

*A HISTORY OF
AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY*

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AMERICAN
PHILOSOPHY*

HERBERT W. SCHNEIDER



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TO

John J. Coss

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

PART IX of this work is entitled "New Realism and New Naturalism," but I shall not live to write it. I could, if there were need for it, expound the chief contemporary systems current in America, but their history cannot yet be written. Of their origins this work gives an account, for the reader will find here how and when realistic and naturalistic ideas emerged from evolutionism, idealism, and empiricism. But the careers of these ideas are still too young to merit biography, and their significance is still veiled in the future. The historian must therefore be content to end his story where his own reflections begin. It may be permitted, however, that in this preface the historian turn prophet and attempt to discern the perspectives from which a later generation may view the thought of his own time. It seems highly probable, though it cannot yet be regarded as historical truth, that something genuinely new is brewing. One should not be misled by all the talk and hope about new realisms, new naturalisms, new logics, new republics, and new deals, for such preoccupation with novelties is itself an old story. There may be nothing new under our patient sun except new names for old ways of thinking and new ways of arriving at old discoveries. But even this much novelty is worth noting. There are good reasons, however, for suspecting that we stand at the beginning as well as at the ending of a cultural epoch. The times have been too eventful not to be creative of new ideas, especially among men who for at least a generation have focussed their attentions on events. We ought to be prepared intellectually for understanding changes even though it is most difficult to understand historically the changes with which we are most familiar.

The fact which above all others should make us aware of a new epoch is the impact of recent importations on American ideas. The reader of the story that follows will note that American philosophy has continually been given new life and new directions by waves of immigration. In America, at least, it is useless to seek a "native" tradition, for even our most genteel traditions are saturated with foreign inspirations. Spanish Franciscans, French Jesuits, English Puritans, Dutch

Pietists, Scottish Calvinists, cosmopolitan *philosophes*, German Transcendentalists, Russian revolutionaries, and Oriental theosophists have all shared in giving to so-called American philosophy its continuities as well as its shocks. The extent to which American intellectual life has been dependent on non-American scholars is incommensurate with the extent to which American philosophers have enjoyed influence abroad. Emerson himself, with all his independence, was certainly not made in America alone; he absorbed from Europe and Asia much more than he gave them. America was intellectually colonial long after it gained political independence and has been intellectually provincial long after it ceased being intellectually colonial. We still live intellectually on the fringe of European culture.

No more striking illustration of this fact is afforded than the tremendous impact made on our own minds by ideas generated and nourished elsewhere. More conspicuous in the history of today and tomorrow than the ideas contained in this volume are the recent intellectual imports from Cambridge, Paris, and Vienna. I mention these three as outstanding sources of contemporary American thought, though there are many others that might well be named in order to remind ourselves that we have an unfavorable balance of foreign trade in ideas. The type of philosophical analysis that grew up in Cambridge under the leadership of Whitehead, Russell, and G. E. Moore, the sophisticated, modernized versions of Catholic scholasticism that have come to us from Paris, and the schools of value theory, existentialism, phenomenology, logical positivism, psychoanalysis, and socialism that have come to us either directly or indirectly from Vienna—these are now pervasive forces in American culture. I venture to predict that all the types of philosophic thought described in this volume are being so radically revised, reviewed, and reconstructed because of these new importations that a decidedly new chapter in American philosophy is being written, the outlines of which we can still not see, though the labor of it is evident on all sides. But the imported goods are not being swallowed raw; they must be blended with those home-grown ideas, for which an established taste and preference exists.

How shall we measure the vitality and momentum of American traditions in the face of this revolutionary situation? Have they a central content, a dominant note, or a moral lesson? I think not. The

reader of this story will probably be at least as bewildered as I am in trying to tell what American history teaches us or what American philosophy "stands for." From a European distance and on the basis of learned ignorance such generalizations can be ventured without fear of contradiction. But for us at home who must live with the facts, it is prudent to let others draw the portraits of our ancestral soul and outline the basic dialectic in our national existence. Our past is fully as confused as our present. Its vitality, therefore, must be sought, not in any definable quality or direction of movement, but in that vague yet tangible energy which it exerts when it is faced with new ideas. When a new idea comes to us we project it, semi-consciously, against one historical perspective after another to discover what meanings or significances it may acquire when placed in various contexts. After a series of experiments in interpretation, we discover how and where the new idea can best be used and assimilated. The variety of contexts at our disposal gives us many handles by which to take hold of novelties. But we do take hold of them as much as they get a hold on us. The many ways in which we resist, distort, adapt, revise new importations is the best evidence that an American tradition lives. Occasionally even the dead past is revived through the stimulus of a sudden turn in affairs or in thought, and we discover new uses for American antiques. The renewed interest in Jonathan Edwards, Thomas Jefferson, Tom Paine, Andrew Jackson, Walt Whitman, to take conspicuous examples, is the product of fresh challenges to ideas which had repeatedly been laid to rest in peace, but which have risen unexpectedly, not as ghosts, but as "living thoughts of great Americans." Much that is carried along as sheer gentility or academic exercise may, without much notice, crowd out our up-to-date notions, when the latter are compelled to meet a new tomorrow. It is for this reason that no enduring evaluation of what is living and what is dead in our tradition is possible. Nevertheless, I confess to a hope that some of the episodes which I have laboriously exhumed for the purposes of this narrative may never suffer further revivification, for I have included them more out of academic scruple and professional etiquette than because I believe that someday it will profit someone to have remembered them.

I must add a few words about the relation of the history told in this volume to other attempts at giving a general pattern to the develop-

ment of American thought. Whether or not it be true that the history of the past must everlastingly be rewritten, it is certainly true that the writing of American intellectual history is in a highly experimental stage; and I have no illusion that my outline will endure when my successors get to work. I have departed widely from the outlines suggested by my predecessors; in fact, no two historians of American thought have told similar stories. I have, of course, profited by the works (see Index) of I. W. Riley, Morris R. Cohen, H. G. Townsend, Perry Miller, R. B. Perry, V. L. Parrington, Charles Beard, Merle Curti, and others, even when I have not followed them. I regret that two recent works of major critical importance came too late to give me the extensive help which I should have derived from them had they come sooner: Arthur M. Schlesinger's *The Age of Jackson* and Joseph Dorfman's *The Economic Mind in American Civilization*—two works which seem to me in general to confirm and enrich the story here told and at a few points to amend it. Dorfman's work, particularly, should be regarded as an essential part of an adequate history of American philosophy. It is already clear that political, economic, theological, and metaphysical principles have been more closely associated in American thought than we have hitherto been led to believe and that a truly comprehensive history of American philosophy still remains to be written.

My volume is, of course, not my work in any strict sense. Besides the works of the historians whom I have mentioned and other contributors to American history, it embodies some of the labors and discoveries of students at Columbia University with whom I have been privileged to work and the cream of whose dissertations I have skimmed for the benefit of those who cannot take the milk of the Word whole. The published works of these students are referred to here and there in this volume; I wish to express my indebtedness to their researches, particularly to those of Marguerite B. Block, J. Edward Dirks, James E. Dombrowski, W. J. B. Edgar, Frances B. Harmon, Joseph Haroutunian, Eugene C. Holmes, Marc E. Jones, Morris Judd, Estelle Kaplan, Adrienne Koch, G. Adolf Koch, Edward McNair, Eugene T. Mudge, Martha Pingel, Herbert E. Richards, Niels H. Sonne, Ronald V. Wells, Morton G. White, and Daniel D. Williams. Their works

shall now live after them, and they will know their proper places in the objective reason of history, which until now had eluded us. They will forgive me, I trust, for fixing them "definitively" as contributors.

My greatest debt is to my collaborator Dr. Joseph L. Blau, who has prepared the anthology of *American Philosophic Addresses*, which is intended to be used with this volume, has compiled the bibliographical references, has dug scores of dusty volumes out of many libraries, has compelled me to study them, has criticized my manuscript, and has in general done so much important research in this field that he is co-inventor of this history, whoever may be its author.

The help I have received in special ways from friends and colleagues ever since Professor Coss first urged me to undertake this work twenty years ago is too varied and detailed to be recalled here. I should mention, however, that my colleagues Joseph Dorfman, Raymond M. Weaver, Charles W. Everett, Henry W. Wells, Arthur E. Christy, Edwin N. Garlan, and Quentin Anderson have given me generously of their expert knowledge. I am likewise indebted for information to Charles M. Bakewell, Philip P. Wiener, Bert J. Loewenberg, Sidney Ratner, Kurt F. Leidecker, and Miss Edith Harris. The task of transforming the chaos of my manuscript into something fit to print fell to Jean Allen Wilson, Shirley Carson O'Connell, Eleanor W. Blau, and Ida M. Lynn; I am deeply grateful to them.

For permission to quote copyrighted material we are indebted to Henry James, who kindly consented to the extensive use of the letters published in his and Ralph Barton Perry's volumes; to the Harvard University Press for the use of many excerpts from Peirce's *Collected Papers*; to Longmans, Green and Company for quotations from James, *A Pluralistic Universe*; to Charles Scribner's Sons for quotations from Santayana, *The Genteel Tradition at Bay*; to Houghton Mifflin Company, publishers of the writings of Henry Adams, for permission to quote generously from them; to The Macmillan Company for a quotation from *E. A. Robinson*, by H. Hagedorn; to the Chicago University Press for selections from the works of Mead; to the Open Court Publishing Company for a quotation from Dewey's *Experience and Nature*; to Minton, Balch and Company for a quotation from Dewey's *Art as Experience*. I have here reproduced in part and with revisions

several articles previously published in *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, *Church History*, *Studies in the History of Ideas*, and the co-operative volume, *The Constitution Reconsidered*, edited by Conyers Read.

The "Guides to the Literature" of the various parts of the story told here are not meant as exhaustive bibliographies. They are, rather, attempts to provide a selective list of both primary and secondary materials for the reader who may wish to continue his studies in American philosophy.

H.W.S.

Columbia University
July, 1946

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— I —

*PLATONISM AND EMPIRICISM
IN COLONIAL AMERICA*

THE PLATONIC HERITAGE OF THE NEW ENGLAND PURITANS

CONGREGATIONALISM was at one time more than a sect; it was a social reform movement with a complete ideology. Though this branch of Puritan philosophy was imported ready made into New England and was soon corrupted, it is well to begin the study of American philosophy with it, partly because it deserves a place among well-constructed and technically erudite systems and partly because it continued to pervade the institutions of New England and haunt its imagination long after it ceased to be believed literally and practically.

In France, the Netherlands, and England a small but enterprising and educated group made a determined attack not only on the Roman Catholic ecclesiastical and sacramental system but also on the scholasticism in which this system found philosophic expression and justification. To attack so well-grounded and deep-seated a tradition required a very elaborate mechanism. To challenge the synthesis of Catholicism and Aristotelianism, the reformers were obliged to construct a no less scholastic synthesis of Protestantism and Platonism. No Protestant groups worked at this task so painstakingly as did the disciples of Peter Ramus, especially the "covenant," or Congregationalist, theologians.¹

The path of the European Congregationalists was exceptionally tortuous and treacherous, because this small minority was a middle-of-the-way group, not only struggling with other Protestants against Catholicism, but struggling among Protestants for a tenuous *via media* which met with vigorous opposition from both extremes of the Reformation. These covenanting dissenters had to contend, in the New World as well as in the Old, against the Presbyterian wing of Protestantism on the Right, and on the Left against the Separatists, Ana-

¹ Strictly speaking, the Covenant Theology was not confined to the Congregational churches, nor were all Congregationalists familiar with this theory. The Dutch Collegiate Church, too, was inspired by these theologians. This Covenant Theology or Federal (*foedus*, covenant) Theology is, of course, not to be confused with the Scottish Covenanters who had a quite different origin.

baptists, Independents, and Antinomians. In addition to meeting all these opposing forces within the Church, they confronted the rising power of secular law and secularized "covenant" theory as popularized by Hobbes.

Against the Catholics and the Anglicans, all dissenters repudiated the mediatorial office of the priesthood, the sacraments and the doctrine of the Apostolic succession of authority. Against the Presbyterians and the orthodox Calvinists, these Congregational dissenters refused to admit that God's decrees are arbitrary and sovereign, asserting that election is based on a "covenant" of grace in the most literal sense and that the elect therefore have a *right* to justification through grace; they also opposed the special powers of elders and synods, regarding them as a compromise with episcopal or aristocratic government. Against the Separatists, they recognized the union of church and state, and against the Antinomians, they admitted that the elect are under the obligation of obedience to the commandments of God, even though they are not liable to the punishments merited by the divine law. Finally, against the Hobbesians, they repudiated purely secular law and temporal peace as a basis for the commonwealth and insisted that a true society must be a theocracy whose aim and duty it is to govern not only "in matters of righteousness and honesty, but also in matters of godliness, yea of all godliness."

The covenant theory of the church was really the ecclesiastical aspect of "social-contract" theory, and its basic aim was to transform the "status" of the elect of Calvinistic theory into a "contract" relationship of voluntary obligation. The theory was welcomed chiefly in middle-class and mercantile circles and was part of the general movement away from feudal and toward commercial conceptions of authority and government.² The theory was democratic in the sense that it provided for the regular election of magistrates and church officers by all members, and in that sense it championed equality and representative government; but in another sense it was not democratic, since it denied that the elected officers are responsible to the will of the people and asserted that law and authority come from God.

² For example, an early version in England of the Ramist logic, written by Abraham Fraunce in 1588, was entitled *The Lawiers Logike*. See John Milton, *Works*, Columbia University Press edition, Vol. XI.

The sources of Congregational Puritanism take us back to Renaissance Platonism, specifically to Peter Ramus (1515–86). He was a French humanist and Platonist who launched a vigorous attack on the logic and rhetoric of Aristotelian scholasticism, especially on the categories and predicables which seemed to him useless. In 1561 he was converted to Calvinism and at the Synod of Nîmes (1572) attained some notoriety for defending a pure congregational theory of the church against the Presbyterians, who denounced his theory as too “democratic” and hence “completely absurd and pernicious.” He was murdered during the Massacre of St. Bartholomew. Both his life and his death thus contributed to making him a Protestant saint and martyr. His chief philosophical contribution was to revive and systematize a Platonic dialectic or dichotomy as basic to and more useful than the scholastic and Aristotelian logic of demonstration. He conceived logic as an art, rather than as a science of proof—an art for disciplining man’s natural intelligence (*sagesse*). By dialectic or systematic dichotomy he taught the art of making distinctions or discriminations. This art of logical analysis he called invention. The other branch of logic he called judgment, or disposition, which is the art of joining properly what dialectic has disjoined. Ramus defended his system primarily for its pedagogical value, but some of his disciples, notably one of Melancthon’s German students, named J. H. Alsted, developed the dialectic method into an encyclopedia of arts and sciences. Alsted’s *Encyclopaedia* (1630) became a popular text for Puritan philosophy. It distinguished three basic disciplines in addition to the educational discipline, *didactia: hexilogia*, the knowledge of the habits and constitution of the mind; *technologìa*, the system of arts arranged dialectically to show the essential relations and unity of knowledge; and *archelogìa*, the system of archetypes, ends, or principles of both knowledge and being, equivalent roughly to a system of Platonic ideas. The general aim of learning or encyclopedic philosophy was to transform man’s natural (“inartificial”) *sagesse* into disciplined (“artificial”) argument until the human mind became an *imago Dei*.

The Ramist system was introduced into Cambridge University by Sir William Temple, in 1580, and contributed to the growth of Cambridge Platonism. It became the basis of Congregational apologetics. The Cambridge Puritans were represented by Alexander Richardson,

George Downname, Anthony Wotton, and especially by William Ames, whose writings became the favorite philosophy texts of early New England. In 1672, the same year in which Ames's edition of Ramus's *Dialectics with Commentary* appeared, Milton published his *Institutions of the Art of Logic Based on the Method of Peter Ramus*. Other Puritan divines who popularized the Ramist philosophy and Covenant Theology were William Perkins, John Preston, and Thomas Hooker.

Hooker later emigrated and became one of the early leaders in New England. He had studied Ramist philosophy under Richardson at Cambridge before he emigrated to New England, where he became the best-informed expositor of the system and, together with an adequately educated group of New England ministers, continued the philosophical defense of Congregationalism for several generations. This philosophical Puritanism in New England created a distinctive, intellectual tradition, whose chief themes were the theory of theocratic towns, and the academic development of *technologia*.

In Europe the primary aim of the Ramist philosophy and Covenant Theology was to give laymen the intellectual tools for breaking down the privileges of the priesthood, the necessity for sacraments, and the power of establishments. In England the Congregationalists could hope at most that parishes might be permitted to organize on covenant principles as recognized and established parts of the Church of England. Though they continued to preach the Calvinistic gospel that all kingdoms should become holy commonwealths, they could not carry out their program in practice. In New England, on the contrary, it was practical to organize by covenants or social contracts small independent communities, towns, or congregations, small kingdoms of Christ, or theocracies, in which popularly elected magistrates and ministers were jointly responsible for enforcing the law of God. Jonathan Mitchell explained in 1662 that "The Latter Erecting of Christs Kingdom in whole Societies . . . was our Design, and our Interest in this Country: tho' with Respect to the Inward and Invisible Kingdom, as the Scope thereof."⁸ And Professor Perry Miller comments very aptly: "That which made New Englanders unique in all seventeenth-century Christendom, which cut them off from all reformed churches and constituted them in truth a peculiar people,

⁸ Quoted in Perry Miller, *The New England Mind* (New York, 1939), p. 433.

was their axiom: 'The Covenant of Grace is cloathed with Church-Covenant in a Politicall visible Church-way.'"⁴ Though the New England divines formed the habit of promulgating divine decrees from their pulpits and took on the airs and powers of a privileged order, the laymen were able in the long run to assert their covenant rights, and they gradually undermined the clerical theocracies in favor of democracies. The clergy, of course, raised an outcry against the growth of ungodliness, but the younger generation, even of the clergy, paid little attention to such lamentation. In other words, what was in Europe primarily a revolt of the middle classes against ecclesiastical privilege became in America a positive basis for the founding of independent political communities in which the clergy gradually lost their power and kept their prestige only to the extent that they themselves adopted the "lay" point of view. The New England towns were neither mere investments for merchant adventurers nor holy commonwealths; they pretended to be both, but gradually there was evolved a distinct type of independence which embodied a mixture of Platonic idealism and Yankee mercantile prosperity. The "election" and the "providence" of God became the sanction or ideology of independent commonwealths.

The theory of nature and the philosophy of history were unified for the New England Puritans by their Christian Platonism. They defined nature as the art (*technē*) of God. A typical text, that of Samuel Johnson, of Yale College, begins as follows:

TECHNOLOGY OR TECHNOMETRY

1. Art is the idea representing and directing *eupraxia* [well-doing].
2. An idea is the matter of art.
3. An idea is the pattern of a thing.
4. An idea is representing and by means of the representation directing *eupraxia* in action.
5. On which the form of art is based.
6. The object and end of an idea is *eupraxia*.
7. A thing is an object in so far as it is engaged in being represented;
8. An end, in so far as it directs by means of representing.
9. *Eupraxia* is the orderly procedure or action of an agent in acting.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 447.

10. We have to consider the effective agent, object, effect and parts of *eupraxia*.

11. An action is an effective agent when it produces an effect consequent on an idea.

12. An object is the material about which an effective agent and its *eupraxia* are concerned in practice—and is also the material out of which it proceeds.

13. The effect which is produced by the agent and his *eupraxia* according to an idea is a *euprassomenon*—which is on the other hand the deed done.

14. The parts or factors of *eupraxia* are two—generation and analysis.

15. Generation is a regular advance from simples to the composites which they compose.

16. Analysis is an orderly regress from the composites to the simples into which they can be resolved.

17. Where generation ends analysis begins, and this holds good for all *generalia*.

Thus we see that there are four things necessary for any *euprassomenon*: (1) An art or idea, namely something representing and directing it. (2) An action which is done consequent upon an idea. (3) A good deed represented and directed. (4) Something about which this deed is concerned and which may be the material out of which the action produces the effect consequent on the idea.⁵

God Himself is interpreted as “art,” and the discipline of the human mind is the attempt at ordered understanding of the divine wisdom. There is no secular science; the so-called “secondary causes” are intelligible, not as merely secondary, but as intrinsic instrumentalities of God’s “economy of redemption.” “Technology” is thus sanctified. The New England educators emphasized Ramus’s scorn for Aristotelian metaphysics and ethics as secular inquiries and extended it to all the sciences. All means are God’s means, and all agency is divine art. Samuel Johnson prefaced his book on physics with the following question and answer:

Q. Why do not the Peripatetics follow this [Ramist] method?

A. The Peripatetics do not follow this method because they do not follow Moses but Aristotle; and learn their philosophy not from the sacred

⁵ Samuel Johnson, *The Career and Writings of Samuel Johnson*, ed. by H. W. and C. Schneider (New York, 1929), II, 63–65.

pages, but from the heathen Aristotle, and because they do not run through the whole course of the nature of things, but deal only with certain parts of it. For they restrict the object of physics and exclude many things from physics as for example, the highest heaven and the angels, whose nature is nowhere considered.⁶

And President Charles Chauncy told his students at Harvard that physics, politics, rhetoric and astronomy "in the true sense and right meaning thereof are Theological & Scripture learning, and are not to be accounted as humane learning."⁷

Though the dialectics or dichotomies of the Ramist texts became, in the course of a generation or two, little more than academic exercises, there persisted the Platonic habit of regarding the divine government not merely as an object of worship but also as a method of inquiry. "Tho' God's Will be His Rule, yet God hath in Himself an Idea of that which He will manage the Creatures by, and it is wise and just."⁸ The *eupraxia*, or skill, exhibited in the works (*euprasomena*) of God or man was the basic category of philosophic analysis and enabled the Puritans to interpret their arts and crafts, including the most mercantile and menial, in the perspective of God's will. They took seriously and literally Peter Ramus's maxim "The exercise and practice make the artisan. . . . To know only the universal rules, without knowing the particular usage, is not to know absolutely and actually."⁹ In short, Puritan philosophy was a system of practice, intended to be practical as well as scientific.

The transition from this Puritan Platonism to deism and natural religion was easy, gradual, and largely unconscious. For the Puritans were obviously not so dependent on the Biblical revelation of law and covenant as they pretended to be. Their system was from the start more genuinely philosophical than Biblical.

When the first attempts were made in New England to assert "natural" rights against the magistrates and the clergy in the interests of more democratic government, Governor Winthrop made a very effective reply, condemning in terms of the Puritan philosophy any appeal to "natural liberties" as being also an appeal to "corrupt liberties."

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁷ Quoted in Miller, *The New England Mind*, p. 105.

⁸ Samuel Willard, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 167.

⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 142.

There is a twofold liberty, natural (I mean as our nature is now corrupt) and civil or federal. The first is common to man with beasts and other creatures. By this, man, as he stands in relation to man simply, hath liberty to do what he lists; it is a liberty to evil as well as to good. This liberty is incompatible and inconsistent with authority, and cannot endure the least restraint of the most just authority. The exercise and maintaining of this liberty makes men grow more evil, and in time to be worse than brute beasts: *omnes sumus licentia deteriores*. This is that great enemy of truth and peace, that wild beast, which all the ordinances of God are bent against, to restrain and subdue it. The other kind of liberty I call civil or federal, it may also be termed moral, in reference to the covenant between God and man, in the moral law, and the politic covenants and constitutions, amongst men themselves. This liberty is the proper end and object of authority, and cannot subsist without it; and it is a liberty to that only which is good, just, and honest. This liberty you are to stand for, with the hazard (not only of your goods, but) of your lives, if need be. . . . This liberty is maintained and exercised in a way of subjection to authority; it is of the same kind of liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.¹⁰

Hobbes would have made the same reply! Nevertheless, these civil or covenant liberties came increasingly to the fore. John Wise gave the Puritan case away when he showed that the covenant theology of "Christian liberty" could be paralleled by secular social contract theory as interpreted by Pufendorf, provided the "consideration of man's moral turpitude be waived." With the gradual decline in the consciousness of corruption and with the growing irritation in the colonies against British mercantilism, Locke's *Treatises* were welcomed increasingly in New England and were finally used to justify rebellion.

What was true of social theory was also true of natural philosophy. Cambridge Platonism was closely associated with the rise of Newtonian science, and when, about 1700, Bacon, Newton, and Locke became available in New England, they quickly supplanted the antiquated physics and astronomy of the Ramist texts.

The condition of learning (as well as everything else) was very low in these times, indeed much lower than in the earlier time while those yet lived who had had their education in England and first settled the country. These were now gone off the stage and their sons fell greatly short of their ac-

¹⁰ John Winthrop, *The History of New England*, ed. by J. K. Hosmer (New York [c. 1908]), II, 238-39, "Original Narratives of American History."

quirements as through the necessity of the times they could give but little attention to the business of education. . . . It was nothing but the scholastic cobwebs of a few little English and Dutch systems that would hardly now be taken up in the street, some of Ramus and Alsted's Works was considered as the highest attainments. They heard indeed in 1714, when he [Johnson] took his Bachelor's Degree of a new philosophy that of late was all in vogue and of such names as Descartes, Boyle, Locke, and Newton, but they were cautioned against thinking anything of them because the new philosophy, it was said, would soon bring in a new divinity and corrupt the pure religion of the country, and they were not allowed to vary an ace in their thoughts from Dr. Ames' *Medulla Theologiae* and *Cases of Conscience* and Wollebius, which were the only systems of divinity that were thumbed in those days and considered with equal if not greater veneration than the Bible itself for the contrivance of those and the like scholastic authors to make curious systems in a scientific way out of their own heads, and under each head to pick up a few texts of Scripture which seemed to sound favorably and accommodate them to their preconceived schemes. Indeed there was no such thing as any book of learning to be had in those times under a 100 or 150 years old, such as the first settlers of the country brought with them 70 or 80 years before and some few used to make synopses or abridgements of these old scholastic systems.¹¹

This *rapprochement* between Puritanism and Newtonian science is most clearly exhibited in the case of Jonathan Edwards.

— 2 —

THE PIETIST THEORY OF LOVE

THAT Puritanism drifted easily into the principles of the Enlightenment and away from strict Calvinism is plausible on two grounds:

1) Puritanism made God intelligible in terms of art and contract, both principles of general order or reason, whereas Calvin had insisted that the decrees of God are in exercise of His absolute sovereignty, that they are inscrutable and arbitrary. For strict Calvinism any attempt to reduce grace to either art or justice was impious as well

¹¹ Quoted from Johnson, *Autobiography*, in *Works*, ed. by Schneider, I, 5-6.

as futile. It was no accident that the system of Ramus made headway first among the Arminians and then among the Dutch Congregationalists, for it was in the Netherlands and later in Scotland that Calvinism was transformed from an absolutistic theocratic system into something approaching constitutionalism and republicanism. In Dutch and British Puritanism philosophical Platonism and political reform were intimately associated. In America this association was developed into an integrated system.

2) By emphasizing the Church-Social Covenant, Puritanism confused and subordinated the "covenant of grace" or individual election. Individualism was persistently sacrificed to "church order." Ramist Platonism emphasized God's *general* providence and respect for covenants. In this sense God's justice was clearly embodied and exhibited both in the social order and in natural law. As the New England church covenants gradually became secularized and were increasingly indistinguishable from the town ordinances, the "standing order" (as the New England theocracy was called) was put on the defensive and resisted the growth of both political and religious individualism. Thus, the Puritans were well prepared to interpret natural law as divine order and social obligations as divine law.

Precisely these two traits of Puritan thinking increasingly segregated them from their near neighbors on the Protestant Left. The Quakers, Anabaptists, and Antinomians in general were pietists or "enthusiasts," who subordinated law to revelation and general order to personal inspirations. The more these groups (especially in America) made trouble for the Puritans, the more the latter became "sober," emphasizing an "enlightened mind" rather than "raised affections" (in the words of Charles Chauncy) and repudiating mysticism, private revelations, and religious individualism in general.

This basic conflict between individualism and ecclesiasticism flared up in the Great Awakening, when European pietism and evangelicalism migrated to America and swept large portions of the populace off its balance. Of all the Puritans, the one who felt this conflict most keenly and dealt with it most radically was Jonathan Edwards. He learned his Ramist and Cambridge Platonism at Yale (probably under Samuel Johnson, who was his tutor for a short time), but during his college years the Dummer Library came over from Europe, contain-

ing the chief works of the "new learning," and both he and Johnson grasped at them eagerly. He was especially impressed by two philosophical works, Locke's *Essay* and Hutcheson's *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*; the former in 1717 while he was still in college, the latter about 1730, while he was a young minister at Northampton. His personal religious struggle was most intense during the years 1722-25, and in 1734 the "Revival" or "Awakening" broke out in his congregation. During these years he read and reread, in addition to the "new" philosophers, a work which was familiar to the Puritan divines, but gained new significance for Edwards—Petro van Mastricht's *Theoretico-practica theologia*, which was also available in a popularized, English version. Van Mastricht, though closely related to the Dutch Covenant theologians, was one of the founders of Dutch pietism. Through this Continental pietism Edwards was prepared theologically for the British and the American pietism of the Great Awakening. Edwards soon became the intellectual leader among the "New Lights," as those Puritans were called who inclined toward religious individualism and participated in revivalism; he constructed a philosophy which is impressive for its personal intensity as well as for its masterly dealing with the intellectual currents of his day. In our next chapter we shall consider how he dealt with Locke and Newton as scientists; our concern here is with his reworking of the Puritan tradition under the stimulus of pietism.

Taking his clue from Locke's emphasis on simple ideas of sense as the ultimate source of reflection, and from Hutcheson's doctrine of the moral sense, Edwards argued that God must be experienced by a kind of sense experience, instead of being understood by "justification of His ways to man," as the Puritan and other rationalistic theologians had tried to understand Him. He remembered how as a youth he had resented the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God until there suddenly came over him an "inward, sweet delight in God." His own eloquent account is worth quoting:

From my childhood up, my mind had been full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty, in choosing whom he would to eternal life, and rejecting whom he pleased; leaving them eternally to perish, and be everlastingly tormented in hell. It used to appear like a horrible doctrine to me. But I remember the time very well, when I seemed to be convinced,

and fully satisfied, as to this sovereignty of God, and his justice in thus eternally disposing of men, according to his sovereign pleasure. But never could give an account, how, or by what means, I was thus convinced, not in the least imagining at the time, nor a long time after, that there was any extraordinary influence of God's Spirit in it; but only that now I saw further, and my reason apprehended the justice and reasonableness of it. However, my mind rested in it; and it put an end to all those cavils and objections. And there has been a wonderful alteration in my mind, with respect to the doctrine of God's sovereignty, from that day to this; so that I scarce ever have found so much as the rising of an objection against it, in the most absolute sense, in God shewing mercy to whom he will shew mercy, and hardening whom he will. God's absolute sovereignty and justice, with respect to salvation and damnation is what my mind seems to rest assured of, as much as of any thing that I see with my eyes; at least it is so at times. But I have often since that first conviction, had quite another sense of God's sovereignty than I had then. I have often since had not only a conviction, but a *delightful* conviction. The doctrine has very often appeared exceedingly pleasant, bright, and sweet. Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God. But my first conviction was not so.

The first instance, that I remember, of that sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things, that I have lived much in since, was on reading those words, I Tim. i. 17. *Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.* As I read the words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from any thing I ever experienced before. Never any words of Scripture seemed to me as these words did. I thought with myself, how excellent a Being that was, and how happy I should be, if I might enjoy that God, and be rapt up to him in heaven, and be as it were swallowed up in him for ever! . . .

After this my sense of divine things gradually increased, and became more and more lively, and had more of that inward sweetness. The appearance of everything was altered; there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet, cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost everything.¹

The "almost everything" is significant, for he relates how the cultivation of this new sense led him into solitude, into communion with nature, and how his academic tasks and social relations reduced him to "a low, sunk estate and condition, miserably senseless . . . about

¹ Jonathan Edwards, *Representative Selections*, ed. by C. H. Faust and T. Johnson (Cincinnati, 1935), pp. 58-60.

spiritual things” and made him realize that he had “abundant reason to be convinced of the troublesomeness and vexation of the world, and that it will never be another kind of a world.” He was troubled by the “proud and self-righteous spirit” which he sensed in himself and saw in his fellows, and he wrote, apparently without humor:

I have greatly longed of late, for a broken heart, and to lie low before God; and, when I ask for humility, I cannot bear the thought of being no more humble than other christians. It seems to me, that though their degrees of humility may be suitable for them, yet it would be a vile self-exaltation in me, not to be the lowest in humility of all mankind.²

Thus, in Edwards’s mind there grew a master passion, a single concern that the sovereignty of God become literally an all-pervasive and all-inclusive motive, transforming passion into subjection and moral benevolence into “holy love.”

Partly on the basis of this interpretation of his own experience, partly through his observations of “the religious affections” during the Awakening, and partly under the influence of pietist theology, he came to believe in a “divine and supernatural light” through which God reveals himself inwardly. He was careful to explain that “those convictions that natural men may have of their sin and misery, is not this spiritual and divine light,”³ that “this spiritual and divine light does not consist in any impression made upon the imagination,”⁴ that “this spiritual light . . . is quite a different thing from inspiration: it reveals no new doctrine, it suggests no new proposition to the mind, it teaches no new thing of God, or Christ, or another world,”⁵ and that “not every affecting view that men have of the things of religion is this spiritual and divine light.”⁶ It is “a real sense of the excellency of God.”⁷

There is a difference between having an opinion, that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace. There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet, and having a sense of its sweetness. . . . There is a wide difference between mere speculative rational judging any thing to be excellent, and having a sense of its sweetness and beauty. The former rests only in the head, speculation only is concerned in it; but the heart is concerned in the

² *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 102, from “A Divine and Supernatural Light.”

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

latter. When the heart is sensible of the beauty and amiableness of a thing, it necessarily feels pleasure in the apprehension.⁸

Edwards was convinced that he had abundant empirical evidence, such as Locke might demand, that men find pleasure in God. But he is careful to point out that love toward God and the pleasure found "in the things of religion" are not natural affections, because the means used are not natural. Following Locke, Edwards believed that in natural "willing" the will is determined by "the last dictate of the understanding"; in the case of this supernatural sense, on the contrary, the sense or appreciation of God's excellency creates the understanding of it. Edwards thus worked out very carefully an empiricist argument for supernatural or holy love.

Not content, however, with the empirical approach, he cast the same idea into Platonic form. He argued not only, as the pietists did, that God must be approached through the "heart" not the "head," but that this "holy" or supernatural love is the love of the universal. He called it "benevolence to Being in general" or "being's consent to Being." All natural or moral virtue is but a reflection and derivative of this "true virtue," which is based, not on a "moral sense" in the humanitarian form of disinterestedness, but on the excellence of Being itself, an excellence of harmony or proportion among the parts of Being. "Wherefore all the Primary and Original beauty or excellence, that is among Minds, is Love; and into this may all be resolved that is found among them."⁹

Edwards made an ingenious synthesis of his two approaches to God—the Lockean and the Platonic—in his sketch on the Trinity. God the Father is Love. In order to have an object of love, the Father must have an Idea of Himself. This Idea is the Son. Their unity in action is the Holy Spirit or Divine Will.

The F. is the Deity subsisting in the Prime, unoriginated & most absolute manner, or the deity in its direct existence. The Son is the deity generated by Gods understanding, or having an Idea of himself & subsisting in that Idea. The Holy Gh. is the Deity subsisting in act, or the divine essence flowing out and Breathed forth in Gods Infinite love to & delight in himself. & I believe the whole divine Essence does Truly & distinctly subsist both in

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 107

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35, from "Notes on the Mind."

the divine Idea & divine Love, and that each of them are Properly distinct Persons.¹⁰

Edwards projected a "Body of Divinity," which he did not live to write. He indicated, however, that he wanted to entitle it "Lovely Christianity," and referred in explanation to van Mastricht and the pietists. His chief ambition, in other words, was to reconcile the doctrine of God as Platonic Archetype of Excellence with the Lockean system of "ideas," and the Puritan theory of grace with the pietist conception of love.

He reconstructed the Ramist Platonism, based on the idea of the Divine Art, into a pietist version of Platonic love. He made it quite clear that this "holy love" or benevolence is nothing sentimental or merely emotional. It is empirical and empiricist "sense." And it is certainly not to be confused with either the inspiration of the Quakers or the ecstatic "affections" of the religious revivals. Edwards's *Treatise on the Religious Affections* is severely critical, and his conception of "Christian practice" or practical holiness is neither mysticism nor enthusiasm. It is Puritan sobriety suffused with a Platonic sense and sensitivity for beauty.

But for the New England Puritans it had a disquieting meaning and effect. When young Edwards of Northampton preached to the Boston aristocracy on the theme "God Glorified in Man's Dependence," the effect was sensational. To have the Calvinistic orthodoxy—the doctrine of absolute and arbitrary decrees, the doctrine of original corruption, the doctrine of determinism, damnation, and redemption—revived, not as a covenant for a holy commonwealth, but as an "inward" or "sensible" revelation of the love of God was both refreshing and disconcerting. As the divergence between "New Lights" and "Old Lights" became more apparent, Edwards's attempt to reconcile Puritanism and Pietism proved increasingly impractical. When he and, even less tactfully, his followers Bellamy, Emmons, and Hopkins attempted to repudiate the popular "Half-way Covenant," to revive in the New England congregations the practice of strict communion and public confession of godliness or regeneration, they became an unpopular minority and ended by becoming a small sect of philosophically erudite but socially unfashionable Calvinists. In self-defense and also

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 379, from "An Essay on the Trinity."

in the interest of "holy love," the Edwardean New Lights were forced to affiliate with the Presbyterians, who corrupted their philosophy, welcomed their pietism, and substituted for their individualism the Presbyterian brand of Protestant Jesuitism (to use Jefferson's apt term), the attempt to organize a centralized "Christian party in politics."¹¹ Not only in New England but throughout the country philosophy and piety became estranged, and the cause for which Edwards labored was hopelessly lost.

— 3 —

IMMATERIALISM

PURITAN scholasticism conceived God in terms of art, not of substance. But those Cambridge Platonists who were not of the school of Ramus were less concerned to combat scholastic concepts of substance and more worried by Descartes's innovations in ontology. Henry More, in particular, dwelt on the theological difficulties arising from the Cartesian distinction between extended substance and thinking substance. *Where*, then, is God? More's answer, which Newton repeated, was that God is extended and that material things literally and spatially exist *in* the divine mind. This led Newton to deify absolute space, and Jonathan Edwards did not hesitate to follow him.

Deprive the world of light and motion and the Case would stand thus with the world, there would [be] neither white nor black neither blew nor brown, bright nor shaded pellucid nor opake, no noise or sound neither heat nor Cold, neither fluid nor Wet nor Drie hard nor soft nor solidity nor Extension, nor figure, nor magnitude nor Proportion nor body nor spirit, what then [is] to become of the Universe Certainly it exists no where but in the Divine mind.¹

It is self-evident I believe to every man, that Space is necessary, eternal,

¹¹ See the pamphlet by Ezra Stiles Ely, *The Duty of Christian Freeman to Elect Christian Rulers* (1827), reprinted in Joseph Blau, ed., *American Philosophic Addresses, 1700-1900* (New York, 1946), pp. 551-62, and Joseph Blau, "The 'Christian Party in Politics,'" *Review of Religion*, XI, no. 1, Sept. 1946.

¹ Edwards, *Representative Selections*, ed. by C. H. Faust and F. Johnson, pp. 22-23; from "Of Being."

infinite, and omnipresent. But I had as good speak plain: I have already said as much as, that Space is God.²

When we say that the World, i.e. the material Universe, exists no where but in the mind, we have got to such a degree of strictness and abstraction, that we must be exceedingly careful, that we do not confound and lose ourselves by misapprehension. That is impossible, that it should be meant, that all the world is contained in the narrow compass of a few inches of space, in little ideas in the place of the brain; for that would be a contradiction; for we are to remember that the human body, and the brain itself, exist only mentally, in the same sense that the other things do; and so that, which we call place, is an idea too. Therefore things are truly in those places; for what we mean, when we say so, is only, that this mode of our idea of place appertains to such an idea. We would not therefore be understood to deny, that things are where they seem to be. For the principles we lay down, if they are narrowly looked into, do not infer that. Nor will it be found, that they at all make void Natural Philosophy, or the science of the Causes or Reasons of corporeal changes; For to find out the reasons of things, in Natural Philosophy, is only to find out the proportion of God's acting.³

In his early "Notes" Edwards represented this Cambridge Platonism, which is the background of Newton as well as of Puritanism, as making no pragmatic difference for scientific knowledge. "It is just all one," he said, whether "ideas" exist in the divine mind or whether things exist "in the same manner as is vulgarly thought." Whether the order of cause and effect is interpreted as proportion in the divine excellence or as natural law makes no difference to science; there is only the difference to religion and the imagination, for idealism leads men to look upon material things as the "shadows of beings" and to see the beauty or art of God, "when one part has such consonant proportion with the rest, as represents a general agreeing and consenting together," "that they seem to have respect one to another, as if they loved one another." But, as Edwards read Locke and saw the general drift of natural religion toward the faith in *necessary* connections, he revised his estimate of idealism somewhat and emphasized an idealistic theory of causation. In his *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended*, which was not published until 1758, he argued against

² Edwards, *Works*; with a memoir of his life by Sereno E. Dwight, I, 706; from "Notes on the Mind."

³ *Ibid.*, I, 669; from "Notes on the Mind."

the idea of necessary connection, much as Hume was doing at about the same time. Edwards apparently arrived at his critique independently of Hume, and certainly had quite different objectives in view. He argued against all "secondary causes" and attributed all causation directly to God's "arbitrary constitution." God is the *only* "agent" in the world; material things are used by him as means, but, strictly speaking, material things do not act as "efficient causes."

Prior existence can no more be the proper cause of the new existence, in the next moment, or next part of space, than if it had been in an age before, or at a thousand miles distance, without any existence to fill up the intermediate time or space. Therefore the existence of created substances, in each successive moment, must be the effect of the *immediate* agency, will, and power of GOD. . . .

It will certainly follow from these things, that God's *preserving* of created things in being, is perfectly equivalent to a *continued creation*, or to his creating those things out of nothing at *each moment* of their existence.⁴

The whole *course of nature*, with all that belongs to it, all its laws and methods, constancy and regularity, continuance, and proceeding, is an *arbitrary constitution*. In this sense, the continuance of the very being of the world and all its parts, as well as the manner of continued being depends entirely on an *arbitrary constitution*. For it does not at all *necessarily* follow, that because there was sound, or light, or colour, or resistance, or gravity, or thought, or consciousness, or any other dependent thing the last moment, that therefore there shall be the like at the next. All dependent existence whatsoever is in a constant flux, ever passing and returning; renewed every moment, as the colours of bodies are every moment renewed by the light that shines upon them; and all is constantly proceeding from God, as light from the sun. *In him we live, and move, and have our being.*⁵

Edwards's doctrine of God's omnificence represented not merely a return to orthodox Calvinism but also a positive argument for pantheism based on Newton and Locke. It did not deny the existence of matter; it asserted that matter exists and operates in God. It denied the existence of substance or substances, for God is more than substance; he is Being, continually creative. And it denied mechanical causation

⁴ Edwards, *Representative Selections*, ed. by Faust and Johnson, pp. 333-34; from *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended*.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 336-37.

or necessary relations. It is important to note that for Edwards human wills, too, exist in the Divine Will and act only *in* God. The immediate antithesis to Edwards's idealism was not materialism, but Arminianism. Edwards's idealism was opposed to Berkeley's. Samuel Johnson's, on the other hand, was intended to be faithful to Berkeley's; but the Puritan heritage was so strong in Johnson that his immaterialism combined superficially his old Platonism with his new Anglicanism.

When Samuel Johnson was converted to Anglicanism, he was converted on grounds of "church order" or episcopal, as contrasted with democratic authority.⁶ Having made his decision, he was practically obliged to become converted also to Arminian theology and turned to Bishop Berkeley for help in this problem. It is clear from their correspondence that neither Johnson nor Berkeley appreciated each other's difficulties. Johnson had just turned from his Ramist system, with great relief, to the study and appreciation of Bacon, Locke, and Newton. The latitudinarian Anglican divines, especially Clarke, who had induced him to return to the "devout, grand, and venerable administration" of the Church of England, had also led him along the fashionable road toward "the reasonableness of Christianity." Wollaston's natural religion was his new bible. Consequently, when he found Berkeley attacking Newton, he was disconcerted. He called Berkeley's attention to Newton's conception of space as God's boundless sensorium and added, "nor can I think you have a different notion of these attributes from that great philosopher, tho' you may differ in your ways of expression or explaining yourselves." He even was so bold as to suggest that "I can't see how external space and duration are any more abstract ideas than spirits." But Berkeley was firm and told Johnson he had no use for absolute space or for the deification

⁶ "Considering first that this country is in such a miserable state, as to Church government (let whatever hypothesis will, be right) that it needs reformation and alteration in that affair. . . .

"That peace without one of Christ's institutions is a false peace and it is best erring on the surest side.

"There may be offence taken where there is none given; if others are damnified by my doing my duty, I cannot help that, however I endeavor the contrary.

"There may be more souls damnified for want of Episcopal government in the country and that by far at length than by my making this appearance."

(*Samuel Johnson, President of King's College; His Career and Writings*, Herbert and Carol Schneider, eds. New York, 1929, I, 63-64.)

of space, and he gradually led Johnson to understand why he was so intent on attacking abstract ideas. Johnson had carried over into his idealism the Puritan distinction between archetypes and ectypes and had preached this doctrine to Berkeley, who had considerable difficulty in persuading Johnson that this distinction was subject to the same criticism that he was making of the materialists who held "that an ideal existence in the divine mind is one thing, and the real existence of material things another." In fact, Johnson's *Noetica*, which embodied his interpretation of Berkeley's idealism, is an uncritical mixture of Puritan Platonism and Berkeleyan immaterialism. The following passage plainly illustrates this mixture, the first part being Berkeleyan, the rest Puritan.

There are archetypes of these sensible ideas existing, external to our minds; but then they must exist in some other mind, and be ideas also as well as ours; because an idea can resemble nothing but an idea; and an idea ever implies in the very nature of it, relation to a mind perceiving it, or in which it exists. But then those archetypes or originals, and the manner of their existence in that eternal mind, must be entirely different from that of their existence in our minds; as different, as the manner of His existence is from that of ours: in him they must exist, as in original intellect; in us, only by way of sense and imagination; and in Him, as originals; in us only as faint copies; such as he thinks fit to communicate to us, according to such laws and limitations as he hath established, and such as are sufficient to all the purposes relating to our well-being, in which only we are concerned. Our ideas, therefore, cannot otherwise be said to be images or copies of the archetypes in the eternal mind, than as our souls are said to be images of Him.⁷

In his subsequent polemics with Calvinists, Johnson took a more vigorously Arminian stand. There it was made quite clear that human "spirits" are not primarily mere perceivers or merely images of the divine, original and absolute Being, but genuine "agents." The argument for moral responsibility was here his chief reliance, and he used it effectively against his Calvinist opponents, who had neither the dialectical skill nor the theological boldness of Jonathan Edwards. What helped Johnson's *Ethics*, however, was not its relation to Berkeley's idealism or to his own *Noetica*, for it had little, but its open assertion of human independence and free will, which was becoming an increasingly popular doctrine in the American colonies.

⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 376-77; from Johnson's *Elementa Philosophica*.

The metaphysics of "agency" took a new turn with Cadwallader Colden, of New York. He was something of a naturalist, but his ambitions as a scientist overreached themselves when he tried to "explain" the law of gravitation on Newton's mechanical principles, thus bringing to theoretical completion the great Newtonian physics. He was disappointed in this, for the Newtonian scientists found too many "hypotheses" in Colden's system to make it of any scientific (that is, experimental) use. But philosophically Colden's analysis of "the first causes of action in matter" is of considerable interest, though he, himself, may have been too much an amateur to have known what he was doing. However, he formulated his basic contribution admirably in a letter to an Edinburgh friend, to whom he sent his "papers" in the hope that at Edinburgh at least their value might be recognized.

National Prejudices, as well as personal often prevail in many points of philosophy. Perhaps the Principles which I have adopted may be more favourably received in Scotland than in England. You'll pardon the fondness which a man naturally has for his own productions when I desire of you, in case you do not think these papers proper to appear in public, please to deposit them in the library of the University of Edinburgh where I had my Education in the Rudiments of Science, for I am persuaded they will sometime or other be found to contain the true principles of physical knowledge, and to be of real use.

We have no knowledge of substances or of things themselves, as little knowledge of material substance as of the Intelligent or of Spirit. All our knowledge consists in this that from the effects of phenomena we discover something which we call substances have the power of producing certain effects. How they produce these effects we in no manner conceive. Yet all the objections to my principles which I have seen arise from an expectation that I should explain in what manner the primary powers produce their effect⁸

Colden had a clever, pragmatic (I would almost venture to say, behavioristic) method of cutting short the metaphysical problems of what mind can do and what matter can do. He had evidently understood the point of Locke's *Essay* and assumed as a scientific maxim the following principle:

Our knowledge of the powers in nature can only be attained by an accurate

⁸ Letter to Robert Whyte, professor of medicine at the University of Edinburgh, dated February 25, 1762, in *The Colden Letter Books*, Vol. I.

observation of the phenomena or effects produced by them and from thence collecting the general rules or laws which these powers observe in producing their effects in different circumstances. We thereby have obtained all the knowledge of nature which can be obtained by our faculties.⁹

From this principle he concluded that the science of matter reduced itself to a description of types of action. "Everything that we know is an agent," but all we know of an agent is "its action and the effects of that action."

I hope to shew, that we may have as clear and distinct an idea or conception of spirit, as we can have of matter: and that all the difficulties or absurdities, which many have fallen into, arise from an error in the conception of the power, force, energy, or manner of acting, and which are commonly called the properties or qualities of things; or from the confusion which arises by the using of different terms, or words to express things, which in themselves are not different. The property, or quality of any thing, is nothing else but the action of that thing: and the different qualities or properties of any thing or substance are no other than the different actions or manner of acting of that thing.¹⁰

He then proceeded to distinguish the different "essences," "powers," or "forces" in things or substances according to the differences observable in their "manner of acting." Accordingly, he discovered three types of material agents: resisting (having the *vis inertiae*), moving (having the power to continue in a straight line at a given velocity), and elastic (having the power to communicate resistance or motion in any direction, i.e., the power of a medium or *aether*). Momentum is a combination of the first two; friction a conflict between the first two; radiation is a product of the first and third.

When Colden had elaborated his system to this extent, he sent it to Samuel Johnson for criticism (and, of course, admiration!). Johnson replied that he had always been taught that matter is by nature, if not by definition, inactive, passive, inert, and that it must be moved by an immaterial agent. Furthermore, he could not understand how "action" and "intelligence" could be separated, since unconscious action (that is, agency) seemed to him a contradiction in terms.

⁹ P. R. Anderson and M. H. Fisch, eds., *Philosophy in America* (New York, 1939), p. 98, from *The Letters and Papers of Cadwallader Colden*, Vol. VI.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 103, from *The Principles of Action in Matter*.

To this Colden replied promptly and confidently that "they who perceived the necessity of this connection [between action and intelligence] must show it." "I observe, I think, every day multitudes of actions, without that the idea of intelligence is necessarily connected with those actions." However, Colden revised his *First Causes of Action in Matter*, and under the title *First Principles of Action in Matter* he added a section on a fourth type of action, viz., "perception, intelligence and will." He labeled this type of agent "intelligent being," and then made the following significant observations.

We have no idea of substances; we have as little knowledge of the substance of material beings as of intelligent ones. . . .

Therefore in all actions of intelligent beings, which are likewise called *moral actions*, the intention, purpose, or will, is principally to be considered. This is the guiding principle in morality, policy, and religion. . . .

The intelligent agent never acts in opposition or contradiction to the material agents; for if it did, nothing but confusion, contradiction and absurdity could ensue: and there could be no need or use of machinery, or of a certain order and disposition of the parts of matter in the several systems, which compose the universe. But the intelligent either so disposes of the parts of the system, that their complicated actions shall serve the purpose, which the intelligent being has in forming of the systems: or where the action of the material agent is not determined, by any thing external to it, and its action is indifferent to any direction, in such case the intelligent being gives the action such direction, as best suits its own purpose.¹¹

Insofar as there is a single system of design or purposive action we must assume a single intelligent being which Colden calls *Archeus* or Nature.

Samuel Johnson was, of course, not completely satisfied with this mere addition of a fourth agent, even when Colden was willing to call it *immaterial*, but the discussion at least revealed that as far as "morality, policy, and religion" are concerned, the naturalists and the immaterialists could join hands, provided they confined themselves to "action."

The larger significance of the introduction of the philosophies of immaterialism into American philosophy at this time is that the chief issues out of which these philosophies arose were subordinated to new

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 119-120, from "Of the Intelligent Being."

ones. Idealism itself made practically no headway in America until a century later, and immaterialistic idealism least of all. For Johnson and Edwards the problem of idealism arose out of two ancient concepts—substance and free will. In the course of the development of both the Arminian and the Puritan types of idealism, the ideas of substance and free will proved increasingly irrelevant and were practically discarded in favor of the newer ideas of material causation and action. “Matter” not only took the place of “substance” as the context of “agency,” but in turn was crowded out of the argument by the more empirical study of cause and effect relations. Arguing on this empirical basis, Edwards defended a type of supernatural (but observable) sense, *in addition to* the natural senses, and a type of immaterial “constitution” in which the natural succession of events can be included. In other words, Edwards and Colden might have come to terms with each other on the interpretation of nature, whereas Colden and Johnson could come to terms on matters of morals. The two immaterialists, Johnson and Edwards, could probably not have agreed on even the meaning of immaterialism. But it is clear that underlying the strictly philosophical arguments among these men, were deep-seated divergences of interest. Edwards was anxious to revive faith in the supernatural in the interests of piety; Johnson, increasingly fearful of the growth of “free thinking,” fled to what might be called a “fundamentalist” interest in biblical science; and Colden turned toward the natural sciences. None of them was prepared for the moral issues that were becoming increasingly urgent and that clustered around the cry of “liberty.”

GUIDE TO THE LITERATURE FOR PART I

CHAPTER I

For the more general background of English Puritanism William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York, 1938), is authoritative and makes good use of the polemic pamphlets. For the still more general background, the basic, if not indispensable, work is John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1st American ed., Philadelphia, 1816).

By far the most adequate exposition of the philosophy of the New Eng-

land Puritans is Perry Miller, *The New England Mind; the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1939). Chapters IV–IX and Appendix A are particularly valuable, since they contain the only comprehensive treatment of the Ramist branch of Puritan philosophy. Chapters XIV and XV give a good account of the social theory of the covenant theology. For criticism of this book see the review by H. W. Schneider in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, I (1940), 119–22. Until Professor Miller's projected sequel, giving a similar account of eighteenth-century thought in New England, appears, the reader might profitably consult Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, *The Puritans* (New York, 1938), which covers a wider range than *The New England Mind*. Ralph Barton Perry, *Puritanism and Democracy* (New York, 1944) gives an excellent account of Puritan social philosophy. Joseph Dorfman, *The Economic Mind in American Civilization* (New York, 1946), I, 42 ff., 111 ff. has a good discussion of Puritan economic ethics and of the secular aspects of Puritan "corporations"; see also Dorfman's discussions of Davenport, p. 39, Winthrop, pp. 60–65, Williams, pp. 66–74, and Morgan, p. 120. George F. Willison, *Saints and Strangers* (New York, 1945), gives a good account of the Plymouth Separatists.

Samuel Eliot Morison, *Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), is the chief collection of relevant materials for the early period of American Puritanism, but it is still useful to refer to an older classic, Henry Martyn Dexter, *The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years as Seen in Its Literature* (New York, 1880), since it contains much detailed information on Connecticut Puritans. Another useful reference work is Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (New York, 1893).

In S. E. Morison, *Builders of the Bay Colony* (New York, 1930), there are good sketches of John Winthrop, Thomas Shepard, Nathaniel Ward, and John Eliot. In S. E. Morison, *The Puritan Pronaos; Studies in the Intellectual Life of New England in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1936), there are references to the chief sources and expressions of New England thought. Clifford K. Shipton, *Roger Conant; a Founder of Massachusetts* (Cambridge, 1944) and "The Autobiographical Memoranda of John Brock 1636–1659," *Proc. American Antiquarian Society*, LIII, part i, add to our knowledge of early Puritan leaders. Kenneth B. Murdock, *Increase Mather; the Foremost American Puritan* (Cambridge, Mass., 1925), and his "The Puritan Tradition," in *The Reinterpretation of American Literature*, ed. by Norman Foerster (New York, 1928), are sympathetic presentations of Puritanism, intended to counteract the unsympathetic accounts of the preceding generation of historians as represented

in Brooks Adams, *The Emancipation of Massachusetts* (1st ed., Boston, 1887; rev. and enl. ed., Boston, 1919), George E. Ellis, *The Puritan Age and Rule in the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, 1629-1685* (Boston, 1888), Sanford H. Cobb, *The Rise of Religious Liberty in America* (New York, 1902), and I. Woodbridge Riley, "Philosophers and Divines, 1720-1789," in *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, I, 72-89. See, too, Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, I, 98-106, for a valuable criticism of Murdock's work; note also Parrington's treatment of Hooker and Roger Williams.

Chapters I-III of Herbert W. Schneider, *The Puritan Mind* (New York, 1930), give a running commentary on the general ideas of New England Puritanism, but are inadequate for the technical philosophical orientation, which is given by Professor Miller. In Chapter V, on Samuel Johnson, pp. 158-64, however, brief mention is made of the Ramist philosophy as taught at Yale, and Herbert and Carol Schneider, *Samuel Johnson, President of King's College; His Career and Writings* (New York, 1929), II, 57-186, reproduce, and in part translate, Samuel Johnson's typical Ramist texts.

Of the selections in Anderson and Fisch, the following are relevant to this chapter: "A Model of Church and Civil Power," and the selections from John Winthrop, Urian Oakes, and John Wise.

It is difficult to select from the voluminous writings of the New England Puritans. For general orientation, two classics supplement each other admirably—John Winthrop, *The History of New England from 1630-1649* (various editions), and Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana; or, The Ecclesiastical History of New England, from Its First Planting in the Year 1620, unto the Year of Our Lord, 1698* (London, 1702). There is an excellent full bibliography of Puritan writings in Miller and Johnson, *The Puritans* (New York, 1938). Below are listed the chief American Puritan philosophical writings in chronological order.

- 1634 John Cotton and others (?), *A Model of Church and Civil Power* (London, 1634).
- 1640 Thomas Shepard, *The Sincere Convert* (London, 1640).
- 1644 John Cotton, *The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and Power Thereof, according to the Word of God* (London, 1644).
- 1645 John Cotton, *The Covenant of Gods Free Grace* (London, 1645).
 — *The Way of the Congregational Churches Cleared* (London, 1645).
- Thomas Shepard, *The Sound Beleever* (Boston, 1645; London, 1653).

- 1647 Nathaniel Ward, *The Simple Cobler of Aggavvam in America* (London, 1647).
- 1648 Thomas Hooker, *A Survey of the Summe of Church-Discipline* (London, 1648).
- 1651 Peter Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*. 2d ed. (London, 1651).
- 1659 John Eliot, *The Christian Commonwealth: or, The Civil Policy of the Rising Kingdom of Jesus Christ* (London, 1659).
- 1668 William Stoughton, *New-Englands True Interest; Not to Lie* 2d ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1670).
- 1672 John Davenport, *The Power of Congregational Churches* (London, 1672).
- 1682 Urian Oakes, *The Sovereign Efficacy of Divine Providence* (Boston, 1682).
- 1700 Increase Mather, *The Order of the Gospel, Professed and Practised by the Churches of Christ in New England* (Boston, 1700).
- 1702 Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London, 1702).
- 1717 John Wise, *A Vindication of the Government of New-England Churches* (Boston, 1717).
- 1721 Cotton Mather, *The Christian Philosopher* (London, 1721).
- 1726 Samuel Willard, *A Compleat Body of Divinity in Two Hundred and Fifty Expository Lectures on the Assembly's Shorter Catechism* (Boston, 1726).

CHAPTER 2

The best biography of Edwards is by Ola Elizabeth Winslow, *New York*, 1940. The best exposition of his philosophy is by Clarence H. Faust, pp. xiv-xcviii in Jonathan Edwards, *Representative Selections*, with Introduction, Bibliography, and notes by Clarence H. Faust and Thomas H. Johnson (Cincinnati, 1935). The selections in this volume are admirable; on pp. cxix-cxlii there is an extensive bibliography with brief analytic comments on much of the material listed. A. C. McGiffert, Jr., *Jonathan Edwards* (New York, 1932), is an excellent study of Edwards's psychology of religion. Chapter IV of H. W. Schneider, *The Puritan Mind*, gives a critical account of Edwards's relations to Puritanism, but fails to do justice to his doctrine of supernatural sense and to his pietism. W. J. B. Edgar has made important researches on Edwards's pietism, but they have not been published.

To the bibliographies in these works it is necessary to add only a few recent publications. Theodore Hornberger, "Edwards and the New Science," *American Literature*, IX (1937-38), 196-207, presents Edwards

as an antagonist of materialism on the grounds of natural science itself, while H. G. Townsend, "Jonathan Edwards' Later Observation of Nature," *New England Quarterly*, XIII (1940), 510-18, and James H. Tufts, "Edwards and Newton," *The Philosophical Review*, XLIX (1940), 609-22, present evidence connecting Edwards with the "new" science. Conrad Wright, "Edwards and the Arminians on the Freedom of the Will," *Harvard Theological Review*, XXXV (1942), 241-61, finds Edwards's position on the freedom of the will close to that of the Arminians in some respects. Perry Miller, "Jonathan Edwards to Emerson," *New England Quarterly*, XIII (1940), 589-617, considers Edwards typical of the same sort of revolt out of which Emerson arose.

The works of Edwards have been published in many editions. *The Works of President Edwards*; with a memoir of his life by Sereno E. Dwight (New York, 1829), is of particular value because of the "memoir." Thomas Herbert Johnson, *The Printed Writings of Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758: a Bibliography* (Princeton, 1940), is a useful study of the various printed editions of Edwards's individual works.

I. Woodbridge Riley, *American Philosophy; the Early Schools* (New York, 1907), is valuable because it contains the "Notes on the Mind" and "Of Being." Substantial excerpts from the first of these important youthful works are given in Muelder and Sears, *The Development of American Philosophy* (Boston, 1940), together with selections from "God Glorified in Man's Dependence," "A Divine and Supernatural Light," and "The Freedom of the Will," and a chapter, "The Insufficiency of Reason as a Substitute for Revelation," from *Miscellaneous Observations on Important Theological Subjects*. P. R. Anderson and M. H. Fisch, eds. *Philosophy in America* (New York, 1939), contains the sections on "Excellency" from the "Notes on the Mind" and a very good selection entitled "Personal Identity," from *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended*.

In addition to these philosophical essays by Edwards, the reader's attention is called to the following important philosophical sermons and essays. Those marked with an asterisk are contained in part in the volume of selections edited by Faust and Johnson. "God Glorified in Man's Dependence *" (reprinted in full in Joseph Blau, ed., *American Philosophic Addresses, 1700-1900*, pp. 521-36); "A Divine and Supernatural Light *"; "The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners *"; "Christian Love"; "Decrees and Elections"; "Efficacious Grace"; "Treatise on Grace"; "Observations on the Trinity *"; "Treatise Concerning Religious Affections *"; "Freedom of the Will.*"

CHAPTER 3

The long search for the sources of Edwards's idealism (see C. H. Faust and T. H. Johnson, *Jonathan Edwards*, p. xxvii, and H. W. Schneider, *The Puritan Mind*, p. 137) now seems superfluous, since recent researches on Puritan philosophy have proved the prevalence of Cambridge Platonism in New England. The attempt to decide which of the numerous Platonist works were most influential on Edwards is a comparatively trivial question.

Consult the literature on Edwards referred to in the section for Chapter 2. The "Notes on the Mind," which are pervaded by the Lockean approach, should be supplemented by the fragment "Of Being," where the approach is more dialectical.

The published writings of Samuel Johnson are scarce. His *Elementa Philosophica* was published by Benjamin Franklin (Philadelphia, 1752); it is composed of two parts: "Noetica" (in which Berkeley's influence is conspicuous) and "Ethica," which had been published separately in 1746 as *A System of Morality*. Of the four volumes ed. by H. W. and C. Schneider, *Samuel Johnson, President of King's College. His Career and Writings* (New York, 1929), Volume II contains the important philosophical works, including Johnson's correspondence with Berkeley and Cadwalader Colden. The introductory essay by H. W. Schneider in this volume is practically identical with Chapter V of *The Puritan Mind*. Volume I contains Samuel Johnson's highly instructive and readable "Memoirs," or autobiography, together with selections from his personal correspondence. Volume III contains his ecclesiastical correspondence and reprints his chief polemics with dissenters; of these, his pamphlets against Jonathan Dickinson and Hezekiah Gold are particularly important philosophically. Volume IV concerns Johnson's labors in connection with the founding of King's College, New York, and reprints some of the anti-Anglican polemics. At the end of this volume is a calendar of the Johnson Papers, most of which are in the Columbia University Library.

E. E. Beardsley, *Life and Correspondence of Samuel Johnson, D.D.* (New York, 1873), is the most complete biography of Samuel Johnson and contains the correspondence with Berkeley and Colden. P. R. Anderson and M. H. Fisch, *Philosophy in America* (New York, 1939), gives part of the Berkeley correspondence and a selection from Johnson's *Noetica*. W. G. Muelder and L. Sears, *The Development of American Philosophy* (Boston, 1940), give selections from Johnson's *Noetica* and *Ethica*. In connection with Johnson's *Ethica*, the reader should refer to William

Wollaston, *The Religion of Nature Delineated* (Glasgow, 1746),*¹ the significance of which as a source for Johnson's work escaped the editors of his writings. For general bibliographies on Samuel Johnson see H. W. Schneider, *The Puritan Mind*, p. 287, and P. R. Anderson and M. H. Fisch, *Philosophy in America*, p. 54. Theodore Hornberger "Samuel Johnson of Yale and King's College. A note on the relation of science and religion in Provincial America," *New England Quarterly*, VIII (1935), 378-97, discusses the relation of Johnson to Bacon, Locke, Newton, and Berkeley.

In addition to Cadwallader Colden's correspondence with Samuel Johnson, referred to above, the published philosophical works of Colden are: *An Explication of the First Causes of Action in Matter, and of the Cause of Gravitation* (New York, 1745); *The Principles of Action in Matter, the Gravitation of Bodies, and the Motion of the Planets, Explained from Those Principles* (London, 1751). *The Letters and Papers of Cadwallader Colden*, from the Collections of the New York Historical Society, 9 vols. (New York, 1917-23; 1934-35), especially Volume III and the list of unpublished Colden manuscripts in VII, 359-76, some of which are of philosophic interest. One of these, "An Introduction to the Study of Philosophy," is included in Joseph Blau, ed., *American Philosophic Addresses, 1700-1900* (New York, 1946), pp. 289-311.

¹ See below, pp. 37-38.

— II —

THE AMERICAN ENLIGHTENMENT

THE Enlightenment is indefinable philosophically, especially in America, where it was least literary and most active. There was no systematic formulation of human reason in this country—no *Encyclopédie*, no *philosophes*, no *esprit de système*; yet there was no period in our history when the public interests of the people were so intimately linked to philosophic issues. To recapture the intellectual life of the revolutionary generation in America we must turn, not to academic texts or to systems of theology and ethics or to the products of reflective solitude, but to the center of public affairs—to state documents and to political platforms, presses, and pulpits. Never in America were philosophical thinking and social action more closely joined. Though much of the philosophizing was *ad hoc*, finding universal solutions for particular problems, it will not do to dismiss the thought of the Enlightenment as mere rationalization. For the conspicuous fact about American life then was that not only were the eyes and hopes of the world centered on America but also American men of affairs themselves were genuinely concerned with the wider, if not the universal, implications of their interests and deeds. They had, indeed, “a decent respect to the opinions of mankind.” It is amazing to see how far into the past and the future they looked in order to understand their present. Never was history made more consciously and conscientiously, and seldom since the days of classic Greece has philosophy enjoyed greater opportunity to exercise public responsibility.

It is impossible to read and write dispassionately of the American Enlightenment, for it contains the heart of our heritage as a people and our deepest tie to the rest of humanity. America was then the cosmopolitan frontier in a double sense: it gathered into action the reflections and passions of several generations of European thinkers, and it also led the way toward the bold political, religious, and moral experiments in which the whole world has ever since participated. It is somewhat embarrassing to the historian of philosophy to point to John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison as cosmopolitan and distinguished expressions of the philosophy of the Enlightenment and then be compelled to admit that their writings are full of commonplaces and their minds full of confusions.

They had no systems of thought, and they consciously borrowed most of the scattered ideas which they put into action. They are poor material for the classroom, but they are, nevertheless, still living forces as well as classic symbols in American philosophy. Under these circumstances any failure to make the American Enlightenment appear as a "glorious revolution" in thought as well as in fact must certainly be a failure on the part of the historian, not of the Enlightenment itself.

Yet, in a sense the Enlightenment did fail miserably. Its ideas were soon repudiated or corrupted, its plans for the future were buried, and there followed on its heels a thorough and passionate reaction against its ideals and assumptions. It was a dramatic episode. Its great themes—natural rights, religious liberty, liberal religion, free thought, universal progress and enlightenment—how soon they had a hollow sound! How pervasive the disillusionment! A Virginia planter, about 1850, wrote that he considered democratic doctrines to have "caused more evil than the avowed opposers of popular rights could have effected if their power had equalled their wishes. . . . A government based on universal suffrage will be a government of and by the *worst* of the people."¹ A German liberal in Cincinnati, celebrating Jefferson in 1855, bewailed the utter collapse of freedom in American culture.² And in 1859 Lincoln wrote:

The principles of Jefferson are the definitions and axioms of free society and yet they are denied and evaded, with no small show of success. One dashinglly calls them "glittering generalities." Another bluntly calls them "self-evident lies" and others insidiously argue that they apply to "superior races." These expressions . . . are the vanguard, the miners and sappers of returning despotism.³

But this reaction fails to prove that the Enlightenment was not really enlightened. On the contrary, there is an increasing and nostalgic return among American philosophers to the memory of those great days, and no American thinker who is more than a professor can refrain from occasional thoughtful wishing for the utility and freedom which philosophy then enjoyed.

¹ Avery O. Craven, *Edmund Ruffin: Southerner* (New York, 1923), p. 44; similarly George Fitzhugh, in his *Sociology for the South* (Richmond, 1854) especially ch. xix.

² J. B. Stallo, *Reden, Abhandlungen und Briefe* (Cincinnati, 1893), p. 19.

³ Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings*, ed. by A. L. Bergh (Washington, D.C., 1903), I, xvi-xvii. [Memorial edition.]

BENEVOLENCE

THE Enlightenment began in complacency and ended in fear. During its early stages the faith in universal benevolence arose out of theological optimism. In America this trait became conspicuous with Cotton Mather, a pompous old theocrat, who conceived his professional duty to be “doing good.” He not only wrote *Essays to Do Good*, but went about from house to house “doing good” wherever he suspected the presence of vice. He became a conscientious busy-body. In Edwards’s conception of benevolence and “Christian love” the object is God and the beneficiary is one’s own soul. But more puritanical Puritans conceived benevolence in terms of doing good to others, imagining that God himself is interested not so much in his own glory as in the happiness of his creatures. Mather’s *Christian Philosopher* is one of the earliest American exhibitions of this conceit, based on the argument from fitness and design in nature. Butler’s *Analogy of Religion* and Paley’s *Natural Theology* became fashionable expositions of the argument from design. The belief in universal providence was increasingly acceptable to the prosperous “elect” of New England. Even Wollaston’s *Natural Religion* was widely read and recommended. Samuel Johnson made it the basis of his *Ethica*. With Wollaston as his model, he explained that God treats everything for what it really is, “according to truth,” and that He therefore treats man as a being created for happiness (eternal, of course).

We must . . . take into the account, the whole of our nature and duration, as being sensitive and rational, social and immortal creatures. It must therefore be the good and happiness of the whole human nature, and the whole moral system, in time, and to all eternity. Hence the good of the animal body, or the pleasure of sense, is but imaginary, and ceaseth to be good, and hath even the nature of evil, so far forth as it is inconsistent with the good and happiness of the soul: which is also the case of private good, so far forth as it is inconsistent with the good of the public; and temporal good, so far forth as it is inconsistent with that which is eternal. . . . And this our good and happiness in the whole, does necessarily coincide with, and even result from, the truth and nature of things, or things, affections and actions, considered as being what they really are; for thus to consider them,

is the same thing with considering them as being fit and tending, in the nature of them, to render our rational, social and immortal nature, in the whole ultimately happy.¹

Benjamin Franklin, who not only read Wollaston's book but also set type for it during his brief sojourn in London, was inclined to ridicule such complacency, and his *Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain* succeeded admirably in this. For example:

The late learned Author of *The Religion of Nature* . . . has given us a Rule or Scheme, whereby to discover which of our Actions ought to be esteem'd and denominat'd *good*, and which *evil*: It is in short, this, "Every Action which is done according to *Truth*, is good; and every Action contrary to *Truth*, is evil: To act according to *Truth* is to use and esteem every Thing as what it is, &c. Thus if A steals a Horse from B, and rides away upon him, he uses him not as what he is in *Truth*, viz. the Property of another, but as his own, which is contrary to *Truth*, and therefore *evil*." But, as this Gentleman himself says, (Sect. I. Prop. VI.) "In order to judge rightly what any Thing is, it must be consider'd, not only what it is in one Respect, but also what it may be in any other Respect; and the whole Description of the Thing ought to be taken in": So in this Case it ought to be consider'd, that A is naturally a *covetous* Being, feeling an Uneasiness in the want of B's Horse, which produces an Inclination for stealing him, stronger than his Fear of Punishment for so doing. This is *Truth* likewise, and A acts according to it when he steals the Horse. Besides, if it is prov'd to be a *Truth*, that A has not Power over his own Actions, it will be indisputable that he acts according to *Truth*, and impossible he should do otherwise. . . . 'Tis as just and necessary, and as much according to *Truth*, for B to dislike and punish the Theft of his Horse, as it is for A to steal him. . . .

How necessary a Thing in the Order and Design of the Universe . . . Pain or Uneasiness is, and how beautiful in its Place! Let us but suppose it just now banish'd from the World entirely, and consider the Consequence of it: All the Animal Creation would immediately stand stock still, exactly in the Posture they were in the Moment Uneasiness departed; not a Limb, not a Finger would henceforth move; we should all be reduc'd to the Condition of Statues, dull and unactive. . . .

As the *Desire* of being freed from Uneasiness is equal to the *Uneasiness*, and the *Pleasure* of satisfying that Desire equal to the *Desire*, the *Pleasure* thereby produc'd must necessarily be equal to the *Uneasiness* or *Pain* which produces it. . . .

¹ Johnson, *Works*, ed. by Schneider, II, 448.

From these Propositions it is observ'd,

1. *That every Creature hath as much Pleasure as Pain.*
2. *That Life is not preferable to Insensibility; for Pleasure and Pain destroy one another: That Being which has ten Degrees of Pain subtracted from ten of Pleasure, has nothing remaining, and is upon an equality with that Being which is insensible of both.*
3. *As the first Part proves that all Things must be equally us'd by the Creator because equally esteem'd; so this second part demonstrates that they are equally esteem'd because equally us'd.*
4. *Since every Action is the Effect of Self-Uneasiness, the Distinction of Virtue and Vice is excluded; and Prop. VIII. in Sect. I again demonstrated.*
5. *No State of Life can be happier than the present, because Pleasure and Pain are inseparable.*

Thus both Parts of this Argument agree with and confirm one another, and the Demonstration is reciprocal.

I am sensible that the Doctrine here advanc'd, if it were to be publish'd, would meet with but an indifferent Reception. Mankind naturally and generally love to be flatter'd: Whatever soothes our Pride, and tends to exalt our Species above the rest of the Creation, we are pleas'd with and easily believe, when ungrateful Truths shall be with the utmost Indignation rejected. "What! bring ourselves down to an Equality with the Beasts of the Field! with the *meanest* part of the Creation! 'Tis insufferable!" But, (to use a Piece of *Common Sense*) our *Geese* are but *Geese* tho' we may think 'em *Swans*; and Truth will be Truth tho' it sometimes prove mortifying and distasteful.²

Benjamin Franklin, when a youth, also ridiculed Cotton Mather. Under the pen name Mrs. Silence Dogood he began to attack the Harvard students, their wealthy parents, their pretentious professors, the fashionable clergy, and Mather personally, all in the name of "essays to do good." After his arrival in Philadelphia, Franklin continued his ridicule by the publication of a series of "Busybody Papers." Years later he wrote to Cotton Mather's son, Samuel, that his father's *Essays to Do Good* "gave me such a turn of thinking, as to have an influence on my conduct through life; for I have always set a greater value on the character of a doer of good, than on any other reputation and if I have been, as you seem to think, a useful citizen, the public

² Anderson and Fisch, eds., *Philosophy in America*, pp. 133-43.

owes the advantage of it to that book.”³ It is possible that Samuel Mather, like more recent readers, failed to see the joke in this letter.

These personal incidents illustrate a general trend: theological complacency, which generated “natural religion” in England and New England, soon had to face a more critical and often a satirical “natural religion,” which could not readily be reconciled with Christianity. The theory of benevolence became increasingly secularized, until natural religion meant simply humanitarian ethics. The characters in Hume’s *Dialogues on Natural Religion* could all have been found in America, and young Franklin was a good Philo, the skeptic. Franklin was a homespun and picturesque, but impressive, embodiment of secularized humanitarianism, a man who devoted himself wholeheartedly and effectively to public service and to useful projects. His “art of virtue” and *Poor Richard*, which are usually interpreted as the cult of thrift and capitalist ethics, were to his mind “essays to do good.” What makes Franklin a truly revolutionary figure in America is the thoroughgoing secularization of his mind and morals. He retained much of the Yankee complacency and acquired some of the Quaker variety in addition. He was complacent about the economic value of Puritan virtues. But he removed the veneer of holiness from them completely and put them on a plain utilitarian footing. The reader of *Poor Richard’s Almanac* would never suspect that the common sense and proverbial wisdom embodied in it was an achievement of intellectual struggle and laborious liberation. It all seems so commonplace and naïve. But the reader of his *Autobiography* and, even better, of his early pieces on deism can see how much enlightenment, sophistication, and critical honesty went into his discovery of common sense amid so much theological pomp and circumstance.

We sometimes disputed, and very fond we were of argument . . . which disputatious turn is apt to become a very bad habit . . . besides souring and spoiling conversation, it is productive of disgusts, and perhaps enmities, with those who may have occasion of friendship. I had caught this by reading my father’s books of dispute on religion. Persons of good sense, I have since observed, seldom fall into it, except lawyers, university men, and generally men of all sort, who have been bred at Edinburgh.

I grew convinced that truth, sincerity, and integrity . . . were of the utmost importance to the felicity of life.⁴

³ Anderson and Fisch, eds., *Philosophy in America*, p. 125.

⁴ Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*.

Thus, Franklin made explicit and complete a philosophical change that was gradually coming over the Puritans; more or less consciously they began to understand that the so-called "Puritan ethic" had a utilitarian basis as well as a theological expression. The New Englanders were forced to be Puritans because of their desire to build a New England, not, as is commonly supposed, because of their Calvinism. The direct and principle cause of the "agonized conscience" or sense of sin, supposedly consequent on the Calvinistic doctrine of depravity and of predestination, is to be found in the exacting demands of pioneer life. The clergy were careful that God should command whatever needed doing and prohibit whatever proved an obstacle.

Benjamin Franklin made the attempt to maintain the Puritan virtues in all their rigor, but to abandon entirely their theological sanctions. He placed the frontier morality on a utilitarian footing and gave it empirical sanctions. In this he was eminently successful. Franklin put the whole matter in a few words: "Revelation had indeed no weight with me, as such; but I entertained an opinion, that, though certain actions might not be bad, *because* they were forbidden by it, or good, *because* it commanded them; yet probably these actions might be forbidden *because* they were bad for us, or commanded *because* they were beneficial to us, in their own natures, all the circumstances of things considered."⁵ All that remained to be said was simply what Franklin did say over again: If you want to achieve anything, these are the necessary means: Temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, etc. And if one were to ask for proof, Franklin could point to his own experience and to the colonies themselves as evidence.

Philosophers are offended by the simplicity, almost simpleness, of this philosophy. In his preoccupation with instrumental values, Franklin is typical of what Europeans call "Americanism." Final values, being taken for granted, seldom become consciously defined and discussed, for in America (and elsewhere too for that matter) ends are adopted early and easily, much as religions are adopted by children; they are taken for granted as part of the intellectual environment, and there seldom arises an occasion for criticizing them seriously. Franklin was not interested in establishing his puritanic discipline as an end in itself. He assumed that people have ends, that they want to be "free

⁵ *Ibid.*

and easy," and that they understand wealth as merely the necessary means for enjoying the real ends of leisure society. "Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise." Health, wealth, and wisdom—this combination is not a bad summary of the natural goods of human life. But none of them occurs in Franklin's table of virtues, which is concerned exclusively with the "early to bed and early to rise" side of life.

In other words, Puritan virtues, inasmuch as they are not a philosophy of human ideals, were neither a substitute for the Aristotelian ethics nor a glorification of bourgeois commercialism. If Puritan morality substitutes for anything it is for the traditional "Christian" virtues, for they, too, constitute a philosophy of the discipline of life. The Christian life is traditionally portrayed as one of humility, charity, penitence, poverty, self-denial, and a forgiving spirit. The Puritan virtues, in spite of the fact that they were sanctioned by a Christian theology, were not traditionally Christian. This divorce from the Christian moral tradition, which Franklin made explicit in his philosophy, is at the heart of the contrast between the Yankee and the Christian. It is also at the heart of the American Enlightenment in general. Had the American Enlightenment followed Franklin into the pursuit of practical benevolence and secular humanitarianism it would have created what Europe expected of it. But it followed the more conventional pattern, engaging in the sentimental cult of benevolence and creating a "liberal religion."⁶ Meanwhile Franklin's "virtues," divorced from his benevolence, which led him to conceive them as means toward a "free and easy" life, hardened into the stuff of unbridled competition and sordid business.

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THE THEORY OF FREEDOM

THE secular triumph of the English Whigs in 1688 was the continuation and culmination of the Puritan rebellion, and the political philosophy of John Locke embodied in secularized form most of the practical aims of the dissenters—constitutional rights,

⁶ See below, pp. 59-67.

toleration, and security. There was a similar development in New England, a secularization of Puritanism into the theory of freedom. But the clergy failed to take the lead in this transition, for the Puritan theocrats were afraid of secular trends, and a few of them revived the old Calvinist doctrine of resistance to tyrants. One of the most striking and amusing illustrations of this is the famous "rebellion" sermon by President John Witherspoon to the Princeton students, May 17, 1776, in which he argued that the sovereign will of God was arousing the "disorderly passions" of the colonists against their oppressors. "The wrath of man in its most tempestuous rage, fulfills his will, and finally promotes the good of his chosen."¹ But even Witherspoon, after he has expounded his orthodox theory of God's use of the passions of men, devotes the last half of his sermon to a plain, secular appeal to the youth to fight bravely in defense of their rights and in "the cause of justice, of liberty, and of human nature." He attempts to unite the two doctrines by arguing on the basis of history that the loss of civil liberty always entails the loss of religious liberty, and that "if we yield up our temporal property, we at the same time deliver the conscience into bondage."²

There was precedent for such adaptations of Puritan theology to rebellion in the case of John Wise, who in vindicating the liberties of local congregations (1717) had turned from the ecclesiastical arguments and principles of Puritanism to the "law and light of nature" (specifically to Pufendorf) for a theory of "the immunities of man," and who had specified as "capital immunities belonging to man's nature" the liberty to follow one's own rational judgment, personal liberty and equality, and the opportunity to join with one's fellows in the exercise of popular sovereignty and social contract. John Wise had concluded quite pointedly that of all governments "possibly the fairest in the World is that which has a Regular Monarch, (in Distinction to what is Despotick) settled upon a Noble Democracy as its Basis."³ Some of the New England clergy now were emboldened to follow

¹ Sermon on *The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men*, p. 16. In the same paragraph Witherspoon comments with his customary theological wit: "There is often a discernible mixture of sovereignty and righteousness in providential dispensations."

² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³ Anderson and Fisch, eds., *Philosophy in America*, p. 39n.

the example of Jonathan Mayhew, who in his *Sermons to Young Men* (1763) declared that the love of liberty and country and the hatred of all tyranny and oppression are the very essence of true religion. But Mayhew and his fellow rebels made little attempt to derive this doctrine from Puritanism. In fact, he was not a minister in "good standing" and was described by Samuel Johnson, a Tory, as one of those "loose thinkers who can scarcely be accounted better Christians than the Turks."

It was simpler for prosperous and rebellious Yankees to discard their Puritan pretense of believing in entire dependence on God and in dutiful obedience to "magistrates" and to become out and out Whigs, if not republicans, in preparation for their amazingly secular declaration of independence. And so there spread rapidly throughout the colonies a secular conception of history and progress. One of the most popular and powerful expressions of this new point of view was Adam Ferguson's *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Edinburgh, 1767). Imagine the effect of the following sentences on a young mind steeped in Edwardean theology.

If the question be put, What the mind of man could perform, when left to itself, and without the aid of any foreign direction? We are to look for our answer in the history of mankind. . . . We speak of art as distinguished from nature; but art itself is natural to man. He is in some measure the artificer of his own frame, as well as of his fortune, and is destined, from the first age of his being, to invent and contrive. . . . If we are asked therefore, where the state of nature is to be found? We may answer, it is here . . . all situations are equally natural. . . . "Man is born in society," says Montesquieu, "and there he remains."⁴

Can you imagine the wrench this must have given the Puritan reader? In place of the Fall, the primitive animal. In place of regeneration, progress by degrees. In place of the divine plan of redemption in history, history is "the mind of man left to itself without the aid of any foreign direction." In place of the congregational covenant with God, man is naturally born into society and simply stays

⁴ Adam Ferguson, *An Essay*, pp. 5, 10, 12, 28. Ferguson was professor of pneumatics and moral philosophy at Edinburgh from 1765 to 1785. He was inspired directly and chiefly by Montesquieu. The seventh edition of his *Essay* was published in Boston, 1809; the eighth in Philadelphia, 1819. This is an index to its extreme popularity.

there. Society is here conceived of as both a human art and a state of nature. Ferguson's reader is being prepared to understand Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Harrington, Sidney, Locke, Montesquieu, and in general the classics of political theory, without benefit of clergy.

In spite of the popularity of Tom Paine's and Benjamin Franklin's appeals to prudence and "common sense," the American leaders took the trouble to reassert the classic principles, not merely of the modern classics, but of the ancient as well. The invasion of America by Roman law and Greek political philosophy, to which the Puritans had paid only lip service, was in itself a major event in the history of American thought and a major contribution of the Enlightenment. Without tracing them back to their classical origins, we can at least mention the chief philosophical ideas and issues that emerged in the attempts to justify the rebellion and in the long deliberation and debate over the Constitution:

a) *Social contract and the commonwealth.*—It was a simple matter to secularize the Puritan theory of the church covenant. This had been achieved in large measure by Locke and the British Whigs; all that was needed to adapt Locke's version of the social contract to American needs was to republicanize it with bits of the Roman classical theories of social contract, the public weal, and the law of nature. For a time it looked to colonial lawyers such as John Adams and Thomas Jefferson that the theoretical, as well as the practical, problems could be solved within the framework of the British Empire, much as the non-separatist Congregationalists had hoped to remain within the Church of England. Let the colonies be regarded as so many "realms" each with its own legislature, each with its own voluntary contract of allegiance to the common Crown, to the common law of the Empire, and to the statute laws its own legislature, then they, together with their "fellow free states," Great Britain, the Isle of Man, etc., would form an imperial federation of free states, analogous to the Congregationalist theory of free parishes federated into the Anglican Church under Christ the only and supreme head. To regard the colonies thus was possible because their charters were obviously contractual. Such states, though federated, would be free, since each enjoyed its own representative government and each, within the limits of the common

law, could vote on the nature and extent of its contribution to the common weal. The only agency needed to insure unity, in addition to the common bond of loyalty to the Crown, would be an independent, imperial supreme court, whose sole function it would be to judge the constitutionality of the acts of each legislature. This conception of a federal commonwealth of free (i.e., contractual) societies was being urged in the 1760's on both sides of the Atlantic by conciliatory statesmen who hoped that the economic strife between motherland and colonies could be subordinated to a scheme of constitutional reform,⁵ but, as the world knows, what proved to be an impractical scheme for an imperial commonwealth quickly became a working basis for colonial co-operation and then for a federal union of states. Everyone expected the federal legislature to be the chief center of trouble and factionalism, for the same reason that the British Parliament was the storm center of colonial policy. It was essential to liberty that this should be so. But a single executive and a supreme court might nevertheless keep the peace, on which the safety of all depended. This basic pattern of American political thought from about 1760 to about 1820 was not merely a practical expedient to win a war and establish a peace, it was the practical embodiment of a social philosophy. The "federal scheme," of which its founders were very proud indeed, was a double application of social contract theory—or, as Jefferson explained, it was a great republic built out of little ones. Each New England town, each ward, or "hundred," each state, was, like the great federation, regarded as a complete contractual society. Thomas Jefferson, especially, was concerned that these "little republics" be maintained in vigor, for, he argued, on the republican virtues and vigilance of these local societies depends the health of the great one.

I dare say that in time all these as well as their central government, like the planets revolving round their common sun, acting and acted upon according to their respective weights and distances, will produce that beautiful equilibrium on which our Constitution is founded, and which I believe it will exhibit to the world in a degree of perfection, unexampled but in the planetary system itself. The enlightened statesman, therefore, will endeavor to

⁵ In the colonies Benjamin Franklin and Samuel Johnson were early advocates of a federation before the question of independence arose, and Johnson, curiously enough, regarded even his plea for American bishops as an ecclesiastical version of this idea.

preserve the weight and influence of every part, as too much given to any member of it would destroy the general equilibrium.⁶

A republic, *res publica*, or commonwealth according to this contractual theory is a voluntary, legal union of citizens who promise each other to protect each other's natural rights and *to this end* appoint an "agent," "trustee," or government to establish civil rights or justice. It is not a mutual compact of subjection to a sovereign (Hobbes) or a recognition of the will of the majority as sovereign (Locke). It is a people exercising its freedom or sovereignty (if that concept *must* be retained) by asserting, respecting, enforcing the rights of each, not by surrendering those rights to a government. Thomas Paine, a virulent republican, proclaimed baldly the "sovereignty of the people"; whereas James Wilson worked out conscientiously the legal implications of such a theory of sovereignty. The Americans had not heard of Rousseau's doctrine of the sovereignty of the General Will when this theory was being formulated; they would have been suspicious of it if they had. For their doctrine was based rather on a subordination of both particular and general wills to respect for natural and civil rights, i.e., to the *res publica*. The *res publica* is related to the *res privata*, they maintained, as means to end; civil liberties, laws, powers, etc. are the instruments of securing the properties and promoting the happiness of the several citizens.

We hold these truths to be self evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with [*inherent and*] inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

These "self-evident truths" were believed to belong to a larger body of self-evident truth. It was one of the basic aims of the Enlightenment, formulated in Locke's *Essay*, to put the moral and political

⁶ Letter to Peregrine Fitzhugh, Feb. 23, 1798; Thomas Jefferson, *The Living Thoughts of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. by John Dewey (New York, 1940), pp. 51-52.

sciences on the foundation of demonstrative knowledge. Mathematics was the ideal pattern, and axioms of right were the obvious starting point for such a system. This general attempt to construct deductive systems in the sciences of mind and morals was a thoroughly rationalistic ideal; it often went by the French label of "ideology." There was no enthusiasm as yet for the Hutcheson-Hume theory of moral sense, and any attempt to regard these "principles of natural law" as merely principles of human nature was repudiated along with the belief in innate ideas. Though there was a constant appeal by pamphleteers like Samuel Adams and Thomas Paine to "common sense," and though Jefferson explained that when he referred to "self-evident truths" in the Declaration of Independence he meant nothing more than "the common sense of the subject," this faith in common sense was not yet a philosophical principle or a psychological discovery. Common sense, in this connection, meant common reason, and the science of any subject was based on the common sense or self-evident principles of *that subject*. To build on such "ideas" or first principles was to achieve certainty without metaphysics and to be empirical without being either utilitarian or sensationalist.¹

b) Natural rights and constitutional right.—By the pamphleteers and lawyers "the rights of man" were used as a convenient shibboleth. To them it mattered little whether they be "rights of Englishmen," "birth rights," "inherent rights," or "rights endowed by our Creator." Nor was it prudent to distinguish too clearly between natural rights

¹ Jefferson generalized these doctrines of method more than his co-laborers in "the science of government" did, with the possible exception of John Taylor of Caroline; John Adams, James Wilson, and James Madison developed systems of government, but they failed to make explicit their more general philosophical ideas; and Alexander Hamilton, who philosophized liberally, was inclined to pick up his principles from the classics when he happened to need them. Jefferson explained that in a formal or academic scheme of studies "in the Philosophical department, I should distinguish: (1) Ideology; (2) Ethics; (3) the Law of Nature and Nations; (4) Government; (5) Political Economy." Here "ideology" represents the general theory of ideas, and the other philosophical "sciences" represent particular bodies of truth. In ideology Jefferson recommended first of all De Tracy; in ethics, Lord Kames; in "the law of nature and nations" next to the ancient Stoics, Grotius or Vattel (secondarily Pufendorf and Burlamaqui); in government De Tracy's *Commentary* and Review of Montesquieu; and in political economy De Tracy's revision of the physiocrats (especially Smith and Say). See Adrienne Koch, *The Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson* (New York, 1943), pp. 60 ff. and 144 ff.

and civil rights. They were inclined to do what Pufendorf did, whom the French in 1789 followed—cut the Gordian knot by speaking grandiloquently of “the rights of man and citizen.” A vague, popular conception of natural rights, liberty, and popular sovereignty was current in the discussions centering about the colonial legislatures and state constitutions. Samuel Adams and James Otis in New England and George Mason, Patrick Henry, and George Wythe in Virginia were typical early popularizers of republican ideas, who set the problems for the next generation of more critical theorists.

But among the philosophically inclined statesmen the great debate in America was really a continuation of the great debate begun (for Englishmen, at least) in Cromwell’s army between the Presbyterians and the Independents. Locke had used the concept of natural rights loosely, since he could grind his axe better on distinctions none too sharp. Similarly, in America the basic theoretical issues were subordinated until after the War of Independence had been won, but then they came increasingly to the fore; it was impossible to evade them in making the Constitution and in dealing with revolutionary France. The basic philosophical issue that emerged out of this conflict may be stated as follows: Can right, or law, be defined as an institutional moral structure so that the general and permanent framework or constitution of a state may be said to be either just or unjust, rational or arbitrary? Or must the right be defined in terms of particular acts, which by their individual nature are just or arbitrary? In the case of England, this issue amounted in practice to the question of whether the sovereignty of parliament, that is, of the people’s legislators, is *ipso facto* right, or whether even the law of the land may be arbitrary and hence require the people to “reserve” particular rights or liberties against its own representatives and laws. John Adams, following James Harrington, conceived an institutional, structural, self-regulating order. His idea was so to construct the constitution that private interest and public interest would be identical, an idea that hypnotized social philosophy for more than a century. He would depersonalize law by distributing property or power in such a way that no particular interest could dominate. In other words, in a perfect republic the various classes and interests check and balance each other and thereby create a natural equilibrium that automatically does justice to each. By increasing the

number of proprietors, by rotation of office and secret ballot, by separation of the deliberative and "prerogative" bodies, and by other such constitutional devices his "equal" or equilibrating commonwealth would enable each citizen in seeking his own interest to promote that of the whole. Had we adopted his "scientific" frame of government, the depravity of human nature would have been so nicely checked and balanced by the institutions of government that we would have nothing to fear from the "insatiable and unlimited" "passions and desires of the majority of the representatives." Could he be here now, he might be much gratified by the magnificent spectacle of checking and balancing which even our imperfect Constitution affords.

At the other extreme was Thomas Jefferson, who because he feared the "tyranny of the legislatures" fought for the Bill of Rights as a "legal check" in the hands of the judiciary, which body, "if rendered independent and kept strictly to their own department merits great confidence for their learning and integrity."⁸

That these extremes were juxtaposed without being reconciled is evident from the argument of Alexander Hamilton, who in his eagerness to defend the Constitution appealed to both philosophies. He argued that bills of rights "have no application to constitutions professedly founded upon the power of the people, and executed by their immediate representatives and servants. Here, in strictness, the people surrender nothing."⁹ But on the following page he writes: "The Constitution is itself, in every rational sense, and to every useful purpose, a bill of rights."¹⁰

The rights outlined in the Bill of Rights appended under Jeffersonian pressure to our Constitutional "right" are clearly civil, not natural rights, and they resemble more closely those formulated in England in 1689 than the natural rights mentioned in the Declaration of Independence. However, the "law of the land" is still a combination of the two ideas of freedom, new "rights" being embodied from time to time in new amendments to the constitutional framework, and new

⁸ Letter to James Madison, March 15, 1789.

⁹ *The Federalist*, No. LXXXIV.

¹⁰ See the article by James Truslow Adams, "Rights without Duties," in *The Yale Review*, XXIV, 237-50; also Charles W. Hendel, Jr., "The Meaning of Obligation," in *Contemporary Idealism in America*, ed. by Clifford Barrett (New York, 1932), pp. 237-95.

"freedoms" being added to legal freedom. In practice the issue turned largely on who ultimately is the guardian of the people's liberties. The Federalists, under the leadership of John Marshall, erected the Supreme Court, which James Wilson had likened to an international tribunal for the advancement of natural law, into the ultimate voice of "the sovereignty of the people" and the guarantor of the reign of law. Tom Paine had given a popular expression to this ideal in *Common Sense*, which when it appeared in 1776 was decidedly more sensational than it was in the days of John Marshall.

But where, say some, is the king of America? I'll tell you, friend, he reigns above, and doth not make havoc of mankind like the Royal Brute of Great Britain. Yet that we may not appear to be defective even in earthly honors, let a day be solemnly set apart for proclaiming the charter; let it be brought forth placed on the divine law, the Word of God; let a crown be placed thereon, by which the world may know, that so far as we approve of monarchy, that in America THE LAW IS KING.¹¹

Jefferson, on the other hand, relied primarily on the civic virtues of the people and on periodic opportunities (theoretically, once in every generation) to revise their government as radically as they choose.

In government, as well as in every other business of life, it is by division and subdivision of duties alone, that all matters, great and small, can be managed to perfection. And the whole is cemented by giving to every citizen, personally, a part in the administration of the public affairs. . . .

Private fortunes are destroyed by public as well as by private extravagance. And this is the tendency of all human governments. A departure from principle in one instance becomes a precedent for a second; that second for a third; and so on, till the bulk of the society is reduced to be mere automatons of misery, to have no sensibilities left but for sinning and suffering. Then begins, indeed, the *bellum omnium in omnia*, which some philosophers observing to be so general in this world, have mistaken it for the natural, instead of the abusive state of man. And the fore horse of this frightful team is public debt. Taxation follows that, and in its train wretchedness and oppression.¹²

c) *Class society*.—Republican theory was both by tradition and on

¹¹ Thomas Paine, *Representative Selections*, ed. by Harry Hayden Clark (Cincinnati, 1944), pp. 32-33.

¹² Thomas Jefferson, *The Living Thoughts of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. by John Dewey, pp. 59-60. "Letter to Samuel Kercheval, July 12, 1816."

principle the antithesis of feudal theory. Feudalism, with its class privileges, was not to be permitted to arise in America; that was the first and foremost meaning of the dictum that all men are created equal. On the other hand, there was general agreement also that all societies are class societies. How reconcile political equality with economic inequality? That was the crux of the problem. That there had already arisen a colonial landed aristocracy, especially in the middle and southern colonies, was readily admitted; that a financial and industrial aristocracy was in the making was generally seen. That "every man ought to be supposed a knave and to have no other end, in all his actions, but private interest"¹³ was one of those self-evident truths on which rest the sciences of government and political economy. John Adams proclaimed it more formally when he wrote: "Harrington has shown that power always follows property. This I believe to be as infallible a maxim in politics, as that action and reaction are equal, is in mechanics."¹⁴ There will inevitably be factions, and the problem is to devise a mechanism whereby factions will govern each other without injury to "the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community."¹⁵ Looking back, we can readily see here a clear formulation of the problem of party government. But our Constitution and its fathers made no provision either in theory or in practice for parties; they debated everlastingly the relative merits of other systems of checks and balances and hoped to devise a form of government which by its very form might withstand those tendencies toward corruption which have been described and explained in all the classics. The chief theoretical argument against party government was: "Representation, limited to the alternative of enlisting under one of these parties, ceases to be an instrument of national self-government, and dwindles into an instrument of oppression."¹⁶ The chief practical reason why an enduring government could not be based on a party system, according to their theories, was that the factions and the class-interests which they expressed, though ever-present, would be ever-

¹³ Alexander Hamilton, *Works* (New York, 1904), II, 51.

¹⁴ Parrington, *The Colonial Mind, 1620-1800*, p. 318.

¹⁵ *Federalist Papers*, No. X (Madison).

¹⁶ John Taylor, *An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States* (Fredericksburg, Va., 1814), p. 196; quoted in E. Mudge, *The Social Philosophy of John Taylor of Caroline* (New York, 1939), p. 148.