (either of the self or of others) but to moral good, "for its own sake, and on the account of its own natural Beauty and Worth".

Fielding's frequent and characteristic emphasis on the "Beauty" of virtue suggests that there is a place for these moral affections in any account of his psychological assumptions. On one level, Tom Jones is



clearly designed to appeal to such affections in the reader.<sup>110</sup> In his Dedication, Fielding declares that "to recommend Goodness and Innocence hath been my sincere Endeavour in this History":

And to say the Truth, it is likeliest to be attained in Books of this Kind; for an Example is a Kind of Picture, in which Virtue becomes as it were an Object of Sight, and strikes us with an Idea of that Loveliness, which Plato asserts there is in her naked Charms. (TJ, p. 7)

In Sophia Western, above all, Fielding makes virtue "an Object of Sight" (or, more properly, of what Shaftesbury would call "Reflection"): she is the "Idea" made flesh. In this sense, Fielding allegorizes moral beauty by representing it in terms of the physical. Viewed in the light of this premise, Jones's literal love for Sophia is also, on the metaphorical level, a love of virtue itself.<sup>111</sup> The proper object of "Love", according to Fielding, is "Goodness".<sup>112</sup> (Perhaps it is in this sense that "Love... is a rational Passion"?)<sup>113</sup> At the end of the novel, Allworthy finds himself convinced that Jones's moral affections were always strong and healthy: "for Virtue, I am now convinced, you love in a great Degree" (TJ, XVIII, x, p. 960). If Allworthy is right (and one must suppose that he speaks with authority here), Jones could be said to exemplify Shaftesbury's conception of "VIRTUE or MERIT": both his "natural" and his "rational" affections are in good order.

According to Shaftesbury, then, "VIRTUE or MERIT" implies a certain kind of rationality. But this ability to reflect on, and conceptualize, certain species of motive, character and conduct is not in itself a moral accomplishment: the rational process terminates in "a...Trial or Exercise of the Heart" — this is the source of the moral as well as the natural affections. In generating moral concepts, the rational process merely supplies objects for the moral affections. Virtue itself is ultimately

<sup>110</sup> Miller associates this aspect of Fielding's work with Humean sentimentalism: see Essays, pp. 225-7.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Dudden, II, 679-80; Wendt, "Naked Virtue", passim; Ehrenpreis, Fielding: TJ, pp. 52-3; Ruthven, "Fielding, Square, and the Fitness of Things", pp. 248 ff.; Battestin, Providence, pp. 179-92; and Røstvig, "TJ and the Choice of Hercules", esp. pp. 147, 160, 176.

<sup>112</sup> See Amelia, X, iv, p. 422; and cf. Miscellanies I, Preface, p. 12.

<sup>113</sup> Allworthy's phrase: TJ, I, vii, p. 52 (my emphasis). But the context suggests that "rational" is being used in its prudential sense.

a matter of sentiment: it consists in "a real Antipathy or Aversion" to moral evil and "a real Affection or Love" towards moral good. Shaftesbury is not an ethical rationalist.<sup>114</sup> That Balguy defines the moral affections in similar terms might be thought to suggest otherwise.<sup>115</sup> But for Balguy these "rational" affections constitute the only legitimate source of truly virtuous conduct, and have no essential connexion with the "natural" affections. For Shaftesbury, virtue or merit presupposes goodness, which is of course constituted by the "natural" affections. And in a sense, "mere Goodness" in man almost inevitably implies "VIRTUE or MERIT". In a rational creature, benevolence entails a love of benevolence:

LET us suppose a Creature, who wanting Reason, and being unable to reflect, has, notwithstanding, many good Qualitys and Affections; as Love to his Kind, Courage, Gratitude, or Pity. 'Tis certain that if you give to this Creature a reflecting Faculty, it will at the same instant approve of Gratitude, Kindness, and Pity; be taken with any shew or representation of the social Passion, and think nothing more amiable than this, or more odious than the contrary. And this is to be capable of VIRTUE, and to have a Sense of RIGHT and WRONG. (Inquiry, I.3.iii, 94)

This is echoed quite directly in Butler's second sermon "Upon the Love of Our Neighbour":

Human nature is so constituted, that every good affection implies the love of itself; i.e. becomes the object of a new affection in the same person. Thus, to be righteous, implies in it the love of righteousness; to be benevolent, the love of benevolence; to be good, the love of goodness; whether this righteousness, benevolence, or goodness, be viewed as in our own mind, or in another's... (15 Sermons, XII, 33)

The psychological bridge between the "good affection" and "the love of itself" is, according to Shaftesbury, a mere capacity for reflection. Thus, despite the weight he gives to the distinction between "mere Goodness" and "VIRTUE or MERIT", the distance between the two is in these terms really not very great. Give a good man an ounce of reflective capacity, and he

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<sup>114</sup> For a relevant contrary view, see Harrison, The Novelist as Moral Philosopher, pp. 115-20.

<sup>115</sup> See Foundation, Pt. I, pp. 45 ff.



will immediately become a lover of goodness.<sup>116</sup> The moral affections, though in themselves truly disinterested, cannot arise or survive apart from the social affections. These two kinds of affection are psychologically symbiotic. The corruption of the former invariably implies the corruption of the latter:

Every-one discerns and owns a publick Interest, and is conscious of what affects his Fellowship or Community. When we say therefore of a Creature, "That he has wholly lost the Sense of Right and Wrong;" we suppose that being able to discern the Good and Ill of his Species, he has at the same time no Concern for either; nor any Sense of Excellency or Baseness in any moral Action, relating to one or the other. (Inquiry, I.3.i, 73)

Even the moral sense is ultimately dependent upon the social affections — upon a prior "Concern" for others. This is where Shaftesbury and Fielding diverge most radically from the rationalists and the rigorists: virtue can never be cultivated or exercised in spite of perverted or corrupt natural affections. The ill-natured villain of Tom Jones could never become a lover of Virtue, "on the account of its own natural Beauty or Worth", any more than Jones himself could become a lover of Vice. For Fielding and Shaftesbury, as for Hutcheson, "VIRTUE or MERIT" is primarily and fundamentally a function not of reason but of nature. The capacity for "VIRTUE or MERIT" is always directly proportionate to the force of the social affections. The Good Heart remains the sine qua non.

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<sup>116</sup> Cf. J. L. Mackie, Hume's Moral Theory, 1980, pp. 13-14. As Mackie puts it, Shaftesbury's "moral sense" is "simply a self-conscious form of the social affections" (p. 14).

## CHAPTER VI

### ETHIC AND RHETORIC

Shaftesbury saw an ethical paradox at the heart of Anglican prudential homiletics. He thought it absurd and self-defeating to attempt to make men more charitable by making them more prudent. In his eyes, the typical rhetoric of Anglican prudentialism, with its heavy emphasis on the "profitableness" of the good life, betrayed an essentially cynical view of human nature and a deficient respect for the ethical spirit of the New Testament. In his Preface to Whichcote's Select Sermons, Shaftesbury complains that the characteristic Anglican emphasis on "profit" and "interest" is grist to the Hobbist mill, implying as it inevitably does that there is "nothing [in Man] that moves him to what is Moral, Just and Honest; except a Prospect of some different Good, some Advantage of a different Sort from what attends the Actions themselves". He finds this implied cynicism difficult to square with the moral theology of Christianity:

...it is strange to conceive, how Men who pretend a Notion and Belief of a Supreme Power, acting with the greatest Goodness, and without any Inducement but that of Love and Good-will, should think it unsuitable to a rational Creature, derived from Him to act after His Example, and to find Pleasure and Contentment in the Works of Goodness and Bounty, without other Prospect. But, what is yet more unaccountable, is, that Men who profess a Religion where Love is chiefly enjoined; where the Heart is expresly called for, and the outward Action without that, is disregarded; where Charity (or Kindness) is made all in all; that Men of this Perswasion should combine to degrade the Principle of Good Nature, and refer all to Reward; which being made the only Motive in Men's Actions, must exclude all worthy and generous Disposition, all that Love, Charity, and Affection, which the Scripture enjoyns; and without which no Action is lovely in the Sight of God, or Man; or in itself deserving of Notice or kind Reward. (Select Sermons, pp. xxviii-xxix: italics reversed)

Shaftesbury sees a damaging tension between Christian ethics and Anglican rhetoric. Christianity is "a Religion where Love is chiefly enjoined; where the Heart is expresly called for, and the outward Action without that, is disregarded": our principal duty is to love one another, from the "Heart". But those who "refer all to Reward" are effectively undermining this injunction by encouraging us to love ourselves — Christian practice



is being recommended as a means to a selfish end, as a prudent way of life. For Shaftesbury, this is ethically paradoxical. The "outward Action" is meritorious ("deserving of...kind Reward") only if it reflects a charitable "Heart": it is the quality of the motive that bestows a merit on the deed. But when the reward itself is "made the only Motive in Men's Actions", it must "exclude" exactly those motives ("Love, Charity, and Affection") which make the "outward Action" worthy of the reward. In this sense, the very idea of Christian prudentialism is a contradiction in terms. The same point is made at greater length in Characteristicks, where Shaftesbury laments the misguided zeal of those who would defend the cause of virtue by advertising its rewards:

I HAVE known a Building, which by the Officiousness of the Workmen has been so shor'd, and screw'd up, on the side where they pretended it had a Leaning, that it has at last been turn'd the contrary way, and overthrown. There has something, perhaps, of this kind happen'd in Morals. Men have not been contented to shew the natural Advantages of Honesty and Virtue. They have rather lessen'd these, the better, as they thought, to advance another Foundation. They have made Virtue so mercenary a thing, and have talk'd so much of its Rewards, that one can hardly tell what there is in it, after all, which can be worth rewarding. For to be brib'd only or terrify'd into an honest Practice, bespeaks little of real Honesty or Worth. We may make, 'tis true, whatever Bargain we think fit; and may bestow in favour what Overplus we please. But there can be no Excellence or Wisdom in voluntarily rewarding what is neither estimable, nor deserving. And if Virtue be not really estimable in it-self, I can see nothing estimable in following it for the sake of a Bargain. <sup>1</sup>

In more than one respect, Barrow's pulpit oratory is extremely vulnerable to this kind of criticism. His descriptions and definitions of charity are, as we would expect, entirely consistent with Shaftesbury's account of Christian ethics. It is charity, as a state of the heart, that "giveth worth, form, and life, to all virtue, so that without it no action is valuable in itself, or acceptable to God". Barrow even argues quite explicitly that all other motives to good works are both practically and morally second-rate:

...no other principle will serve; if we are moved only by whip and spur, driven on by fear, or incited by hope, we shall

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<sup>1</sup> Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour, Sect. III: in Characteristicks, 5th ed., 1732, I, 97-8.

go forward unwillingly and dully, often halting, ever flagging: those principles which do put slaves and mercenaries on action, as they are not so noble and worthy, so neither are they so effectual and sure; as ambition, vain-glory, self-interest, design of security, of profit...&c.  
 ("Motives", Works, I, 257)

Without charity, "what is any practice, how specious soever in appearance, or materially good, but an issue of self-conceit or self-will, of servile fear or mercenary design?" (loc. cit.). Without it, then, we "lose all the virtue, and forfeit all the benefit of what we perform" (I, 258). All this sounds uncannily like Shaftesbury. As long as Barrow is only defining charity, or expounding a simple Christian ethic, he is beyond the reach of Shaftesbury's criticism. It is his manner of recommending charity that seems to generate compromises and contradictions. Much of his preaching is apparently designed to engage "servile" or "mercenary" motives. Shaftesbury's metaphors of the "bribe" and the "bargain" begin to seem appropriate when we look at Barrow's hortatory rhetoric, with its persistent appeal to interest. "The practice of charity is productive of many great benefits and advantages to us", declares Barrow: we are therefore "not only obliged in duty, but may be encouraged by our interest thereto" ("Motives", Works, I, 251). This indeed is one of his principal aims — to encourage us "by our interest" to the practice of the Christian virtues. We are told, accordingly, that charity "will preserve us from divers external mischiefs and inconveniences", and that as it "preserveth from mischiefs, so it procureth many sweet comforts and fair accommodations of life": "Charity doth in every estate yield advantages suitable thereto; bettering it, and improving it to our benefit" (I, 252, 253, 254). Charity is manifestly the best policy:

Thus to employ our riches is really the best use they are capable of; not only the most innocent, most worthy, most plausible, but the most safe, most pleasant, most advantageous, and consequently in all respects most prudent way of disposing them. ("Bounty", Works, I, 302)

These prudential arguments are of course reinforced by an overriding emphasis on eternal rewards and punishments. To the observance of the duty of charity "most ample and excellent rewards are assigned": "in return for what we bestow on our poor brethren, God hath promised all sorts of the best mercies and blessings to us" — in short, charity is a "most effectual" means of "purchasing his favour":



God, in making thee rich, would have thee to be a double benefactor, not only to thy poor neighbour, but also to thyself, whilst thou bestowest relief on him, purchasing a reward to thyself. ("Bounty", I, 286, 297)

On the other hand, "grievous punishments are designed and denounced to the transgressors of these duties; the worst of miseries is their portion and doom" (I, 287). But charity "appeaseth God's wrath, and prevents our condemnation and punishment":

So that, if obtaining the certain favour of the great God, with all the benefits attending it, seem considerable to us; or if we think it advisable to shun his displeasure, with its sad effects; it concerns us to practise these duties. (I, 286, 295)

These passages are typical of Barrow's appeals to self-love, to hope and fear, and equally typical of the Anglican rhetoric which Shaftesbury finds so distasteful. What seems to have sharpened Shaftesbury's distaste is the continual adoption of economic metaphors, and the representation of Christian virtue as little more than a particularly profitable "Bargain". Alms-giving, says Barrow, is "the most beneficial traffick that can be": "we thereby lend our money to God, who repays with vast usury; an hundred to one is the rate he allows at present, and above a hundred millions to one he will render hereafter; so that if you will be merchants this way, you...cannot fail to grow rich most easily and speedily" ("Bounty", Works, I, 305). God pays infinitely huge rates of interest on charitable investments, and in this sense "the poor man's pocket is a bank for our money", and one which, unlike secular financial institutions, "never can disappoint or deceive us" (I, 304). For the rich man, therefore, the poor man represents a failsafe means to an infinitely lucrative end. God's revealed contract with man promises a "large return" indeed on all our donations to the indigent:

Seeing God vouchsafeth to esteem whatever is done in charity to our neighbour...to be done unto himself; that in feeding our indigent neighbour we refresh him; in clothing our neighbour we comfort him; we do by charitable beneficence oblige God, and become in a manner benefactors to him; and as such assuredly shall be requited by him: and is not this ...a mighty advantage to us? ("Motives", Works, I, 256)

But is it charitable to view our poor neighbour's empty pocket as "a bank for our money"? And can it be meritorious to do good merely "for the

sake of a Bargain"? Barrow would seem to be appealing deliberately to those "principles" which, in his own words, "do put slaves and mercenaries on action" — to "servile fear" and (above all) "mercenary design". In this sense, the economic rhetoric appears to undermine his own ethical analyses of charity. The good man, as Barrow says elsewhere, "not only lendeth...to those who in time may repay, or requite him; but he freely giveth to the poor, that is, to those from whom he can expect no retribution back" ("Bounty", Works, I, 281). This disinterestedness is what distinguishes the benefactions of the good man from those of the opportunist and the profiteer: "He doth not...present the rich: to do so is but a cleanly way of begging, or a subtile kind of trade" — this is "hardly courtesy" and "surely no bounty", precisely because the benefactor can expect "retribution", or even a profitable return. "In doing this", says Barrow, "there is little virtue; for it there will be small reward" (loc. cit.). Such politic liberality is hardly more than a function of what Barrow calls "self-interest", one of the "culpable" sorts of self-love:

This is the great source of uncharitableness; for from hence men affect no man otherwise than he seemeth able to serve their turn; the poor, therefore, is ever slighted and neglected by them as unserviceable; the rich only is minded and respected as capable to promote their ends; they... delight in nothing which doth not make for their advantage; all their shows of friendship and respect are mercenary, and mere trade; they do nothing gratis, or for love. ("Self-Interest", Works, I, 547)

On the face of it, this is grist to Shaftesbury's mill. Can there be any significant ethical distinction between this "culpable" self-interest and the kind of self-interest which Barrow positively encourages in his exhortations to liberality? His Christian redefinition of "profit" seems designed merely to modify or redirect the expression of what are essentially the same "mercenary" motives. In effect, Barrow's rhetoric seeks to accommodate his congregation's tendency to "affect no man otherwise than he seemeth able to serve their turn". Barrow presupposes that his audience will "delight in nothing which doth not make for their advantage", and chooses his oratorical strategies accordingly. He complains that the kindnesses of the self-interested are "mercenary, and mere trade", yet recommends bounty to the poor as "the most beneficial traffick that can be". He complains that the worldly profiteers "do



nothing gratis, or for love", yet attempts to induce liberality by advertising its profitability.

Shaftesbury, I think, would object that Barrow's rhetoric is implicitly contradicting, and therefore undermining, his ethics. Charity is clearly and repeatedly described as an altruistic orientation of the heart, a disposition (as it were) to do all things "gratis, or for love", but in the rhetorical context of direct and deliberate appeals to self-love, and to "those principles which do put slaves and mercenaries on action". But Barrow would argue that these "principles" — of self-love, of hope and fear — are ethically modified by the quality and status of their objects. He uses terms such as "servile" or "mercenary" only with respect to secular profit-seeking. As Barrow uses the term, "self-interest" does in fact signify material self-interest — something rather different from self-love per se. Although his use of the economic metaphor tends (perhaps inevitably) to blur the all-important distinction between worldly and heavenly, or secular and Christian, "profit", he would simply not accept that the pursuit of the latter is a "mercenary" activity. To fix our hopes and fears on God and eternity is, for Barrow, to fix them on their right and proper objects. The "invincible principle of self-love" ("Future Judgment Reasonable", Works, II, 376) lies, necessarily, at the bottom of all our endeavours; and, if properly directed, it can be as productive of our virtues as it is of our vices. The steady pursuit of eternal "profit", by the prescribed means, is for Barrow the very essence of Christian wisdom and piety. Hence the emphatic qualification in this account of the pious man's disinterestedness:

Thus the pious man giveth, that is, with a free heart and pure intention bestoweth his goods on the indigent, without designing any benefit, or hoping for any requital to himself; except from God, in conscience, respect, and love to whom he doeth it. ("Bounty", Works, I, 282: my emphasis)

The qualification — "except from God" — is all-important, and it is on precisely this point that Shaftesbury differs most radically from the Anglicans. He would regard Barrow's exception as philosophically indefensible. He would argue that self-interest, whatever its objects, is self-interest — that the "servile" or "mercenary" quality of certain motives is undiminished by changes in the quality of their objects. "For to be brib'd only or terrify'd into an honest Practice", by man or God, "bespeaks little of real Honesty or Worth". Shaftesbury includes hope

and fear relative to God in the class of "servile" and "mercenary" motives, and would therefore find nothing truly meritorious in the kind of "honest Practice" encouraged by Barrow's rhetoric. This brings us to the heart of Shaftesbury's case against prudentialism. For him, as for Fielding, most conduct is in itself morally ambiguous: moral goodness and illness consist essentially in certain orientations of the heart — or "Affections" — relative to one's fellow-creatures. It is "by Affection merely that a Creature is esteem'd good or ill, natural or unnatural", by the constitution of that creature's "natural Temper":

NOTHING...being properly either Goodness or Illness in a Creature, except what is from natural Temper; "A good Creature is such a one as by the natural Temper or Bent of his Affections is carry'd primarily and immediately, and not secondarily and accidentally, to Good, and against Ill:" And an ill Creature is just the contrary; viz. "One who is wanting in right Affections, of force enough to carry him directly towards Good, and bear him out against Ill; or who is carry'd by other Affections directly to Ill, and against Good." (Inquiry, I.2.i, 35; I.2.ii, 43)

The moral goodness of the creature is determined not by the amount of good he does, but by the quality of the motives from which he does it — by his "Affections or Passions" relative to "the publick Good, or Good of the Species" (I.2.ii, 44):

SO that in a sensible Creature, That which is not done thro any Affection at all makes neither Good nor Ill in the nature of that Creature; who then only is suppos'd Good, when the Good or Ill of the System to which he has relation, is the immediate Object of some Passion or Affection moving him. (I.2.i, 34)

This is a straightforward anti-utilitarian argument. Morality concerns itself only with the intentional production of natural "Good or Ill", social happiness or misery. Involuntary actions or abstentions, however injurious or beneficial to others, are always morally neutral:

WE do not...say of any-one, that he is an ill Man, because he has the Plague-Spots upon him, or because he has convulsive Fits which make him strike and wound such as approach him. Nor do we say on the other side, that he is a good Man, when having his Hands ty'd up, he is hinder'd from doing the Mischief he designs; or (which is in a manner the same) when he abstains from executing his ill purpose, thro a fear of some impending Punishment, or thro the allurements of some exteriour Reward. (I.2.i, 33)



Shaftesbury's perception of deliberate self-interest as something morally comparable with physical bondage or biological compulsion is revealing, and introduces a new complexity into the argument. This is where anti-utilitarianism shades into anti-prudentialism. A good man "is such a one as by the natural Temper or Bent of his Affections is carry'd primarily and immediately, and not secondarily and accidentally, to Good, and against Ill". He who does good (or refrains from evil) only "thro a fear of some impending Punishment, or thro the allurements of some exteriour Reward", does good only "accidentally". His primary and immediate intention is merely the evasion of the punishment or the winning of the reward. The action is only a means to one of these ends, and in this sense the socially beneficial consequences of that action (however desirable in themselves) are only "accidental": they are, in effect, quite as unintentional and involuntary as the injuries done by the epileptic or the carrier of infection. A man may be "accidentally induc'd to do Good", by one or more of the selfish passions, but in a case such as this "he is no more a good Creature for this Good he executes, than a Man is the more an honest or good Man either for pleading a just Cause, or fighting in a good one, for the sake merely of his Fee or Stipend" (Inquiry, I.2.ii, 39). The "ill-dispos'd Creature" may find "exteriour Helps or Succours...to push him on towards the performance of any one good Action", even to a course of socially beneficial conduct; but "there can no Goodness arise in him till his Temper be so far chang'd, that in the issue he comes in earnest to be led by some immediate Affection, directly, and not accidentally, to Good, and against Ill":

FOR instance; If one of those Creatures suppos'd to be by Nature tame, gentle, and favourable to Mankind, be, contrary to his natural Constitution, fierce and savage; we instantly remark the Breach of Temper, and own the Creature to be unnatural and corrupt. If at any time afterwards, the same Creature, by good Fortune or right Management, comes to lose his Fierceness, and is made tame, gentle, and treatable, like other Creatures of his Kind; 'tis acknowledg'd that the Creature thus restor'd becomes good and natural. Suppose, now, that the Creature has indeed a tame and gentle Carriage; but that it proceeds only from the Fear of his Keeper; which if set aside, his predominant Passion instantly breaks out: then is his Gentleness not his real Temper; but his true and genuine Nature or Natural Temper remaining just as it was, the Creature is still as ill as ever. (I.2.ii, 41-2)

Again, the distinction between "Nature or Natural Temper" and mere "Carriage" (that is, conduct, behaviour) is ethically all-important. The

latter is always morally ambiguous. Good conduct may be a product either of goodness (constituted by the "Temper" in which the social or other-regarding "Affections" prevail) or of servile self-interest, "an Affection merely to Self-Good". If the "Temper" is "fierce and savage" — or even merely selfish and anti-social — the creature is vicious, regardless of its "Carriage" or conduct. The natural tendency or disposition of such a creature is to do injury (or, at best, to disregard the interests of others), and this remains true even when that disposition is held in check by "a fear of some impending Punishment" or "the allurements of some exterior Reward". However harmless, even beneficial, such a creature's conduct might be, the creature remains essentially vicious.

Up to a point, these arguments are perfectly consistent with Barrow's ethical analysis of charity. In a sense, it is theological differences that give rise to ethical disagreement. Barrow would argue that man's relationship with God (if not with other men) is necessarily "interested", and that hope and fear are the natural and proper spurs to obedience. According to Shaftesbury, on the other hand, both virtue and piety are properly "disinterested": it is "true Piety, to love GOD for his own sake", in the same way that it is true virtue to love goodness for its own sake (Inquiry, I.3.iii, 102). Shaftesbury considers "on what account Men yield Obedience, and act in conformity to such a Supreme Being", how they are "influenc'd" by "the Belief of a DEITY": "It must", he says, "be either in the way of his POWER, as presupposing some Disadvantage or Benefit to accrue from him: or in the way of his EXCELLENCY and WORTH, as thinking it the Perfection of Nature to imitate and resemble him" (I.3.iii, 96). Shaftesbury's ethical argument with the Anglicans is perhaps ultimately an argument about the nature of God.<sup>2</sup> For Shaftesbury, obedience is meritorious only insofar as it proceeds from the latter, "disinterested" species of piety:

IF (as in the first Case) there be a Belief or Conception of a DEITY, who is consider'd only as powerful over his Creature, and enforcing Obedience to his absolute Will by particular Rewards and Punishments; and if on this account, thro Hope merely of Reward, or Fear of Punishment, the Creature be incited to do the Good he hates, or restrain'd from doing the

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<sup>2</sup> It is perhaps worth noting that Fielding's conception of God ("the best-natured being in the universe"), and of human moral aspiration relative to God, was clearly influenced by Shaftesbury: see Champion, 27 March 1739/40: Henley, XV, 260.



Ill to which he is not otherwise in the least degree averse; there is in this Case...no Virtue or Goodness whatsoever. The Creature, notwithstanding his good Conduct, is intrinsecally of as little Worth, as if he acted in his natural way, when under no Dread or Terrour of any sort. There is no more of Rectitude, Piety, or Sanctity in a Creature thus reform'd, than there is Meekness or Gentleness in a Tyger strongly chain'd, or Innocence and Sobriety in a Monkey under the Discipline of the Whip. For however orderly and well those Animals, or Man himself upon like Terms, may be induc'd to act, whilst...Awe alone prevails and forces Obedience; the Obedience is servile, and all which is done thro it, merely servile... Be the Master or Superiour ever so perfect, or excellent, yet the greater Submission caus'd in this Case, thro this sole Principle or Motive, is only the lower and more abject Servitude, and implies the greater Wretchedness and Meanness in the Creature, who has those Passions of Self-Love so predominant, and is in his Temper so vitious and defective... (Inquiry, I.3.iii, 97)

According to Shaftesbury, then, any conduct generated merely by "the FEAR of future Punishment, and HOPE of future Reward" is "merely servile". "Nor", indeed, "can this Fear or Hope...consist in reality with Virtue, or Goodness; if it either stands as essential to any moral Performance, or as a considerable Motive to any Act, of which some better Affection ought, alone, to have been a sufficient Cause" (I.3.iii, 100). The merit of any particular deed is inversely proportionate to the degree of self-interest which was necessary to produce it. (This logic is of course replicated in Hutcheson's Inquiry.) We should "love GOD for his own sake" — not as a means to an end but as an end in Himself, for his "EXCELLENCY and WORTH". If the creature's obedience "depends only on the expectation of infinite Retribution or Reward, he discovers no more Worth or Virtue here, than in any other Bargain of Interest" (I.3.iii, 102-3). Typically, Shaftesbury turns the economic metaphor against the Anglicans. The whole argument reflects critically on the ethos and the rhetoric of prudentialism. Clearly, Shaftesbury deplores what he sees as the deliberate and complacent encouragement of "servile" or "mercenary" conduct, not least because for him such conduct is morally worthless. He even has doubts about the utilitarian value of the appeal to interest.<sup>3</sup> Mere hope and fear, whatever their objects, are despicable motives to the good life (which ought to be inspired by the natural affections and disinterested piety): self-interest is self-interest, whatever form it takes.

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Inquiry, I.3.iii, 101. Ultimately, Shaftesbury fears, the encouragement of self-interested virtue will tend to reinforce self-interest per se, even of the kinds deplored by Barrow.

"IF the Love of doing good", says Shaftesbury, "be not, of it-self, a good and right Inclination; I know not how there can possibly be such a thing as Goodness or Virtue".<sup>4</sup> Fielding is surely paying tribute to Shaftesbury when he declares that he knows no better "general definition of virtue" than this (Champion, 3 January 1739/40: Henley, XV, 136). In a more general sense, as we have seen, Fielding shares Shaftesbury's tendency to locate moral goodness in the activity of the social affections, in benevolence: without these energies, there will be no "Love of doing good", and without this there can be no true "Goodness or Virtue". Such a definition of moral goodness would seem logically to entail the anti-prudential arguments of the Inquiry, and we might therefore expect to find that Fielding also sympathizes with Shaftesbury's critical attitude towards good conduct which springs merely from "servile" or "mercenary" motives. In his fiction, Fielding does indeed tend to underline the moral eminence of his heroes and heroines by playing on the distinction between the good and the merely prudent. In Tom Jones, for instance, hero and heroine are attended by Partridge and Mrs Honour respectively, both of whom are characterized by prudential habits of mind, and both of whom are consequently viewed and presented with lightly ironic humour.<sup>5</sup> Implicitly, their constitutional incapacity for purely 'disinterested' practical thinking is contrasted with the genteel moral sensibilities of Jones and Sophia. Black George's dilemma over Sophia's sixteen guineas is treated to one of the lengthiest pieces of moral-psychological analysis in the novel, but culminates in more ironic comedy at the expense of merely prudential "Honesty".<sup>6</sup> George, like other 'low' characters in the fiction, is shown to be incapable of acting honestly without the "friendly Aid of Fear" — his good and honest deeds are as "servile" as his bad ones are "mercenary". Like Shaftesbury, Fielding does tend characteristically to regard fear as one of the "meanest" of passions, and the "meanest" of motives to good conduct

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<sup>4</sup> Sensus Communis, III: Characteristicks, I, 98.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. M. Irwin's related point about "the absolute moral distinction between central and peripheral characters" in Fielding's fiction: The Tentative Realist, pp. 107-9 (I quote from p. 108).

<sup>6</sup> See TJ, VI, xiii, pp. 319-20. (Analyzed later in this chapter.)



("Of Good-Nature", l. 21: Miscellanies I, p. 31). Insofar as fear is essential to any good deed, it implies the weakness or absence of the good affections which ought ideally to have produced it. In Joseph Andrews, Lady Booby pays tribute to Joseph's great "Condescension...to his Superiours", but notes that this is "unattended by that mean Servility which is called Good-Behaviour in such Persons": "Every thing he doth hath no mark of the base Motive of Fear, but visibly shews some Respect and Gratitude, and carries with it the Persuasion of Love..." (IV, vi, pp. 295-6). This passage is no doubt complicated by dramatic irony; but the language, and its quasi-Shaftesburian moral implications, are typical of Fielding.

If the fear of secular powers is a "mean" and "base" motive to practical virtue, is this also true of the fear of God? This, as we have seen, is where Barrow draws the line. Shaftesbury, on the other hand, argues consistently that fear is in itself an inferior and despicable motive to any good deed — inferior relative to the 'disinterested' affections which constitute true "Goodness or Virtue". Like Shaftesbury, Fielding does in fact seem to question whether there can be anything meritorious in a merely prudential conformity to the letter of God's law. Two papers in the Covent-Garden Journal are particularly illuminating. In No. 44 (2 June 1752), Fielding satirizes a certain species of public beneficence, the charitable bequest, by exposing the motives of the benefactors. "The Origin of this Kind of Charity", he begins, "was no better than Priestcraft and Superstition": in former times, when rich men approached death, and were filled with the fear of "Almighty Justice", the priests "took Advantage of the Terrors of their Consciences, and persuaded them, that by consigning over a great Part...of their Acquisitions for the Use of the Church, a Pardon for all Kind of Villainy was sure to be obtained". "Thus", says Fielding, "the greatest of Rascals died very good Saints, and their Memories were consecrated to Honour and good Example". In such cases as these, the "charitable" were in reality only the "superstitious". But a new motive to these death-bed bequests was subsequently devised:

In Process of Time...the Lawyer came to the Assistance of the Priest...and formed a Distinction between the superstitious and the charitable Use. Henceforward, instead of robbing their Relations for the Use of the Church, a Method was devised of robbing them for the Use of the Poor. Hence Poor-Houses, Alms-Houses, Colleges and Hospitals began to present themselves to the View of all Travellers, being always situated in the

most public Places, and bearing the Name and Title of the generous Founder in vast capital Letters; a kind of... Monument of his Glory to all Generations.

Thus we see the Foundation of this Kind of Charity, and a very strong one it is, being indeed no other than Fear and Vanity, the two strongest Passions which are to be found in human Nature. (Jensen, II, 11-12)

This is of course a piece of specialized and topical satire, and in itself can only very loosely be regarded as indicative of Fielding's ethical convictions. But the satiric contempt of "Fear and Vanity" as motives to good works becomes more meaningful in the light of Fielding's subsequent remarks:

It may be thought perhaps, that I have omitted a third [passion], which some may imagine to be the strongest, and greatest of all, and this is Benevolence, or the Love of doing Good; but that these charitable Legacies have no such Motive, appears to me from the following Considerations.

First if a Man was possessed of real Benevolence, and had (as he must then have) a Delight in doing Good, he would no more defer the Enjoyment of this Satisfaction to his Death-bed, than the Ambitious, the Luxurious, or the Vain, would wait till that Period, for the Gratification of their several Passions.

2dly, If the Legacy be...the first charitable Donation of any Consequence, I can never allow it possible to arise from Benevolence: For he who hath no Compassion for the Distresses of his Neighbours, whom he hath seen, how should he have any Pity for the Wants of Posterity which he will never see? (Jensen, II, 12)

These remarks lay bare the ethical premises of the satire. Above all, they imply a conviction that the only true (and therefore meritorious) acts of public charity are never inspired by fear or vanity, but by benevolence, which implies and involves "the Love of doing Good". Fielding's major premise is a conception of virtue derived directly from Shaftesbury. And, like Shaftesbury, he draws a critical contrast between the altruistic energies of benevolence and the servile selfishness of "Fear and Vanity". In utilitarian terms, the death-bed legacy — the deed itself — may be a very good thing, especially for the poor, but it reflects no virtue or merit in the benefactor, whose ends remain exclusively selfish. The social benefits of the legacy are merely "accidental". For the benevolent individual, doing good is always an end



in itself, not a means of purchasing divine favour or worldly glory.<sup>7</sup>

Fielding deals with the "mercenary" benefactor in much the same way as he deals with the "servile". In another Covent-Garden Journal essay (No. 29, 11 April 1752), essentially an exhortation to charity, he begins by analyzing three distinct sub-charitable human species. First, there is the "Wretch who is bursting with Pride, Malice and Envy", the antitheses of charity. (Here, again, is the Blifil-type.) Fielding then rises "from the odious to the insipid Character, from those who delight in doing Mischief, to those who have little or no Delight either in the Good or Harm which happeneth to others": these pseudo-Stoics, while they have no malice, have no benevolence. This "Character", says Fielding, is "truly contemptible", and its representatives "will be called to a severe Account...for converting solely to their own Use, what was entrusted only to their Care for the general Good" (Jensen, I, 306-7). The third sub-charitable type (and the most important for our purposes) is the man who does good works and therefore thinks himself meritorious:

I proceed now, by another Gradation, to a third Species of Men, who will boldly tell us that they act upon Christian Principles...

The Men I here mean, are, of all others, the greatest Usurers. Being possessed, either by their own Roguery or by that of their Ancestors, of a thousand times more than their Share of the good things of this World, they expect by parting with the ten thousandth Part of these Things to purchase Heaven a lumping Pennyworth. Every little Act of Kindness which they do, every trifling Alms which they bestow is sure to be brought into the Account, nay to be doubly posted: For first they expect, by some paultry Obligation, to bind the Person to whom it is done, in Bonds of perpetual Slavery; nor are they thus satisfied, but Heaven is made Debtor into the Bargain. This, as the Beggars tell them, and they seem to believe, is to restore them a hundred fold whatever they give on Earth.  
(Jensen, I, 307)

This is surely more than a satiric elaboration of the assertion that "Charity is not confined to giving Alms" (Jensen, I, 306). Fielding is damning those who (in Shaftesbury's phrase) do good only "for the sake of

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Fielding's critique of vanity, and particularly the pursuit of posthumous honour, as motives to good works in the Champion, 3 May 1740: "Good actions require no such rewards. A Christian expects those of infinitely greater value, and an ancient heathen would have told us, that virtue had in herself sufficient to reward her followers, and, like perfect beauty, did not require the allurements of a good fortune to make men desirous of her possession" (Henley, XV, 298-9). That the Christian expects to be rewarded is not necessarily inconsistent with an anti-prudential stance on the question of motivation.

a Bargain". There is more than a hint of Hutcheson's  $B = \frac{M-I}{A}$  here, too. And, like Shaftesbury, Fielding underlines the mercenary character of this self-conscious beneficence by representing it in terms of the economic metaphor: ultimately, these men are no better than calculating "Usurers". Given Fielding's admiration for Barrow, this device has a curiously ironic resonance. Fielding condemns exactly the kind of moral "traffick" that Barrow might be thought to have encouraged (though in a sense he is really satirizing the misappropriation and vulgarization of arguments like Barrow's). Fielding's "Beggars" seem to have learned their rhetorical techniques from the Anglican preachers. Barrow does actively encourage prudential alms-giving, and does so in the language of the market-place. The mercenary expectations of Fielding's "Usurers" could well have been sown or reinforced by this kind of rhetoric. Whether or not this can be seen as a direct vindication of Shaftesbury's fears, Fielding's use of the conventional economic language as a satiric medium is surely some measure of his sympathy with Shaftesbury's anti-prudentialism. And the sardonic coprology of his subsequent paragraph is even more revealing:

But surely such mercenary Goodness as this, done as it were by way of Penance, can have but little Merit. Such Dabs of Alms, squeez'd out of a hard-bound Generosity, can produce no very sweet smelling Savour, in the Sense of a truly wise and benevolent Being; much less of a Being who possesses, in an infinite Degree, those Qualities. (Jensen, I, 307)

In the remainder of his essay, Fielding defines and recommends the truly meritorious alternative to this "mercenary Goodness":

Let us, my Friend, soar a Pitch higher. Let us leave the Merit of good Actions to others, let us enjoy the Pleasure of them. In the Energy itself of Virtue (says Aristotle) there is great Pleasure; and this was the Meaning of him who first said, That Virtue was its own Reward. A Sentiment most truly just, however it hath been ridiculed by those who understood it not. If we examine the Matter abstractedly, and with due Attention, we may extend the Observation of Aristotle to every human Passion: For in what, but in the Energies themselves, can the Pleasures of Ambition, Avarice, Pride, Hatred, and Revenge, be conceived to lie? What Rewards do these severe Task-masters bestow on their Slaves for all their Labours, but that common Reward of all Slaves, the Labour itself? Why is not Benevolence therefore as capable at least of repaying us with herself as any other Passion? Why must this most lovely



of all Mistresses be pursued, not for her native Charms,  
but for the Fortune which she is to bring us?  
(Jensen, I, 308) <sup>8</sup>

To be preoccupied with "the Merit of our good Actions to others" implies an incapacity to "enjoy the Pleasure of them": in other words, it implies a want of benevolence, "that Passion which is the Perfection of human Nature, of which the Delight is in doing Good" (Jensen, I, 308). Again, it is clear that virtue and benevolence are for Fielding virtually synonymous terms. Virtue is its own reward because benevolence, like "any other Passion", is attended with its proper pleasure. (Though the comparison with the pleasures of vicious pursuits is surely ironic.) The "mercenary" benefactor is manifestly incapable of enjoying this pleasure, and can therefore be inferred to lack the passion itself. Those who pursue Virtue not "for her native Charms" but for her "Fortune" thereby betray their want of benevolence — of real virtue: "Like base Prostitutes they must be pleased and paid too, or rather indeed must be paid because they are insensible of Pleasure" (Jensen, I, 308-9). Fielding, sharing Shaftesbury's conception of goodness and merit, also appears to share his sense of a paradox in the idea of Christian prudentialism. Those who practise the Christian virtues only for the sake of the promised reward "can have but little Merit", and are therefore unlikely to receive the reward they pursue. Those, on the other hand, who do good for its own sake (for the sheer pleasure of it) are most worthy of the reward, and can most confidently expect it. The benevolent man may well go unrewarded in this world, but "goeth on doing Good, and enjoys it while he doth it":

And as to that glorious Reward, the only one indeed which is worthy of a wise man's Consideration, which will attend the good Man hereafter, nothing is more certain than that he who deserves it is sure of attaining it; and the more real Delight we take in doing Good, the more we seem to acquire of such Merit. (Jensen, I, 309)

Given that Barrow's analyses of charity are in themselves essentially consistent with Fielding's moral-psychological premises, how do we account for his persistent appeals to "servile fear" and "mercenary design" ("Motives", Works, I, 257)? As I have said, Barrow does exclude hope and

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<sup>8</sup> Fielding is probably alluding to NE, I, vii-viii.

fear relative to God from the class of "servile" and "mercenary" motives, and for sound theological reasons. But could it be that his willingness to make this distinction reflects an indifference to the ethical questions raised by Shaftesbury and Fielding? Did Barrow really see no moral distinction between good deeds motivated by Christian love and similar deeds inspired solely by deliberate self-interest? Was he complacently promoting craven or mercenary formalism, as Shaftesbury clearly suspected? There are two different answers to these questions, and each is bound up with Latitudinarian suppositions about the constitution of human nature. Anglican man is a decidedly motley creature. Though 'optimistic' relative to the heartless psychological egoism of Leviathan, Barrow's view of human nature was in itself far from roseate.<sup>9</sup> Though there is indeed "a kind of natural charity" in man ("Love", Works, I, 235), there is much else besides. In a sense, the 'optimistic' passages in Barrow's sermons can be properly understood only if account is taken of their rhetorical functions, only if we ask ourselves why they are there. In a sermon "Of the Love of Our Neighbour", for instance, a characteristic essay on good nature serves only to persuade Barrow's congregation that "our nature is not so absolutely averse, or indisposed to the practice of...charity", that "a practice of this duty is not impossible" (Works, I, 235, 237: my emphasis). These negative formulations are surely significant. Barrow recommends the love of our neighbour in the full consciousness that he is recommending something difficult. "It may be objected to our discourse", he admits, "that the duty...is unpracticable, nature violently swaying to those degrees of self-love which charity can nowise reach" — how can we love our neighbour as ourselves? (I, 230). And he concedes the validity of this objection, making it the starting-point of his argument that charity is "not impossible":

If, it may be said, the precept be thus understood, as to oblige us to love our neighbours equally with ourselves, it will prove unpracticable, such a charity being merely romantic and imaginary; for who doth, who can, love his neighbour in this degree? Nature powerfully doth resist, common sense plainly doth forbid, that we should do so: a natural instinct doth prompt us to love ourselves, and we are forcibly driven thereto by an unavoidable sense of pleasure and pain, resulting from the constitution of our body and soul, so that

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<sup>9</sup> For lengthier discussions of Latitudinarian views of human nature, see Battestin, Moral Basis, pp. 55 ff.; and Miller, Essays, pp. 73-6, 189-228. Both Battestin and Miller seem to me to oversimplify the issue by viewing it in terms of 'optimism' and 'pessimism'.



our own least good or evil are very sensible to us: whereas we have no such potent inclination to love others; we have no sense, or a very faint one, of what another doth enjoy or endure: doth not therefore nature plainly suggest, that our neighbour's good cannot be so considerable to us as our own? especially when charity doth clash with self-love, or when there is a competition between our neighbour's interest and our own, is it possible that we should not be partial to our own side? is not therefore this precept such as if we should be commanded to fly, or to do that which natural propension will certainly hinder? (I, 232)

Barrow does not set up this "common sense" objection merely to knock it down. Even though he has a range of answers to them, he nowhere denies that these are the basic facts of human nature. To love thy neighbour as thyself is at odds with many of the most powerful dictates of "natural instinct" and "common sense"; and "it is not only this law to which this objection may be made; but many others, perhaps every one evangelical law, are alike repugnant to corrupt nature" (I, 233). Barrow's sermon urges us to attempt, at least, to fight and overcome "that sorry principle of niggardly selfishness, to which corrupt nature doth incline" (I, 230). This explicit recognition of the "depraved and crazy state" of fallen man goes along with an equally orthodox acknowledgment of his need for supernatural assistance in the struggle to "quell" his egoistic leanings (I, 235, 230). In the final event, grace alone can be depended upon to "guide and urge us in due measure to affect the benefit of others, as now corrupt nature doth move us unmeasurably to covet our own" (I, 236). Good nature is very far from being the whole of man. Like Fielding after him, Barrow was "unwilling to look on human nature as a mere sink of iniquity" but "far from insinuating that it is a state of perfection" (Champion, 11 December 1739: Henley, XV, 94). As Ernest Tuveson has said, "it would be a fatal mistake to assume that the Christian...elements in the thinking of these preachers [the Latitudinarian Anglicans] were mere vestigial remains, so to speak, hanging on to a new, secular, optimistic opinion about human nature": Barrow and the other Anglican opponents of Hobbes "were polemicists, it must be remembered, and the polemicist is notoriously prone to exaggerate in making whatever point he immediately has in hand".<sup>10</sup> This valuable caveat pinpoints one important reason for misapprehensions about Latitudinarian 'optimism'. When Barrow is not deliberately defending human nature against the slanderous assaults

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<sup>10</sup> "The Importance of Shaftesbury", ELH, 20 (1953), 267-99 (pp. 271, 273). Cf. Greene, "Latitudinarianism and Sensibility", pp. 169-73.

of Hobbism, his working psychological assumptions become a good deal clearer. Good nature is only one of many natural inclinations, some of which are decidedly anti-social. The truth is that "the best of our natural inclinations" ("Bounty", Works, I, 299: my emphasis), however excellent in themselves, generally coexist with all the other "common dispositions" —

Eager appetites to secular and sensual goods; violent passions, urging the prosecution of what men affect; wrath and displeasure against those who stand in the way of compassing their desires; emulation and envy toward those who hap to succeed better, or to attain a greater share in such things; excessive self-love; unaccountable malignity and vanity, are in some degrees connatural to all men... ("Slander", Works, I, 162)

Barrow may have balked at the "monstrous paradox" of Leviathan ("that all men naturally are enemies one to another") ("Motives", Works, I, 249), but he had more in common with Hobbes than he would have cared to admit. He saw clearly enough that many (though not all) of man's natural passions are selfish, anti-social, and acquisitive. And he saw equally clearly that "the best of our natural inclinations" are generally incapable of suppressing or subduing these less illustrious impulses. Barrow was not prepared to depend upon heavenly grace to tip the psychological balance. Here lies the practical importance of future rewards and punishments. Like Hobbes's notorious manifesto for secular absolutism, Barrow's proof of "the expediency, the moral or prudential necessity of a future judgment" is built upon the facts of human nature ("Future Judgment Reasonable", Works, II, 374). "It is...requisite and needful", he argues, "that men should have an apprehension concerning...a judgment appointed by God":

It is, I say, needful to engage men upon the practice of any virtue, and to restrain them from any vice; for that indeed without it, no consideration of reason, no provision of law here, can be much available to those purposes. He that will consider the nature of men, or observe their common practice (marking what apprehensions usually steer them, in their elections and pursuits of things), shall, I suppose, find, that from an invincible principle of self-love, or sensuality, deriving itself through all their motions of soul, and into all their actions of life, men generally do so strongly propend to the enjoyment of present sensible goods, that nothing but a presumption of some considerable benefit to be obtained by abstinence from them, or of some grievous mischief consequent on the embracing them, can withhold them from pursuing such enjoyment. From hence (seeing fancy, reason, and experience do all prompt men to a foresight of events, and force them to



some regard of the consequences of things) it followeth that hope and fear are the main springs which set on work all the wheels of human action; so that any matter being propounded, if men can hope that it will yield pleasant or profitable (that is, tending to pleasant) fruits, they will undertake it; if they do fear its consequences will be distasteful or hurtful, they will decline it... In short, as men are baited with pleasure or bribed with profit, so they pursue; as they are stung with pain or curbed with fear, so they eschew things... ("Future Judgment Reasonable", Works, II, 375-6)

Man is a quintessentially hedonistic creature. Pleasure is his one great end; and the "profitable" is that which leads or conduces to this overriding goal. In another context, Barrow notes that men are universally "devoted to profit":

This, if you mark it, is the great mistress, which is with so passionate riviality everywhere wooed and courted; this is the common mark, which all eyes aim, and all endeavours strike at; this the hire which men demand for all their pains, the prize they hope for all their combats, the harvest they seek from all the year's assiduous labour. This is the bait, by which you may inveigle most men any whither; and the most certain sign, by which you may prognosticate what any man will do: for mark where his profit is, there will he be. ("Profitableness", Works, I, 9)

These are the basic and unquestioned premises of Barrow's persistent rhetorical appeals to self-love, to hope and fear, desire and aversion. As a pulpit orator, he seeks not to eradicate the profit-motive, but to moralize it by enlightening it. His characteristic emphasis on the "profitableness" of virtue and godliness is directed by a pragmatic awareness of the realities of human psychology. He finds it very difficult to imagine any man consciously engaged in the pursuit of an end that does not seem, at least, conducive to his own interest:

...any matter being propounded, if men can hope that it will yield pleasant or profitable...fruits, they will undertake it; if they do fear its consequences will be distasteful or hurtful, they will decline it: very rare it is to find, that the love or liking of a thing, as in itself amiable to the mind, or suitable to reason, doth incline men thereto; that honest things, bare of present advantages, and barren of hopeful fruits, are heartily pursued; that any thing otherwise averteth us from itself, than as immediately presenting some mischief, or dangerously threatening it. ("Future Judgment Reasonable", Works, II, 376)

Barrow thinks it simply futile to attempt to reform the common man by harping on "the native beauty and intrinsic worth of virtue" (II, 377):

If it do appear that virtue can pay men well for their pains, they perhaps may be her servants; but they will hardly wait on her in pure courtesy, or work in her service for nothing; if she bringeth visibly a good dowry with her, she may be courted; but her mere beauty, or worth, will draw few suitors to her: who will forego sensible pleasures, or waive substantial profit; who will reject the overtures of power or honour for her sake? And if vice, how ill soever it look or leer, do offer fairly, how many persons will be so nice or squeamish, as merely out of fancy, or in despite to her, to refuse or renounce her? (II, 376)

Prudential pulpit oratory could be said to encourage a kind of economic marriage, by focussing less on the "beauty" of virtue than on her "dowry" (that is, on the various consequential benefits of virtue). But this is more than just a cynical rhetorical ploy, of course: Barrow believes, and therefore teaches, that virtue and the "great mistress" profit are in fact one and the same metaphorical bride.

To establish the identity of virtue and profit, and thereby persuade men into the embraces of this beautiful and wealthy bride, Barrow dwells constantly on the manifold sanctions annexed to virtue and vice. Despite his belief that virtue and vice are psychologically self-rewarding and self-punishing, he is well aware that these immediate natural sanctions are insufficient in themselves, and far from adequate as incentives and deterrents (II, 376-7). Civil penalties are persuasive, as far as they go, but cannot really go far enough: though necessary, "human laws" can do little to enforce the embracing morality of Christianity (loc. cit.). For this and other reasons, it is "fit and needful that there should be a future judgment; the apprehension thereof being the sharpest spur to virtue, the strongest curb from vice, the surest fence of human society" (II, 383). Measured against the infinite rewards and punishments promised by God, "all other incentives to virtue and restraints from vice...are very weak and faint" (II, 377). And the weakest and faintest of all, according to Barrow, are the "fine and stately notions" of the moral philosophers:

There have been indeed vented such fine and stately notions as these: that reason simply, however attended, doth challenge obedience to itself; that virtue is abundantly its own reward, and vice a complete punishment to itself; that we should not in our practice be mercenary, regarding what profit or



detriment will accrue from it, but should be good absolutely and gratis; that moral goods are the only desirable goods, and moral evils the only evils to be grieved at; that nothing can happen amiss to good men, and whatever their condition is, they are perfectly happy; that nothing can truly benefit ill men, or exempt them from misery: but these, and the like notions, frequently occurring in philosophers, as they are (being rightly understood, or taken in a qualified sense), supposing religion and a future judgment, evidently reasonable and true (as also perhaps, even abstracting from that supposition, they may have in them a kind of slim and dusky truth, discernible to one in a thousand, who is very sharp-sighted, and looketh most wistly on them; as they may be relished by a few persons of very refined spirit, or of special improvement;) so to the common herd of people (unto whose inclinations and capacities it is fit that the general rules of practice, and the most effectual inducements thereto, should be squared), to men immersed in the cares, the toils, and the temptations of the world, they plainly are unsuitable; their grosser conceit cannot apprehend, their more rugged disposition will not admit such fine notions; they, in effect, by the generality of men, have been slighted and exploded, as incongruous to common sense and experience, as the dictates of affectation or simplicity; as the dreams of idle persons, addicted to speculation, and regardless of the world such as it really doth exist, and will ever persist, while men continue endued with the same natural inclinations and affections: so that from such notions little succour can be expected toward promoting virtue, or restraining vice in the world.

Upon these considerations, the necessity or great usefulness of supposing a judgment doth appear; that it being cast into the scales may, to the common understanding of men, evidently render virtue more considerable and eligible than vice; as even in consequential profit and pleasure far surpassing it. (II, 377)

This pragmatic defence of "common sense" morality was echoed and endorsed in Locke's The Reasonableness of Christianity (1695), and reiterated in the eighteenth century by Butler: "The least observation will shew", says Butler, "how little the generality of men are capable of speculations. Therefore morality and religion must be somewhat plain and easy to be understood: it must appeal to what we call plain common sense ...because it appeals to mankind" ("Upon Compassion", 15 Sermons, V, 15). Furthermore, "there can no access be had to the understanding, but by convincing men, that the course of life we would persuade them to is not contrary to their interest" ("Upon the Love of Our Neighbour", 15 Sermons, XI, 20). Given the prevalence of what Barrow calls the "invincible principle of self-love", it would be "simplicity" at best to attempt to reform the "common herd" with the notion of disinterested virtue or the indifference of external goods and evils. Barrow's characteristic lack of concern with the distinction between "mercenary" and "absolute" goodness

is justified in practical rather than philosophical terms: true or not, the value of any "fine and stately notions" can be no more than their "usefulness" — morality (and moral persuasion) must be squared with human nature "as it really doth exist", and not as we would wish it to be. This logic is far from inconsistent with Christ's own approach to the "common herd": the New Testament is full of references to future rewards and punishments. As Butler notes, "religion...is so far from disowning the principle of self-love, that it often addresses itself to that very principle" (15 Sermons, XI, 20). In short, only Christian morality, with its potent appeals to hope and fear, can effectively reform the simple common man.

Barrow's arguments had become conventional and formulaic long before Fielding's literary maturity, and in the eighteenth century were typically directed against the ethics of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson.<sup>12</sup> The Anglicans believed man to be naturally incapable of purely disinterested conduct. And in the world "as it really doth exist", desire and aversion, hope and fear — the passions — are therefore the only reliable motives to virtue, and can remain so only as long as morality is enforced by strong and appropriate sanctions. These commonplaces of Anglican homiletics (and perhaps Barrow's argument in particular) are useful paradigms of Fielding's moral preoccupations in Amelia. Viewed in this context, Dr Harrison's notoriously cryptic response to Booth's "chief Doubt" about Christianity begins to make sense:

'A very worthy Conclusion truly,' cries the Doctor; 'but if Men act, as I believe they do, from their Passions, it would be fair to conclude that Religion to be true which applies immediately to the strongest of these Passions, Hope and Fear, chusing rather to rely on its Rewards and Punishments, than on that native Beauty of Virtue which some of the antient Philosophers thought proper to recommend to their Disciples. — But we will defer this Discourse to another Opportunity...' (XII, v, pp. 511-12)

This is no more than a highly compressed version of the conventional argument. (Fielding seems to draw attention to its homiletic pedigree by having Harrison conclude his point in true homiletic style — the postponed

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<sup>12</sup> For abundant examples, see Lessenich, Elements of Pulpit Oratory, pp. 187-90.



amplification is itself a conventional Anglican rhetorical formula.)<sup>13</sup> However, as Battestin notes, Dr Harrison's reasoning "would not perhaps satisfy a logician".<sup>14</sup> How is it possible to infer the "truth" of Christianity from the mere fact that its sanctions appeal to the strongest human passions? The syllogism looks incomplete. But the suggestion seems to be that the moral efficiency of the correspondence between human nature and revealed sanctions is evidence of God's responsibility for both.<sup>15</sup> In this respect, again, Harrison's reasoning involves a compression of Anglican commonplaces.<sup>16</sup> The promises and threats of revelation, God's deliberate appeal to the passions of fallen human nature, were perceived as sure signs of divine wisdom and benevolence. Divine sanctions and human passions fit together perfectly in a providentially designed reciprocity, and the ultimate purpose of this gracious arrangement is to allow the satisfaction of human self-love. This anthropocentric logic, with its implication that human happiness is the great end of nature and revelation, is wholly characteristic of Latitudinarian Anglicanism. There is certainly nothing unique or eccentric in Dr Harrison's moral proof of the "truth" of Christianity, except perhaps its confusing brevity.

While it is easy enough to make sense of Dr Harrison's logic, it is more difficult to square this logic with Fielding's constant commitment to a quasi-Shaftesburian analysis of virtue, and his recurrent preoccupation with "that native Beauty of Virtue" which Harrison disdains.<sup>17</sup> In the Covent-Garden Journal — contemporaneous with Amelia, of course — Fielding was still insisting that virtue is properly its own reward, and that "mercenary" virtue is no virtue at all. How can this circle be squared? In the first place, the inconsistency might be explained as a simple

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. CGJ, No. 66, where Fielding ends his essay with the formulaic postponement: "to conclude as I began, with the Language of a Sermon, I shall reserve the rest for some future Opportunity" (Jensen, II, 114).

<sup>14</sup> Amelia, XII, v, p. 511, n. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Wendt, "Naked Virtue", pp. 144-5; and Robert L. Oakman, "The Character of the Hero: A Key to Fielding's Amelia", SEL, 16 (1976), 473-89 (pp. 482-3).

<sup>16</sup> See Lessenich, Elements of Pulpit Oratory, pp. 189-90.

<sup>17</sup> This difficulty has been noted by Wendt, "Naked Virtue", esp. pp. 134, 144 ff.

utilitarian compromise, based on the very sound principle that mercenary virtue is a great deal more desirable than mercenary vice. Paul C. Davies has noted that Shaftesbury himself "operates a dual standard" in morality: "Where the true gentleman obeys his own reasoned standards of conduct the common man requires the external restraints of reward and punishment".<sup>18</sup> A similar dual standard seems to play a part in generating the ethical ambivalence of Fielding's later position.<sup>19</sup> His experiences as a London magistrate may well have pushed Amelia firmly into the utilitarian camp (just as they almost certainly engendered the bitter cynicism of the Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon). In some ways, of course, Fielding's dual standard does not correspond directly to a social distinction between gentlemen and the mob. The vices and follies of the genteel are primary objects of satirical attention in Amelia, as they are in Tom Jones. Fielding's ethical syncretism relates more directly to the basic distinction between the good-natured individual (the true gentleman) and the rest of humanity, who can apparently only aspire to a prudential simulacrum of virtue. Fielding's good characters are often conspicuously inferior in social rank (one might cite examples such as the chambermaid and the postilion in Joseph Andrews). Nevertheless, it has to be said that the natural and social élites tend to coincide (Tom Jones, for instance, finally proves to be a gentleman in both senses): in Fielding's novels, the lower orders are in general the servile and mercenary orders. One thinks especially of Partridge, who is "one of those who have more Consideration of the Gallows than of the Fitness of Things" (TJ, X, vi, p. 547).

Partridge belongs to the natural and social majority which Barrow calls "the common herd of people". The superiority of divine rewards and punishments over the "native Beauty of Virtue" lies principally in their power to control and restrain the vices of this majority. Nowhere is Fielding's utilitarian priority more explicit than in his Proposal for Making an Effectual Provision for the Poor (published in 1753, two years after Amelia). Among his suggestions for a workhouse régime is the

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<sup>18</sup> "The Debate on Eternal Punishment in Late Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century English Literature", ECS, 4 (1970-71), 257-76 (p. 267).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Wendt, "Naked Virtue", pp. 147-8; and Golden, Fielding's Moral Psychology, p. 37. Fielding's social philosophy is of course essentially conservative, and certainly non-egalitarian: see Sherburn, "Fielding's Social Outlook", passim; Miller, Essays, pp. 96-103; and (especially) Malvin R. Zirker, Jr, Fielding's Social Pamphlets, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966, passim, esp. pp. 132-40.



recommendation that the inmates be forced to take regular doses of religion. Fielding quotes at length from Tillotson's sermon on "The Advantage of Religion to Society", a rather depressing defence of Christianity on entirely utilitarian grounds, emphasizing "the usefulness of it to the ends of government" (Henley, XIII, 186). Fielding adopts Tillotson's view without reservation, arguing that "the very deist and atheist himself" must appreciate the practical value of divine sanctions: "those who will not allow religion to be a divine, must at least confess that it is a political, institution, and designed by the magistrate for the purpose of reducing the people to obedience" (Henley, XIII, 185-6). According to Barrow, likewise, religion is "needful to the maintenance of public order", and Christianity in particular "doth most conduce to the benefit of public society; enjoining all virtues useful to preserve it in a quiet and flourishing state, teaching loyalty under pain of damnation".<sup>20</sup> In keeping with this typical Anglican argument, Fielding views the promises and threats of revelation as necessary reinforcements of the magistrate's power, as psychological instruments of social control. His primary concern in the Proposal is to restrain "the outrageous indecency of the lowest part of mankind", among whom "order" and "decency" can be induced only with the help of supernatural sanctions (Henley, XIII, 188, 186). And in fact the child-like credulity of the lower orders means that religion can be an effective substitute for physical coercion inside the workhouse, even though it often fails in society:

That religion is a very cold and unavailing motive to action in the world is, I am afraid, neither easy to be denied nor difficult to account for. Some there are who are too wise (I mean in their own opinions) to believe any of the truths of it; many more are too far immersed in the pursuits of business or pleasure; and many, almost all indeed who are the objects of this plan, very seldom or never hear the word religion mentioned; but heaven and hell when well rung in the ears of those who have not yet learnt that there are no such places, and who will give some attention to what they hear, are by no means words of little or no signification. Hope and fear, two very strong and active passions, will hardly find a fuller or more adequate object to amuse and employ them; this more especially in a place where there will be so little of temptation to rouse or to gratify the evil inclinations of human nature... In such a place, and among such a people, religion will, I am satisfied, have a very strong influence in correcting the morals of men; and I am no less persuaded that

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<sup>20</sup> "Of the Evil and Unreasonableness of Infidelity" (cited hereafter as "Infidelity"), Works, II, 83-4.

it is religion alone which can effectually accomplish so great and so desirable a work. (Henley, XIII, 186-7)

This is not a very exalted conception of "religion", or indeed of "morals". Christianity seems to have shrunk into a particularly effective penal code. Viewed from a sociological angle, Latitudinarian Anglicanism could be said to have been a theology of restraint.<sup>21</sup> Underlying this utilitarian syndrome was an oft-expressed fear that the erosion of belief in eternal rewards and punishments would inevitably engender moral decadence and, ultimately, unmitigated social anarchy. The "supposition" of a future judgment is, for Barrow, "needful for the welfare of human society", and without it a body of men would soon be "worse than a company of wolves or foxes" ("Future Judgment Reasonable", Works, II, 378):<sup>22</sup>

The naughtiness of infidelity will appear by considering its effects and consequences; which are plainly a spawn of all vices and villainies, a deluge of all mischiefs and outrages upon the earth: for faith being removed, together with it, all conscience goeth, no virtue can remain; all sobriety of mind, all justice in dealing, all security in conversation, are packed away; nothing resteth to encourage men unto any good, or restrain them from any evil; all hopes of reward from God, all fears of punishment from him, being discarded. No principle, or rule of practice is left, beside brutish sensuality, fond self-love, private interest, in their highest pitch, without any bound or curb; which therefore will dispose men to do nothing but to prey on each other with all cruel violence and base treachery. ("Infidelity", Works, II, 83)

In arguing the need for religion in these terms, Barrow seems to have reproduced the "monstrous paradox" of Leviathan ("Motives", Works, I, 249). Hobbes had argued that men must be subject to "a common power, to keep them in awe, and to direct their actions to the common benefit":

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Davies on the Anglicans' persistent attachment to the doctrine of original sin and the "complementary" doctrine of eternal rewards and punishments: "The belief in the application of these doctrines in the next world seems to go along with belief in the principles of subordination and restraint in the present" ("The Debate on Eternal Punishment", p. 275). There is much about this aspect of Latitudinarian Anglicanism in Pattison, "Tendencies of Religious Thought", *passim*.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Tillotson: "were it not for some small remainders of piety and virtue which are yet left scattered among mankind, human society would in a short space disband and run into confusion...and mankind would become beasts of prey one towards another". Quoted by Fielding, Proposal: Henley, XIII, 185.



For the laws of nature, as justice, equity, modesty, mercy, and, in sum, doing to others, as we would be done to, of themselves, without the terror of some power, to cause them to be observed, are contrary to our natural passions, that carry us to partiality, pride, revenge, and the like. And covenants, without the sword, are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all. 23

Without "a power of coercion", covenants — the bases of social justice — are "no reasonable security" for any man, and will "leave men still in the estate of nature and hostility":

For seeing the wills of most men are governed only by fear, and where there is no power of coercion, there is no fear, the wills of most men will follow their passions of covetousness, lust, anger, and the like, to the breaking of those covenants, whereby the rest, also, who otherwise would keep them, are set at liberty, and have no law... 24

Barrow, substituting an invisible and divine for a visible and secular power, effectively Christianizes this manifesto for coercive restraint.<sup>25</sup> The atheists, according to Barrow, would by banishing religion "send packing justice, fidelity, charity, sobriety, and all solid virtue", none of which can "firmly subsist" without the influence of hope and fear ("Profitableness", Works, I, 22). If Barrow is deliberately attempting to disarm Hobbism by Christianizing it, the ploy seems only to expose a radical complicity.<sup>26</sup> The same suppositions about natural man seem to underlie both arguments, notwithstanding Barrow's passionately held belief

<sup>23</sup> Leviathan, II, xvii: Works, III, 157, 152-4.

<sup>24</sup> De Corpore Politico, II, i: Works, IV, 129.

<sup>25</sup> Conversely, Passmore has argued that Leviathan features what is "in essentials...a primitive theological ethics": "In a state of nature, men are brutish — so they are, echoes the theologian, since the Fall. They can only live together in some sort of comity by surrendering their 'right to all' to a sovereign power — perfectly true, says the theologian, men must learn to obey the commands of God. Before there is a Commonwealth, there is no justice — if there were no God, the theologian translates, there would be neither right nor wrong. Men can only pursue their own good — just so, if there were not the fear of hell-fire, morality and civilization would collapse" (Ralph Cudworth, p. 83).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Jacob, The Newtonians, pp. 53 ff., on the "complex relationship... between the latitudinarians and their bête noire" (p. 53).

in the natural social affections.<sup>27</sup>

Barrow's fears of social disintegration were standard Anglican fears. Locke also believed that "Robberies, Murders, Rapes, are the Sports of Men set at Liberty from Punishment and Censure". The rapacious tendencies of human nature make legal restraint imperative, and legislation would be quite nugatory without coercive sanctions to back them up:

Principles of Actions indeed there are lodged in Men's Appetites, but these are so far from being innate Moral Principles, that if they were left to their full swing, they would carry Men to the over-turning of all Morality. Moral Laws are set as a curb and restraint to these exorbitant Desires, which they cannot be but by Rewards and Punishments, that will over-balance the satisfaction any one shall propose to himself in the breach of the Law. <sup>28</sup>

If Locke differs from Barrow, it is only in the sense that he is more 'pessimistic' about man's natural inclinations (this is part of his argument against the existence of "innate Moral Principles"): for Locke, all the passions are modifications of basic hedonistic impulses, and these potentially anarchic energies can lead to desirable behaviour only when tamed and channelled by an external framework of laws and sanctions. Fielding, like Barrow, is further from Hobbes than Locke is (in that he believes in good nature, and in the natural conscience); but in the Champion (22 January 1739/40), he too presents the conventional

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<sup>27</sup> It should however be remembered that Barrow's conventional 'pessimistic' thesis, like its 'optimistic' counterpart, serves a particular rhetorical purpose in a particular argumentative context, and that it is only one of many arguments he presents in defence of the faith. When reading any of Barrow's arguments, it is important to be mindful of their specific homiletic raisons d'être. Neither his 'optimistic' nor his 'pessimistic' accounts of human nature can properly be treated as philosophical utterances (unlike Butler's sermons on human nature), and it is futile to search his sermons for a 'consistent' position on these matters.

<sup>28</sup> Essay, I.iii.9, p. 70; I.iii.13, p. 75. Cf. Hobbes on the necessity of sanctions (and note the similarity of phrasing): "there must be some coercive power, to compel men equally to the performance of their covenants, by the terror of some punishment, greater than the benefit they expect by the breach of their covenant" (Leviathan, I, xv: Works, III, 131). Cf. also Robert South on the anarchic inclinations of human nature: "The mind of Man is naturally licentious, and there is nothing, which it is more averse from, than Duty. Nothing which it abhors more than Restraint. It would if let alone, lash out, and wantonize in a boundless Enjoyment and Gratification of all its Appetites, and Inclinations" (quoted by Davies, "The Debate on Eternal Punishment", p. 265).



## utilitarian argument against atheism:

Suppose the atheist could establish his creed... Would men be the happier or better for this knowledge? What would be the consequence of this? Why then mankind might be left to pursue their desires, their appetites, their lusts, in a full swing and without control. The ambitious, the voluptuous, the covetous, the revengeful, the malicious, steering clear of human laws only, without any fear of being called to a future account, might feast and glut their several passions with the most delicious repasts they could procure. (Henley, XV, 164) 29

Fielding clearly supposed that the vicious (or potentially vicious) natural passions can be kept under by religious hopes and fears, especially the latter. Like Barrow, he sees the doctrine of eternal rewards and punishments as a potent restraining influence. His conspicuous preoccupation with Christian eschatology in Amelia seems to reflect a growing anxiety about the inadequacies and malfunctions of the secular legal and penal systems, as well as an attenuation of his faith in the moral potential of the common man. Fielding's long-held sympathies with the ethics of sentimental benevolism are increasingly stifled by the (necessarily) utilitarian principles of the urban magistrate. Though no doubt remaining convinced of the "native Beauty of Virtue", he seems to be more concerned with the need to find practical ways of reforming "the common herd of people" (as Barrow calls them), who are constitutionally incapable of being virtuous for the sheer love of it. Through Dr Harrison, Amelia ultimately proposes a theological solution (though it also proposes a wholesale revision of the law). The psychological premises of the problem and the solution can be found in Booth's theory of the passions:

'I have often told you, my dear Emily,' cries Booth, 'that all Men, as well the best as the worst, act alike from the Principle of Self-Love. Where Benevolence therefore is the uppermost Passion, Self-Love directs you to gratify it by doing good, and by relieving the Distresses of others; for they are then in Reality your own. But where Ambition, Avarice, Pride,

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29 Fielding apparently fears the reduction of man to "that which is sometimes called the state of nature, but may more properly be called a state of barbarism and wildness" (Proposal: Henley, XIII, 138) — "that blessed State of Nature...where every Man doeth what seemeth right in his own Eyes, and is at full Liberty to practise every Vice, and gratify all his Passions, without Disgrace or Controul" (JJ, No. 16: Coley, p. 202).

or any other Passion governs the Man, and keeps his Benevolence down, the Miseries of all other Men affect him no more than they would a Stock or a Stone. And thus the Man and his Statue have often the same Degree of Feeling or Compassion.'  
(Amelia, X, ix, p. 451)

Fielding would agree with this. The problem of Amelia is not the prevalence of self-love (which is in this context morally neutral), but the scarcity of benevolence. There is bitter irony in Fielding's mock-tribute to the generosity of Colonel James "(for generous he really was to the highest Degree)":

Here, Reader, give me leave to stop a minute, to lament that so few are to be found of this benign Disposition; that while Wantonness, Vanity, Avarice and Ambition are every Day rioting and triumphing in the Follies and Weakness, the Ruin and Desolation of Mankind, scarce one Man in a thousand is capable of tasting the Happiness of others. (IV, iv, p. 170)

The lamentation is sincere enough.<sup>30</sup> But the commendation is pointedly misplaced. "In Truth", of course, "the Colonel, tho' a very generous Man, had not the least Grain of Tenderness in his Disposition":

His Mind was formed of those firm Materials, of which Nature formerly hammered out the Stoic, and upon which the Sorrows of no Man living could make an Impression. A Man of this Temper, who doth not much value Danger, will fight for the Person he calls his Friend; and the Man that hath but little Value for his Money will give it him; but such Friendship is never to be absolutely depended on: For whenever the favourite Passion interposes with it, it is sure to subside and vanish into Air. Whereas, the Man, whose tender Disposition really feels the Miseries of another, will endeavour to relieve them for his own Sake; and, in such a Mind, Friendship will often get the Superiority over every other Passion. (VIII, v, p. 331)

This is a serious application of Booth's psychological theory. In the benevolent individual, the exercise of self-love involves the exercise of benevolence, his "favourite Passion". James's "favourite Passion" is not benevolence but lust: thus, when stricken with an adulterous craving to possess Amelia, his loosely-anchored friendship does indeed "subside and vanish into Air". Self-love, naturally directing the gratification of the

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Amelia, IX, iv, where Fielding tells us (in a desperate tautology) that Dr Harrison "had a Tenderness of Heart which is rarely found among Men; for which I know no other Reason, than that true Goodness is rarely found among them..." (p. 372).



uppermost passion, thus also dictates betrayal and adultery. Where any other vicious passion is the "favourite", the exercise of self-love is likely to involve the commission of similar crimes. Since lust or any other discrete natural passion can never be transmuted into benevolence, the moralist's problem is to find a way of disarming the favourite passions of the moral hoi polloi, of making the "common herd of people" act virtuously in spite of themselves.

This is in fact where Booth's psychology comes into its own. His theory of the passions is sound in itself, as an account of human motivation, but it leaves out "the strongest of these Passions, Hope and Fear" (Amelia, XII, v, p. 511). It may well be impossible "for a Man to act in direct Contradiction to the Dictates of his Nature" (TJ, VIII, i, p. 405). But what all men have in common by nature is self-love, and the morally neutral passions of hope and fear. If, as Booth argues, self-love invariably directs the gratification of the uppermost passion, and if hope and fear are the strongest human passions, then the obvious way to curb the excesses of the ambitious, the avaricious, or the adulterous is to make their hopes and fears uppermost by advertising the rewards and punishments annexed to virtue and vice. For Dr Harrison, apparently, the supreme value of religious sanctions lies not in their retributive functions, but in their power to set up a suppressive tension between the "strongest" passions and the "favourite", between the "invincible principle of self-love" (expressing itself as hope or fear) and the love of power, money, pleasure, or whatever. The licentious passions can be checked or restrained only by another, stronger order of passions. It is this psychological mechanism which makes the "common herd" submit to legal restraint, secular or divine. Hence Fielding's bitterness in Amelia about the corruption and promiscuity of the secular legal and penal institutions.

Viewed from this angle, the Christian doctrine of a future judgment could be said to have the same practical functions as the civil penal code, controlling refractory (or potentially refractory) individuals by setting self-love against the passions. Locke believes this to be the whole of the matter. But we should remind ourselves that Fielding, like Barrow, works with rather less cynical psychological assumptions. Even among the "common herd", morality is not reducible to a prudential conflict between self-love and the passions. Fielding believes the social affections and the conscience to be as natural as these other psychological forces, though not perhaps so universal or so potent. He and the Anglican

prudentialists were not addressing themselves to naturally amoral creatures. But they did believe that "the best of our natural inclinations" (as Barrow calls them) could borrow practical force from self-love. By advertising the various sanctions annexed to virtue and vice, they insisted that every moral dilemma is also a prudential dilemma, that every temptation to act immorally is also a temptation to act imprudently. The psychological implications of this strategy are effectively dramatized in the following passage from Tom Jones:

Black George having received the Purse, set forward towards the Alehouse; but in the Way a Thought occurred to him, whether he should not detain this Money likewise. His Conscience, however, immediately started at this Suggestion, and began to upbraid him with Ingratitude to his Benefactor. To this his Avarice answered, 'That his Conscience should have considered that Matter before, when he deprived poor Jones of his 500 l. That having quietly acquiesced in what was of so much greater Importance, it was absurd, if not downright Hypocrisy, to affect any Qualms at this Trifle.' In return to which, Conscience, like a good Lawyer, attempted to distinguish between an absolute Breach of Trust, as here where the Goods were delivered, and a bare Concealment of what was found, as in the former Case. Avarice presently treated this with Ridicule, called it a Distinction without a Difference, and absolutely insisted, that when once all Pretensions of Honour and Virtue were given up in any one Instance, that there was no Precedent for resorting to them upon a second Occasion. In short, poor Conscience had certainly been defeated in the Argument, had not Fear stepped in to her Assistance, and very strenuously urged, that the real Distinction between the two Actions, did not lie in the different Degrees of Honour, but of Safety: For that the secreting the 500 l. was a Matter of very little Hazard; whereas the detaining the Sixteen Guineas was liable to the utmost Danger of Discovery.

By this friendly Aid of Fear, Conscience obtained a compleat Victory in the Mind of Black George, and after making him a few Compliments on his Honesty, forced him to deliver the Money to Jones. (VI, xiii, pp. 319-20)

Black George's moral "Victory" has very little to do with the conquest of the passions by reason and the will, such as Fielding's rationalist critics would surely expect here. What we do see is a three-cornered struggle between the conscience and two different kinds of passion. What begins as a moral dilemma is psychologically overlaid by a prudential dilemma.<sup>31</sup> Avarice, George's "favourite" passion, is the prime mover of the debate.

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. the typical confusion of prudential with moral motives (the latter being subsumed in the former) in Mrs Honour's dilemma in TJ, VII, viii, pp. 353-4.



Here, we might recall Fielding's treatment of the libertine in the Champion, where the passions are said often "to dazzle our eyes by the immediate glare of the object before us, so as to hurry us on to action, without giving our understanding leisure to consider and weigh the consequence" (Henley, XV, 180). In the case of Black George, where the proposed action involves treacherous "Ingratitude" (a serious crime in Fielding's book), involves injury to others — which distinguishes it from the purely prudential case of the libertine — this "leisure" is imposed by the interference of "Conscience". Indeed, it is this intervention by the "LORD HIGH CHANCELLOR" of the mind (TJ, IV, vi, p. 172) which supplies George with the leisure to exercise prudence, "to consider and weigh the consequence" of pocketing the sixteen guineas. It is this consideration, not the verdict of conscience, which finally disarms avarice. We are told that "poor Conscience had certainly been defeated...had not Fear stepped in to her Assistance" — in effect, George's predominant passion is "defeated" by another passion. Having wisely foreseen the consequences of satisfying his greed, he is frightened into an "honest" course of action. But the "Honesty" upon which he congratulates himself is to some extent only accidental: in deciding, ultimately, to give the money to Jones, he is first and foremost acting prudently. George's self-conquest involves no exertion of rational free will (except in the Lockean sense). The moral conflict between conscience and avarice is effectively resolved by self-love.

Underlying this resolution is the prospect of the gallows. The Anglican prudentialists hoped and believed that the prospect of damnation could induce exactly the same kind of deliberation, and secure the same practical results. Hence their typical homiletic emphasis on the penalties of sin and vice. But this seems to bring us back to the ethical question with which we began. Can a man like Black George be counted virtuous for doing good in spite of himself? Can there be anything meritorious in practical "Honesty", or any other practical virtue, which issues from craven self-love? As an Anglican moralist in the Latitudinarian tradition, with its fundamentally legalistic framework, Fielding would have to say that there is. Barrow would no doubt invoke Ecclesiastes 12:13: "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man".<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, "Thou shalt not steal" is only one of the ten commandments,

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<sup>32</sup> Ecclesiastes 12:13 is among the Latitudinarians' favourite texts: for a helpful collation of these, see Rivers, "Reason, Grace and Sentiment", Ch. i (n. pag.).

all of which are in any case subsumed in the two great commandments of the New Testament: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart", and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Exodus 20:15; Matthew 22:37-9). Can a true fulfilment of the latter command really be induced by Barrow's rhetorical appeals to self-love? It is easy to see how threats of fire and brimstone might restrain the inclinations of the thief, or the murderer, or the adulterer, or the miser; but can charity be brought out of fear?

Shaftesbury thought not. He believed that rhetoric such as Barrow's could (at best) induce only a prudential conformity to the letter of Christian law, and persistently infers that the Anglicans were complacently promoting an empty and worthless formalism, an outward and mechanical pursuit of the good life merely for the sake of a "Bargain".<sup>33</sup> But there is a fairer and more positive way of looking at Anglican rhetorical strategies. Barrow would certainly have denied that he was encouraging mercenary formalism. He knew full well that charity is not the same thing as mere almsgiving, and would have resented having this kind of thing pointed out by Shaftesbury. He explicitly insists that charity is as much a matter of being as of doing: the loving heart is the sine qua non of Christian virtue and merit. Legalism, when it embraces the commandments of the New Testament, does not imply formalism. Charity alone, and charity in the highest sense, is the fulfilling of the law. Barrow's analysis of virtue is in this sense entirely consistent with Shaftesbury's. What seems to have galled Shaftesbury was the manner in which this virtue was recommended to Anglican congregations, apparently as a mere practical means to a selfish end: here, he thought, was an insolubly paradoxical tension between Christian ethics and prudential rhetoric.

But could it be that Shaftesbury was misled by the rhetorical idiom that he found so offensive? Viewed in a certain light, Barrow's pulpit oratory does indeed seem to be directed at the "Usurers" and "Prostitutes" of whom Fielding complains in the Covent-Garden Journal. But is there any real difference in kind between the typical message of Anglican homiletics and the arguments of Shaftesbury's own Inquiry? Though discursive rather than oratorical, this extensive proof that virtue is

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<sup>33</sup> This is also how some modern historians see the matter: see, for instance, Westfall, Science and Religion, p. 130; and Passmore, "The Malleability of Man", pp. 27-32. Cf. also Harrison on Butler's ethics: The Novelist as Moral Philosopher, pp. 84-8, 120-23.



our True Interest inevitably generates the same rhetorical effect. Viewed from one angle, the Inquiry could be said to replicate the ethical paradox which Shaftesbury himself detects — and deplores — in Anglican homiletics.<sup>34</sup> The fact that he confines himself largely to the "natural Advantages of Honesty and Virtue", rather than the future and supernatural,<sup>35</sup> seems (especially to modern sensibilities) to make very little difference. The same could perhaps be said of Fielding's work. His analysis of virtue, as something definitively altruistic and disinterested, something pursued not for the sake of a bargain but for its own sake, is closely akin to Shaftesbury's. And, like Shaftesbury, he frequently displays a certain contempt for servile or mercenary motives to even the best actions. At the same time, his work displays a persistent rhetorical kinship with the pulpit oratory of Anglican prudentialism. As Fielding says (of himself) in the Introduction to A Journey from this World to the Next,

...he everywhere teaches this moral: That the greatest and truest happiness which this world affords, is to be found only in the possession of goodness and virtue; a doctrine which, as it is undoubtedly true, so hath it so noble and practical a tendency, that it can never be too often or too strongly inculcated on the minds of men. (Henley, II, 213)

The same "moral" is inculcated in Tom Jones, and for the same "practical" reasons:

Besides displaying that Beauty of Virtue which may attract the Admiration of Mankind, I have attempted to engage a stronger Motive to human Action in her Favour, by convincing Men, that their true Interest directs them to a Pursuit of her. (Dedication, p. 7)

The characteristic appeal to the (disinterested) moral affections is seconded and reinforced by a frank appeal to self-love.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Walford's introduction to the Inquiry: "Shaftesbury explicitly argues against two distinct versions of the egoistic theory: the view that man is by nature essentially selfish and therefore incapable of benevolent action, and the view that altruism is fundamentally incompatible with self-interest... Unfortunately Shaftesbury presents his case in such a way as to suggest that the furtherance of self-interest is the ultimate justification of altruism" (p. xv).

<sup>35</sup> See above, p. 308.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Miller, Essays, pp. 64-5.

As an ethical theorist, Shaftesbury would apparently question whether such an appeal, however successful, could actually generate virtue — something which he and Fielding believe to be characteristically disinterested. He concedes that an individual may, by these means, "be induc'd to practise Virtue, and even endeavour to be truly virtuous":

Yet neither is this very Endeavour to be esteem'd a Virtue. For tho he may intend to be virtuous; he is not become so, for having only intended, or aim'd at it, thro Love of the Reward. But as soon as he is come to have any Affection towards what is morally good, and can like or affect such Good for its own sake, as good and amiable in it-self; then is he in some degree good and virtuous, and not till then. (Inquiry, I.3.iii, 113)

Prudential rhetoric such as Barrow's or Fielding's may well induce virtuous practice, and (if the reader is also impressed by the notion that virtue is worthy of pursuit "for its own sake") may even induce a practical effort to become "truly virtuous". But, insofar as this practice or this effort is dependent upon prudential inducement, it cannot be regarded as "truly virtuous". If self-interest "either stands as essential to any moral Performance, or as a considerable Motive to any Act, of which some better Affection ought, alone, to have been a sufficient Cause", the moral value of that act or performance is proportionately diminished (I.3.iii, 100).

As we have seen, Fielding's work displays a broad sympathy with this kind of thinking. The good deed which is undertaken merely "thro Love of the Reward" (or indeed through fear of the punishment for omission) is at best morally second-rate, and often worse. Yet Fielding's rhetorical emphasis upon "Interest" appears to encourage precisely this kind of "mercenary" activity. In this respect, Fielding's ethics might appear to be implicitly compromised by his own strategies as a practical moralist. But this kind of abstract ethical reasoning must be tested against the facts of human psychology as Fielding understood them. It is true that his rhetorical strategies imply a self-interested reader, just as Barrow's pulpit oratory implies a self-interested congregation. Fielding, no less than Barrow, accepts that the desire and pursuit of happiness is a radically natural — indeed necessary — dimension of all human endeavour. To demand the denial or extirpation of self-love per se is to demand the impossible. But self-love is not necessarily a bad thing in itself, and it is certainly not the whole of man. We should perhaps remind ourselves



that benevolence is an equally natural feature of common humanity: both Barrow and Fielding believe in that cluster of sympathetic energies which are embraced by the name of "good nature". The common man is naturally concerned for the interests of himself and others.<sup>37</sup> According to these moralists, he is also equipped with a conscience, "whose Use is not so properly to distinguish Right from Wrong, as to prompt and incite him to the former, and to restrain and with-hold him from the latter" (TJ, IV, vi, p. 172). Morality is psychologically complex. Humanity cannot be neatly sorted into simple moral classes, labelled "benevolent" and "self-interested" respectively. The vast majority of us are self-interested and benevolent. It is true that we therefore often experience morality as a psychic conflict between self-love and social. At times it may seem impossible to reconcile our own interests with those of our neighbour, and in such cases the right course of action will naturally appear to involve some degree of self-sacrifice. As a way of life, virtue might well appear to be directly contrary to our own interest or happiness. Self-love and social might seem to counsel contradictory courses of action. "It may be presum'd," as Shaftesbury says, "that the pursuing the common Interest or publick Good thro the Affections of one kind, must be a hindrance to the Attainment of private Good thro the Affections of another" (Inquiry, II.1.i, 132). But one of the principal aims of the Inquiry is to refute and discredit this "extraordinary Hypothesis", as Shaftesbury calls it, and to demonstrate instead

"That what Men represent as an ill Order and Constitution in the Universe, by making moral Rectitude appear the Ill, and Depravity the Good or Advantage of a Creature, is in Nature just the contrary. That to be well affected towards the Publick Interest and one's own, is not only consistent, but inseparable: and that moral Rectitude, or Virtue, must accordingly be the Advantage, and Vice the Injury and Disadvantage of every Creature." (II.1.i, 134, 135)

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<sup>37</sup> Again I am implicitly questioning the usefulness of arguments about the 'optimism' or 'pessimism' of Fielding's (and the Latitudinarians') views on 'human nature'. Abstract, generalized polarities are not (and were not) very appropriate. "Is man actuated primarily by a vicious self-interest or by a disinterested and friendly disposition toward all rational agents?", asks W. R. Irwin, ostensibly paraphrasing the terms of the debate between the Anglicans and the egoists (The Making of JW, p. 59). Dudden formulates the same question in uncannily similar terms (Henry Fielding, II, 685), and others have spent a great deal of energy attempting to answer it (see above, p. 323, n. 9). It seems to me that the terms of the question are not only ethically loaded, but logically and historically inadequate.

In Shaftesbury's case, the point of publishing this argument is not of course to encourage "mercenary" practice. He consistently maintains the view that virtue is quintessentially disinterested. But he also takes account of the fact that all men, even the most virtuous, are constitutionally attached to their own interest (Inquiry, I.2.i, 21). And, despite all the immediate and consequential advantages of virtue, Shaftesbury (like Fielding) is realistic enough to acknowledge that it also involves "the greatest Hardships and Hazards of every kind" (II.1.i, 132). At times, in other words, experience will seem to deny the coincidence of virtue and interest. At such times, there will naturally arise a psychic conflict between the moral and the natural affections, or between self-love and social. For this reason, virtue needs the support of a firm belief or conviction in its own ultimate coincidence with interest. Virtue is not self-sufficient. This is why there is a place for future rewards and punishments in Shaftesbury's ethics.<sup>38</sup> As he says, "the Principle of Fear of future Punishment, and Hope of future Reward, how mercenary or servile soever it may be accounted, is yet, in many Circumstances, a great Advantage, Security, and Support to Virtue". There are important practical "Advantages" to be derived from "Reflection upon private Good or Interest":

For tho the Habit of Selfishness, and the Multiplicity of interested Views, are of little Improvement to real Merit or Virtue; yet there is a necessity for the Preservation of Virtue, that it shou'd be thought to have no quarrel with true Interest... (Inquiry, I.3.iii, 104, 114)

The overall purpose of the Inquiry is to demonstrate that there is no such "quarrel". However, despite its real and incomparable advantages, virtue cannot shield us against the natural "Trials" to which all men are prone, from "Poverty, Crosses or Adversity". The virtuous man who suffers such "ill Fortune" may "falsly presume" that virtue itself is the "occasion" of it. Such a presumption (however false) will naturally tend to embitter and erode his commitment to virtue. Religion is in this sense a necessary antidote against worldly tribulation:

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<sup>38</sup> See Inquiry, I.3.iii. Students of Fielding have frequently argued or implied that Shaftesbury disdained rewards and punishments altogether, and that this is a significant point of difference between the novelist and the philosopher. See, for instance, Battestin's imprecise and potentially misleading remarks in Moral Basis, pp. 13, 60-65; and cf. Miller, Essays, pp. 69-72; Price, Palace of Wisdom, pp. 287-8.



UPON the whole; whoever has a firm Belief of a GOD, whom he does not merely call good, but of whom in reality he believes nothing beside real Good, nothing beside what is truly sutable to the exactest Character of Benignity and Goodness; such a Person believing Rewards or Retributions in another Life, must believe them annex'd to real Goodness and Merit, real Villany and Baseness... These are the only Terms on which the Belief of a World to come, can happily influence the Believer. And on these Terms, and by virtue of this Belief, Man perhaps may retain his Virtue and Integrity, even under the hardest Thoughts of human Nature; when either by any ill Circumstance or untoward Doctrine, he is brought to that unfortunate Opinion of Virtue's being naturally an Enemy to Happiness in Life. (I.3.iii, 107, 119)

Here, in a sense, Shaftesbury formulates the problem which Fielding was to personify in Billy Booth,<sup>39</sup> and anticipates the solution which is ultimately proposed by Amelia. Religion offers the ultimate assurance, in an unjust world, that virtue has "no quarrel with true Interest". True religion extends and confirms Shaftesbury's own assurances that virtue and interest are naturally "not only consistent, but inseparable". In themselves, these assurances cannot actually induce virtue, which consists in the proper orientation of the natural and moral affections. In advertising the coincidence of virtue and interest, Shaftesbury's end is not so much the inducement of virtue as the enlightenment of self-love. An illustration may be useful here. Let us suppose an individual (such as Tom Jones, perhaps) whose natural and moral affections are in good order, who loves not only his neighbour but also Virtue itself. In Shaftesbury's terms, this man is virtuous. Like all other human individuals, however, this one is naturally committed to the pursuit of his own private happiness — like the rest of us, he is fundamentally self-interested. Now let us suppose that the same virtuous individual suffers a series of betrayals or misfortunes, or for some other reason arrives at the "unfortunate Opinion" that virtue is contrary to his own interest. He may even have begun to suspect that vice is a more profitable way of life.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See Amelia, I, iii, esp. pp. 30-31.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Cicero, De Officiis, III, xviii, 74-5. Virtue and interest, honestas and utilitas, are always indivisible: "And yet...there are times when one course is likely to appear expedient and another morally right. The appearance is deceptive; for our standard is the same for expediency and for moral rectitude. And the man who does not accept the truth of this will be capable of any sort of dishonesty, any sort of crime. For if he reasons, 'That is, to be sure, the right course, but this course brings advantage,' he will not hesitate in his mistaken judgment to divorce two conceptions that Nature has made one; and that spirit opens the door to all sorts of dishonesty, wrong-doing, and crime."

Clearly, this new "Opinion" is liable to set up a psychic conflict between virtue and self-interest. His natural and moral affections may be as strong as ever, but they will now have to conquer the resistance of self-love, which in many cases will tend to issue contradictory directions. Owing to an "Opinion" about what constitutes his own interest, this individual may experience morality as a conflict between self-love and social — life may seem to present him with a series of choices between virtue and happiness. Shaftesbury's argument is implicitly directed at just such an individual. The aim of the Inquiry is to challenge and correct the mistaken "Opinion" that virtue and interest are incompatible alternatives, and thereby negate the erroneous premises of the psychic conflict. The natural benevolence of our hypothetical individual will thus be freed from the resistance of misguided self-love, which, once enlightened by Shaftesbury's argument, will happily co-operate with the natural and moral affections.

It is in this sense that the appeal to interest need not imply approval or encouragement of "mercenary" or "servile" practices. Hutcheson shared Shaftesbury's belief in the essential disinterestedness of the natural and moral affections which constitute virtue, yet also understood the importance of his mentor's emphasis on interest. One passage from Hutcheson's Inquiry deserves to be quoted at length:

NOW the principal Business of the moral Philosopher is to shew, from solid Reasons, "That universal Benevolence tends to the Happiness of the Benevolent, either from the Pleasures of Reflection, Honour, natural Tendency to engage the good Offices of Men, upon whose Aid we must depend for our Happiness in this World; or from the Sanctions of divine Laws discover'd to us by the Constitution of the Universe;" that so no apparent Views of Interest may counteract this natural Inclination: but not to attempt proving, "That Prospects of our own Advantage of any kind, can raise in us real Love to others." Let the Obstacles from Self-love be only remov'd, and NATURE it self will incline us to Benevolence. Let the Misery of excessive Selfishness, and all its Passions, be but once explain'd, that so Self-love may cease to counteract our natural Propensity to Benevolence, and when this noble Disposition gets loose from these Bonds of Ignorance, and false Views of Interest, it shall be assisted even by Self-love... (VII, ii, p. 252)

Even for Hutcheson, self-love and social are not natural enemies. Any psychic or practical conflict between them is invariably traceable to false "Views of Interest". The job of the moralist is to rectify these false views, to enlighten self-love, and thereby resolve what is



ultimately a groundless conflict. In this, the moralist cannot and does not generate benevolence in his reader ("real Love to others" can never be a product of "Self-love"); but he does and can liberate it from the fetters of deluded self-interest: "Let the Obstacles from Self-love be only remov'd, and NATURE it self will incline us to Benevolence". Once we thoroughly understand that "Benevolence tends to the Happiness of the Benevolent", that our own interests are best served by acting on our natural concern for the interests of others, then benevolence "shall be assisted even by Self-love". Enlightened self-love is properly the ally and the liberator of man's better nature.

In their attachment to this kind of thinking, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson betray a radical kinship with the Anglican prudentialists. And is it not possible that Barrow's pulpit oratory (economic metaphors and all) was designed to attain the very ends prescribed by Hutcheson? In his frequent attempts to enlighten self-love, was he not also attempting to liberate genuine benevolence? It is too easy to see his concern with the "profits" of virtue and piety as an index of moral crudity or of cynical assumptions about human nature. Even his bluntest appeals to self-interest do not necessarily imply a disbelief in, or an undervaluation of, natural benevolence. In fact, Barrow was a staunch defender of human nature against Hobbist defamation, and a firm believer in those charitable energies which constitute "good nature". In the common man, benevolence is a real and potent principle. But so is the "invincible principle of self-love". And since the common man tends to be led and directed by what Hutcheson calls "false Views of Interest", natural benevolence tends to be confined or suppressed by self-love. Given these psychological premises, it is surely not surprising that Barrow devotes so much energy to the correction of those "false Views". Once enlightened, self-love becomes the natural partner of good nature, not replacing but releasing it. Hence Barrow's insistence upon the unity of our own interests and those of our neighbour:

It may be hard, while our concerns appear divided, not to prefer our own; but when they are coincident, or conspire together, the ground of that partiality is removed. ("Love", Works, I, 237: my emphasis)

As soon as virtue and interest are understood (or firmly believed) to be "coincident", the tension between self-love and social dissolves — "for then it will be an instance of self-love to exercise charity" (loc. cit.).

Like Barrow, Fielding is a firm believer in the natural benevolence of the common man, but also appreciates the general predominance of other, less desirable, natural passions. Where self-love is unenlightened, it will tend to direct the gratification of whatever passion happens to be uppermost. And since the "favourite" passions of the motley majority are licentious in tendency, it is not surprising that Fielding and Barrow should devote so much effort to correcting "false Views of Interest". Most of the world's follies and vices are directly attributable to the prevalence of these false views. One explicit purpose of Tom Jones is to encourage the pursuit of virtue by showing it to be our "true Interest". With typical pragmatism, Fielding consistently takes into account the natural and potent influence of self-love. But this by no means implies a purely mercenary imagined reader. At one point in Tom Jones, Fielding observes that Partridge is "a very good-natured Fellow", while at the same time declaring a suspicion that his loyalty to Jones is not entirely a matter of disinterested friendship:

I am led into this Conjecture, by having remarked, that tho' Love, Friendship, Esteem, and such like, have very powerful Operations in the human Mind; Interest, however, is an Ingredient seldom omitted by wise Men, when they would work others to their Purposes. This is indeed a most excellent Medicine, and like Ward's Pill flies at once to the particular Part of the Body on which you desire to operate, whether it be the Tongue, the Hand, or any other Member, where it scarce ever fails of immediately producing the desired Effect. (VIII, ix, p. 442)

Fielding's own appeal to "Interest", in Tom Jones and elsewhere, perhaps reflects this realistic awareness of the facts of human psychology. "Love, Friendship, Esteem, and such like" do "have very powerful Operations in the human Mind", but "Interest" is virtually omnipotent. Hence the importance of demonstrating that virtue itself is our "true Interest", thus to enlist self-love on the side of social.

Like Hutcheson, Fielding believes that the common man's better nature is generally circumscribed or suppressed by "false Views of Interest", which generate needless division and conflict between self-love and social. This is, in fact, a principal concern of Amelia, where character after character is said (like Partridge) to be "good-natured" at bottom, and subsequently descends into vice or villainy.<sup>41</sup> This strategy is only

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Bloch, "Booth's Doctrine of the Passions", esp. pp. 465-72.



partly ironic. The point seems to be that benevolence — real benevolence — is as good as impotent in minds where it is not the "favourite" passion. Again and again Fielding shows us the better impulses of his characters being frustrated or overwhelmed by tyrannical passions, passions which are themselves fuelled and sustained by "false Views of Interest". Amelia bitterly laments the fact that social injustice and institutional corruption are effectively serving to foster or confirm such "false Views", by penalizing the virtuous and tolerating, or rewarding, the vicious. "The Governors of the World", says Dr Harrison, "are answerable for the Badness of it". In a "Christian Society", one whose institutionalized values are those of Christianity, one which rewards and punishes according to biblical codes of right and wrong, a man like Colonel James (in whose nature there are genuine "good Stamina") might never have been tempted to contemplate adultery (IX, v, pp. 374-5). But this is a society where adultery and many other serious vices are "protected by Law and countenanced by Custom" (p. 375), where the sinner often has little to lose by pursuing his favourite sins. In effect, this decadent society (as Fielding sees it) is driving an artificial wedge between virtue and interest, prizing apart what is a fundamentally natural conjunction. Society is flatly contradicting those moralists — including Fielding himself — who believe and teach that virtue is naturally our "true Interest", thus frustrating their efforts to unite self-love with social. While the satirical dimension of Amelia implicitly recommends a programme of wholesale social reform, this gloomy novel ultimately falls back on a theological solution to the problem. The doctrine of future rewards and punishments seems to offer the only sure way of conjoining self-love with social in the present: only religion can offer a plausible assurance that virtue and interest are coincident. But even this solution is compromised and undermined by Fielding's very recognition that he is offering it to an increasingly godless society.

The dismal realism of Amelia was a new departure for Fielding. But there is unbroken continuity in his belief that the moralist must somehow take account of self-love, and, by advertising the coincidence of the moral and the prudential, enlist it on the side of virtue. In this, his moral and psychological presuppositions are rooted in something like Bishop Butler's clear-sighted pragmatism:

It may be allowed, without any prejudice to the cause of virtue and religion, that our ideas of happiness and misery are of all our ideas the nearest and most important to us... Let it be allowed, though virtue or moral rectitude does indeed consist in affection to and pursuit of what is right and good, as such; yet, that when we sit down in a cool hour, we can neither justify to ourselves this or any other pursuit, till we are convinced that it will be for our happiness, or at least not contrary to it. ("Upon the Love of Our Neighbour", 15 Sermons, XI, 20)

Fielding, like Butler and many other contemporary moralists, actually believed that the pursuit of virtue is "for our happiness" — that it is indeed our "true Interest". Once we understand this, as Butler says, we shall no longer have to make choices between virtue and happiness:

Conscience and self-love, if we understand our true happiness, always lead us the same way. Duty and interest are perfectly coincident; for the most part in this world, but entirely and in every instance if we take in the future, and the whole; this being implied in the notion of a good and perfect administration of things. ("Upon Human Nature", 15 Sermons, III, 9)

Despite the gloom of Amelia, Fielding's beliefs were fundamentally consistent with this. Morality, as Fielding understood it, certainly cannot be resolved into a set of tidy polar oppositions, between self-love and social, reason and the passions, duty and inclination, self-indulgence and self-denial. Tom Jones is perhaps the finest product of a tradition which actively sought to break down this kind of dichotomy. As a practical moralist, one of Fielding's most cherished purposes was to convince a deluded, and therefore divided, reader that virtue and interest are indivisible, that the moral and the prudential are (in Butler's words) "perfectly coincident". Cicero tells us that Socrates "used to pronounce a curse upon those who first drew a conceptual distinction between things naturally inseparable" (De Officiis, III, iii, 11), and perhaps Fielding would be tempted to do the same if brought face-to-face with some of his modern readers. It is to be hoped that the present study has gone some way towards reuniting what too many recent studies of Fielding have put asunder.



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