JOHN JEBB AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT ORIGINS OF BRITISH RADICALISM

Anthony Page

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This book is dedicated to

my parents

Gwen and Dudley Page

Contents

Preface

I decided to write a study of John Jebb because his wide-ranging interests and activities would allow me to explore many aspects of eighteenth-century Britain. The result is, I hope, a book that brings to life Jebb's thought and activities while also providing a view of Britain during the period of the American Revolution.

This book was written in the context of post-modern Australia, where the ranks of those teaching and studying British history are dwindling. It is, in part, a contribution to remembering how our democratic culture has been formed through a long and interesting history of struggle and debate. At La Trobe University I was fortunate to be taught by some outstanding enthographic and revisionist historians. I have, I hope, learned their lessons about the 'otherness' of the past and the dangers of anachronistic and teleological thinking. I remain, however, influenced by the progressive teachers I had at Wendouree High Technical School in Ballarat. In particular, Doug Bradby brought Voltaire and the eighteenth century to life for a small group of rural and working class students – inspiring us to examine how fellow human beings grappled with moral, intellectual and political problems in a period of history that resonates beyond the boundaries of Europe.

This book is dedicated to my hard-working, kind and cheerful parents. I will always be thankful for their love and encouragement and the childhood they provided on our dairy farm. My interest in and ability to understand Jebb's mentality owes much to having a mum and dad who live according to the essential spirit of Christianity. Many thanks to the late John Hinchon, who did much to prepare me for university; Dr Damian Powell for his friendship and stimulating conversations on history and the human condition; and the network of friends that has developed out of my days as an undergraduate at La Trobe University.

My experience of being a postgraduate student was greatly enriched by having Professor Wilfrid Prest as a supervisor. He has provided a great deal of

support, advice, encouragement and the opportunity to meet and dine with some distinguished British historians. I count myself extremely fortunate to have met with much kindness, candour and generosity on the part of academics who study Rational Dissent – in particular, Dr Martin Fitzpatrick of the University of Wales and Emeritus Professor R.K. Webb of the University of Maryland. Harry Dickinson, Iain McCalman and Grayson Ditchfield have also provided thoughtful comments on the whole text and John Gascoigne on chapter 6. Bernard Bailyn is owed a debt of gratitude for inviting and paying for me to attend a two-week 'International Seminar on the History of the Atlantic World, 1500-1800' at Harvard University in August 2000. I was working as a secondary school teacher at the time and this experience did much to recharge my academic batteries. John Patterson was a wonderfully supportive principal – allowing me two weeks off in the middle of a busy term is only one example of his kindness. Along with George Dimovski and the other staff at Broadford Secondary College, he provided a memorably rewarding and entertaining experience of school teaching.

Many thanks to Professor Michael Bennett and the School of History and Classics, University of Tasmania for providing the opportunity to work and teach as an historian, and to live with my family in a beautiful part of the world – a dream fulfilled. Thanks also to the University of Adelaide for providing a scholarship to undertake the research that forms the basis of this book and the following institutions for their assistance: Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide; British Library; Dr Williams's Library; John Ryland's Library; Cambridge University Library; Public Record Office, London; Gloucestershire Record Office; Linen Hall Library, Belfast; National Library of Ireland; Massachusetts Historical Society; and St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, Wales.

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Thanks to Heather Staines and the people at GPG for publishing this book, especially Katie Chase who has been a very thorough and helpful copyeditor. Many hours have been spent entering her corrections and in the process further modifications and additions have been made. With much help, I have endeavoured to ensure the text is free of errors. Any that remain are my responsibility – but they are not there through want of trying to find and fix them!

My wonderful wife Carmen has carefully read through the entire text and has cheerfully lived with Dr Jebb being the subject of many conversations. While the bulk of this book was completed before we met, without her unflagging love, good humour and encouragement this text may never have seen the printer. Words cannot express how much I appreciate our partnership, and our little Katherine, who is toddling, babbling, exploring the world, and amazing and amusing her parents more and more each day.

A Note on Sources and Abbreviations

The primary text used in this study is *The Works: Theological, Medical, Political and Miscellaneous of John Jebb, MD. FRS., with a Life of the Author* (3 vols., John Disney ed., 1787). Volume I is divided into two parts with separate pagination. The first part (John Disney's 'Memoirs of the Life of the Author') is cited as: 'Life of Jebb'. The second part is simply cited as: Jebb I. The other two volumes are cited as: Jebb II and Jebb III.

There are five volumes of Jebb's interleaved Greek New Testament and a volume of notes for his Theological Lectures in Dr Williams' Library, London. The pages are not numbered, but most citations of the interleaved Testament are from the first few pages of each volume where Jebb tended to write general notes. These are cited as: DWL Jebb mss. I-VI.

JJ	John Jebb
AJ	Ann Jebb
BDMBR	J.O. Baylen and N.J. Grossman eds., *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals: volume: 1, 1770-1830* (Salem, New Hampshire, 1979).
DNB	*Dictionary of National Biography*
E&D	*Enlightenment and Dissent*
JHI	*Journal of the History of Ideas*

MP	Member of Parliament
SCI	The Society for Constitutional Information

Throughout the book London is place of publication, unless otherwise stated.

Where individual works are not cited in the bibliography, that work is to be found in the collected works by that author.

When multiple articles have been cited from an edited collection of essays, only a short title for the source book is given. Full details can be found where the source book is cited in the bibliography.

The punctuation and capitalisation in original sources has been retained. While printed and manuscript sources from the eighteenth century generally make heavy use of capital letters, the opposite is true of John Disney's edition of Jebb's *Works*.

Introduction

This is a study of Enlightenment ideas and their propagation by a man and woman at the forefront of the birth of modern British radicalism. The origins of modern democratic politics lay in the eighteenth century – but exactly where has been open to question. English republicanism was thought to have shot its bolt early, having flourished and failed in the seventeenth century. The origin of nineteenth-century campaigns for democratic reform, according to this view, lay in the inspirational influence of the French Revolution and the republican writings of Thomas Paine.[1] The Industrial Revolution, seen to have been Britain's contribution to the emergence of the modern world, was depicted as having occurred under a relatively unified and uninteresting Hanoverian political establishment. As a result, history courses tended to focus on either the dramatic tumults of the Tudor and Jacobean period or the world-conquering culture of nineteenth-century Britain. Recent research, however, has revealed the profound social, economic, political and intellectual legacy of eighteenth-century Britain. Indeed, Roy Porter has persuasively argued that Enlightenment Britain (rather than revolutionary France) ushered in the modern world.[2] As part of this reassessment, the nature and importance of political dissent has attracted much attention. Historians have demonstrated that modern British radicalism had strong indigenous roots that pre-date 1789 – the War of American Independence being highlighted as a particularly important formative period.[3] It

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[1] The classic statement of this view is E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963).

[2] Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the creation of the modern world* (2000).

[3] Stephen Conway, *The British Isles and the War of American Independence* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 203-38.

has also been shown that most radicals in this period and throughout the nineteenth century did not reject the political system outright, but rather championed their own versions of an 'ancient constitution' that they claimed had been corrupted.[4]

The traditional division between studies of political action and studies of political thought is being bridged. Those studying eighteenth-century political thought have become increasingly interested in the relationship between political philosophy expounded for a well-educated elite, and its popularisation for a less-educated though broadly literate public.[5] This study adds to our understanding of this process and illuminates the character of the British political radicalism that emerged in the three decades prior to the French Revolution.

While Dr John Jebb (1736-1786) is referred to in studies of the religious, educational and political controversies of his day, extended study of his prominent role in the formative period of British radicalism has been long overdue.[6] Jebb began his career as a clergyman and academic at Cambridge in the 1760s, and died as a doctor and leading figure among political reformers in London. Both friend and foe acknowledged his talents and influence. When the American John Adams arrived in London in 1785 he told Jebb that 'I have long wanted to Communicate with some of the enlightened Friends of Liberty here ... and I know of none who merit the Character better'.[7] This sense of Jebb's important role in the reform movement was echoed over two decades after his death by the conservative critic John Nichols, who wrote: 'No name is better known among the advocates for Parliamentary Reform, than that of Dr Jebb'. Nichols characterised him as 'much celebrated among the violent partisans for unbounded liberty, religious and political; and certainly a man of learning and talents, though they were both so much absorbed in controversy as to leave little among his writings of general use. ... He was an active, enterprising, sincere, good natured man, but of rather too ardent a temper'.[8]

Jebb was committed to reforming all aspects of eighteenth-century British religion, politics and society. At Cambridge he taught mathematics and

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[4] See, for example, the contributions to James Vernon ed., *Re-Reading the Constitution: new narratives in the political history on England's long nineteenth century* (Cambridge, 1996).

[5] See, for example, the works of H.T. Dickinson, James E. Bradley and Kathleen Wilson cited in the bibliography.

[6] The most substantial treatment until recently was Naomi Miller's entry on Jebb in J.O. Baylen and N.J. Grossman eds., *A Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals: volume 1, 1770-1830* (Salem, N. H., 1979). See also Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth Century Commonwealthman: studies in the transmission, development and circumstance of English liberal thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the war with the Thirteen Colonies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), pp. 370-73. There have been two recent doctoral dissertations: Kenneth Pearl, 'John Jebb, a British Radical in the Age of the American Revolution' (PhD thesis, City University of New York, 1998); Anthony Page, 'Enlightened Patriot: John Jebb and Dissent in England, 1760-85' (PhD thesis, University of Adelaide, 1999). The latter forms the basis of this book.

[7] John Adams to John Jebb, 21 August 1785, MHS Adams papers.

[8] John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* (1813), II, pp. 711, 571-72.

philosophy, and acted as university examiner on several occasions. Through critical study of the Bible he became a Socinian, and attracted the disapproval of university authorities when he proceeded to deliver lectures on the Greek New Testament. In the early 1770s Jebb became a leading figure in organising the Feathers Tavern petition, which requested that Parliament remove the requirement that Church of England clergy subscribe to the theology and liturgy articulated in the Thirty-Nine Articles. When it became evident that the efforts of the petitioning clergy were to no avail, Jebb turned his attention to educational reform, seeking to broaden the curriculum and introduce annual examinations for all students. Following the narrow failure of his educational proposals, Jebb became increasingly marginalised at Cambridge, a situation exacerbated by his open support for the American colonists. In 1776 he moved to London to undertake the study and practice of medicine. As the American War dragged on with no end in sight, Jebb became a leader in the Association movement that formed to demand parliamentary reform. He worked tirelessly for parliamentary reform in Britain and Ireland until he succumbed to persistent ill health and died in early 1786.

Jebb poured time, energy and ability into promoting the cause of 'liberty'. His uncompromising espousal of deeply held 'rational Christian' principles earned him implacable enemies and devoted friends. William Cole, a Cambridge Tory, described Jebb as a 'thin, spare, pale man, of good Parts, which he applies in a way much to the discredit of the University'. Upon Jebb's resignation from his livings in 1776, Cole observed: 'Thus does this indefatigable man's spirits waste themselves in plans for further Reformation in Religion, and in finding that not likely to succeed, in reforming the University ... I make no doubt but his head is turned: however that be, it is evident that he is a most turbulent, busy Spirit, and the Church is well rid of him.'[9] The ill-disposed radical David Williams claimed that King George III had sneered: '[Jebb] tore off his garments, harassed his friends with reveries, and sunk into the grave in poverty and vexation'.[10]

The praise of Jebb's friends, however, was boundless. John Cartwright, the author of numerous tracts calling for parliamentary reform, declared him the 'friend of my bosom and pattern of my conduct'.[11] According to Capel Lofft, as a preacher Jebb joined great learning with 'simplicity, clearness, peculiar power of persuasion; energy; the advantages of voice and manner; judgement, candour, sincerity, sensibility'. Committed to truth and public duty, Jebb was the 'tenderest and warmest of friends', 'amiable, and even pleasant, in familiar intercourse, to a degree of serene gaiety'. Thomas Brand Hollis remembered the 'feast of reason' he enjoyed in the company of 'this wonderful man'.[12] The poet Anna Seward reflected that 'never were the graces of conciliation, resulting

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[9] BL Cole mss. 5378:53.

[10] James Dybikowski, *On Burning Ground: an examination of the ideas, projects, and life of David Williams* (Oxford, 1993), p. 44n.

[11] F.D. Cartwright ed., *The Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright* (1826), p. 166.

[12] 'Life of Jebb', pp. 240, 243-44, 235.

from warm and ingenious benevolence, more engagingly blended with superior talents, and high-strung virtues, than in that extraordinary man'.[13]

Yet Brand Hollis also reveals why Jebb's opponents found him so irritating: 'Happiness in the present world, he could never have met with; it was not intended by its maker as the mansion of perfection, and nothing that fell short of perfection would have satisfied our honoured friend.'[14] During the political reform agitation of the early 1780s Christopher Wyvill, head of the Yorkshire Association, found the leader of the London radicals to be an impractical idealist. Mutual esteem, however, and 'the incomparable suavity of temper in Dr Jebb' preserved their friendship.[15] Jebb confessed that he would 'grow warm' when addressing fundamental issues of principle – and there was little, if anything, that was not a matter of principle. When offering advice to a former student he wrote: 'Explore with the utmost exertion of your faculties political truth, and having found it, avow it with firmness and perseverance. In the end it must succeed, and your character be stamped with honour. Temporising expedients are always injurious, when contrary to natural right and natural feelings.'[16] While John Cartwright found it an offensive characterisation of his friend, the following seems a fairly accurate assessment:

> Though Dr Jebb's public conduct was in the highest degree upright and consistent, yet he had too much warmth of temper and too little worldly wisdom, to be proposed a model in this respect. His character as a party man was injurious to him professionally, as appeared in the failure of his attempt to obtain the place of an hospital physician, yet he had many warm friends who were ready to serve him, and his practice increased as long as his health permitted him to follow it regularly.[17]

Cartwright responded to this with the following account, which in its own way provides an insight into Jebb's character and the way in which he inspired his students and friends with a radical combination of Christianity and Enlightenment values:

> If [John Jebb's] feelings were acute, and his temperament warm, they served the ends for which the Deity has given us feeling and sympathy, to stimulate to virtuous action; for if any man was a conscientious imitator of the mildness of Jesus, it was my departed friend. Often, indeed, have I seen him agitated ... by the selfish and the criminally ambitious; often have I known him misrepresented and traduced with

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[13] Anna Seward, *The Letters of Anna Seward* (6 vols., Edinburgh, 1811), I, p. 149.

[14] 'Life of Jebb', pp. 237.

[15] Christopher Wyvill, *Political Papers* (York, 1794), IV, p. 521n.

[16] John Jebb [hereafter 'JJ'] to Archibald Hamilton Rowan, 5 March 1785, in *The Autobiography of Archibald Hamilton Rowan* (Dublin, 1840), 127.

[17] John Aikin ed., *General biography: or Lives, critical and historical, of the most eminent persons of all ages countries conditions and professions* (volume 5, 1804), cited in *Life of Cartwright*, pp. 165-66.

> acrimony; but never did I know him retort, or on such occasions to speak or act otherwise than as the dictates of Christian charity and political wisdom (according to my conceptions of them) dictated to him.[18]

To this we might add the impression of the perceptive young Abigail Adams, daughter of the first American minister to St James's Palace. John Adams enjoyed his conversations with Jebb on politics, and Abigail wrote to her brother: 'the Dr is said to be a very Wise and sensible Man, that he is an agreeable one, I can assure you'.[19] Intelligent and friendly, yet earnest, priggish and unbendingly committed to a particular set of Enlightenment ideals would seem to be a fair summary of Jebb's character.

Jebb did not act alone. At the end of December 1764 he married Ann Torkington (1735-1812), the daughter of a clergyman in Huntingdonshire. We are fortunate that George Meadley published a short *Memoir* of Ann Jebb in which she is depicted as the radical ideal of a wife who was virtuous and politically aware, without behaving in a 'masculine' way. At the Jebb's regular tea parties she actively engaged in religious and political discussion with visitors. In the absence of children, Ann maintained as much interest in politics as her husband, discussed all issues with him and wrote in support of their common causes. Fortunately at least thirty-eight of her letters to the newspapers on clerical subscription (penned under the pseudonym 'Priscilla') have been preserved in John Disney's collection of newspaper clippings.[20] Ann's letters to the newspapers, along with the two tracts she wrote in support of the French Revolution, allow this study of Jebb to become, in part, a study of a partnership. Yet a focus on John is made necessary by the paucity of the remaining sources, which preclude any deep study of Ann's opinions in a manner that would distinguish her from her husband. By all accounts husband and wife were one in their sentiments and ideas. When John was seriously ill in 1782, Theophilus Lindsey observed that 'Mrs Jebb would have been of all women to be pitied if we had lost him – for she lives by him'.[21] Following her husband's death in 1786 Ann felt, according to her friend and biographer George Meadley, that she had lost 'not merely a husband, a partner in a common interest; but her guardian and protector, her guide, philosopher, and friend'.[22]

An understanding of John Jebb's thought and activities helps to illuminate the nature of political radicalism in the first half of George III's reign. While researching his life I found myself asking the question: why did Jebb act in a manner that was so detrimental to his material prosperity? Parental advice

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[18] John Cartwright cited in F.D. Cartwright ed., *The Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright* (2 vols., 1826), I, p. 166.

[19] *Adams Family Correspondence* (6 vols., L.H. Butterfield ed., Cambridge, Mass., 1963-93), VI, p. 302.

[20] John Disney, 'A Collection of Letters and Essays on the subject of Religious Liberty published in the Newspapers 1771-74', DWL mss. 87.1-6.

[21] Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur, 26 December 1782, JRL Lindsey-Tayleur correspondence.

[22] G.W. Meadley, *Memoir of Mrs Jebb* (1812), p. 24.

and self-interest dictated that he should play the game of patronage politics, and had he been more flexible in his political and religious opinions Jebb could have risen within the Church. Temperament no doubt partly explains his conduct. Some others (most notably William Paley) were exposed to similar influences and took more moderate paths in their thought and conduct. Owing to the potent combination of his religious, philosophical and political convictions, however, Jebb was not prepared to bite his tongue. Instead, he became an inspirational and leading figure among those who sought to reform the Church, Cambridge University and the political system. As a result, a study of his thought and actions brings into sharp relief some of the key aspects of advanced radicalism in the decades prior to the French Revolution.

The nature of radicalism in the eighteenth century has been hotly debated in recent decades. Historians traditionally emphasised the link between radicalism and urbanisation, arguing that political dissent was informed by a developing liberal conception of the autonomous individual.[23] Revisionist historians, however, have demonstrated the pervasive influence of classical republicanism, with its notions of virtue and landed independence underpinning active participatory citizenship. This conservative and backward-looking 'radicalism', they argue, criticised the commercial and state building policies of eighteenth-century governments.[24] To this debate over the relative importance of liberalism and republicanism has been added a recent emphasis on the role of religion. At the end of the 1970s a colloquium of historians agreed that religion was of central importance in the social and political life of eighteenth-century Britain. Yet as John Cannon pointed out, having paid lip service to the importance of religion they largely neglected it in their discussions of politics during the Whig Ascendancy.[25] The years since have witnessed an explosion of research on the period, and the role of religion has received ample attention. In his seminal *English Society 1688-1832* (and a string of subsequent books and articles) Jonathan Clark has argued not only that religious concerns were predominant and pervasive, but that there was broad support for, and deference toward, a 'confessional state' composed of monarchy, aristocracy and the

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[23] For contemporary statements of this view see: Isaac Kramnick, 'Religion and Radicalism: English political theory in the age of revolutions', *Political Theory,* 5 (1977), pp. 505-34; and *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism: political ideology in late eighteenth-century England and America* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990); Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992).

[24] The foremost exponent of this view in relation to the British context is J.G.A. Pocock, who authored or edited the following: 'Machiavelli, Harrington, and English Political Ideologies in the Eighteenth Century', *William and Mary Quarterly,* 22 (1965), pp. 549-83; *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine political thought and the Atlantic republican tradition* (Princeton, N.J., 1975); '*The Machiavellian Moment* Revisited: a study in history and ideology', *Journal of Modern History,* 53 (1981), pp. 49-72; *Virtue, Commerce and History: essays on political thought and history, chiefly in the eighteenth century* (Cambridge, 1985); ed., *The Varieties of British Political Thought 1500-1800* (Cambridge, 1993); see also Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967).

[25] John Cannon ed., *The Whig Ascendancy* (1981), pp. 192-95.

Anglican Church.[26] While the important contribution of Rational Dissent to political radicalism has long been recognised, Clark has argued that Anglo-American radicalism was fundamentally rooted in theological dissent from the Anglican confessional state.[27]

In answering Edmund Burke's denigration of the British reformers, Benjamin Bousfield held Jebb up as an example of 'the most disinterested patriot, the most benevolent philosopher, and the most conscientious theologian'.[28] Selectively quoted, Jebb can (and has) been used to support an explanation of political dissent as rooted in liberalism, republicanism or heterodox theology. Such reductionism, however, should be avoided when studying political activists and their thought, and in what follows I endeavour to sketch all aspects of the patriot, philosopher and theologian. Jebb's radicalism needs to be understood in the context of the Enlightenment as it developed in England. The Enlightenment was a trans-national intellectual movement that manifested in different ways in different religious and political contexts. But it can be characterised as reflecting a common attitude of mind, or spirit, that championed reason, scepticism, cosmopolitanism, freedom of expression and the possibility of progress toward greater human happiness.[29] While Enlightenment thinkers differed as to what they regarded as true or important, they shared a common faith that through reason and criticism some things could be shown to be false. This attitude played a role in bringing about the French Revolution and is central to modernity.[30]

John Pocock has characterised England as experiencing a dominant conservative Enlightenment. An angry party of *philosophes* opposed to the state did not develop because the British constitution allowed a degree of political participation and religious toleration. English 'founding fathers' of the Enlightenment such as the scientist Isaac Newton and philosopher John Locke were harnessed as supporters of the established order. Defenders of Church and State used 'enlightened values' such as 'sceptical' philosophy, sound theology, polite letters, science and economic progress to defend civilisation against

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[26] For J.C.D. Clark's view of the eighteenth century see: 'Eighteenth-Century Social History', *The Historical Journal,* 27 (1984), pp. 773-88; *English Society, 1688-1832* (Cambridge, 1985); *Revolution and Rebellion* (Cambridge, 1986); 'On Hitting the Buffers: the historiography of England's ancien regime. A response', *Past and Present,* 117 (1987), pp. 195-207; 'England's Ancien Regime as a Confessional State', *Albion,* 21 (1989), pp. 450-74; *The Language of Liberty 1660-1832: political discourse and social dynamics in the Anglo-American world* (Cambridge, 1994).

[27] Anthony Lincoln, *Some Political and Social Ideas of English Dissent 1763-1800* (Cambridge, 1938); Clark, *English Society*, chapter 5.

[28] Benjamin Bousfield, *Observations on the Right Hon. Edmund Burke's Pamphlet, On the subject of the French Revolution* (Dublin, 1791), in G. Claeys, *Political Writings of the 1790s* (8 vols., 1995), II, p. 96.

[29] See, for example, the introductory essay and excellent selection of writings in Isaac Kramnick, *The Portable Enlightenment Reader* (Harmondsworth, 1995).

[30] Linda Kirk, 'The Matter of Enlightenment', *The Historical Journal*, 43 (2000), pp. 1129-43.

superstition and sectarian enthusiasm.[31] In the words of another influential historian, 'Enlightenment goals – like criticism, sensibility or faith in progress – throve in England *within* piety'.[32]

There were those, however, who considered themselves enlightened and yet dissented from the conservative Anglican Enlightenment. They were members of the Protestant sects (predominantly the Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Baptists) that began with a refusal to conform to the teachings and episcopal hierarchy of the Church of England following the Act of Uniformity in 1662.[33] Those who, in the course of the eighteenth-century, embraced reason and 'natural religion' as being in harmony with (and the means to accurately understand) the Christian revelation have been labelled 'Rational Dissenters'. Narrowly defined, Rational Dissent is often equated with Unitarianism – which involved a rejection of the theology of original sin and the Trinity. A variety of theological views could be found within the 'Unitarian' traditions. The broad polarities were those of the Arians, who thought that Jesus was not God incarnate, but rather a separate and distinct entity – a son of God who had nevertheless existed in heaven prior to his earthly manifestation; and the Socinians, who rejected the doctrine of atonement, claiming that Jesus was a divinely ordained prophet, sent by God to be the 'saviour' of mankind through precept and example. The late eighteenth-century variant of Socinianism (which Jebb came to espouse) emphasised the simple humanity of Jesus – and it was with this view that Unitarianism was increasingly associated. In a recent important study of *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in eighteenth-century Britain* it has been suggested that Rational Dissent needs to be seen as part of a broader commitment to rational religion that included many conservative Dissenters and a wide range of Anglicans. In this view, 'rational religion' encompassed a variety of positions between the extremes of High-Church Anglicanism, orthodox or evangelical Dissent and deism.[34] In light of this, the Rational Dissenters were the advanced elements of those who sought to espouse a Christianity shaped by reason through a process of candid scrutiny and debate. When the ex-Anglican priest Theophilus Lindsey founded the Essex Street Unitarian Church in 1774, it became central to the networks of Rational Dissent and attracted a small number of Anglican dissidents such as Jebb.

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[31] J.G.A. Pocock, 'Conservative Enlightenment and Democratic Revolutions: the American and French cases in British perspective', *Government and Opposition*, 24 (1989), pp. 81-105; 'History and Sovereignty: the historiographical response to Europeanization in two British Cultures', *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), pp. 358-89.

[32] Roy Porter, 'The Enlightenment in England', in Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich eds., *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 6. 'The religious strength of England's Enlightenment' is demonstrated in B.W. Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England: theological debate from Locke to Burke* (Oxford, 1998), p. 10.

[33] Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: from the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1978).

[34] Knud Haakonssen, 'Enlightened Dissent: an introduction', in *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in eighteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 5. This view is presented in RK Webb's essay 'The Emergence of Rational Dissent' in the same volume, pp. 12-41.

The Rational Dissenters were a small proportion of English society, who felt frustrated by the contrasting rapid spread of evangelical Methodism. Their influence, however, greatly outweighed their numerical strength. Rational Dissent included within its ranks many well-connected clergymen, doctors, lawyers, businessmen and even politicians, along with influential writers on science, philosophy, religion and politics. Their prominent role in voicing support for the American Revolution has long been recognised.[35] Rational Dissent was situated in complex ways between the conservative English Enlightenment and the more radical trends on the Continent. As Haakonssen has written, Rational Dissent's 'very success in integrating with the established order ... led to deep ambiguities. On the one hand, it muted democratic, let alone more egalitarian, tendencies and made sure that Rational Dissent on the whole was part of the conservative Enlightenment .... On the other hand, the fact that the legal and political basis for the Rational Dissenters' success was so tenuous tended in the opposite direction, namely toward a search for radical reform'.[36]

Jebb is representative of the link between Rational Dissent and political radicalism in the late eighteenth-century. Thus, his example lends support to Jonathan Clark's emphasis on the link between theology and politics. A close examination of Jebb reveals, however, that there was more to Rational Dissent than heterodox theology. Theology was a key point of confrontation between Jebb and the established order – he was very frustrated with what he saw as a national Church preaching and teaching falsehood. But his radicalism was not simply the result of hot-headed Socinianism. Jebb opposed the established order with a comprehensive and visionary alternative world-view (and thus could be seen to have 'harassed his friends with reveries'). Along with a radical reading of the 'English Constitution', his theology was embedded within an optimistic philosophical system. There were those who were sceptical of orthodox theology, but either lived with or supported the status quo. The relentless enthusiasm and conviction with which Jebb pursued his campaigns against the established constitution in Church and State can be understood only in light of the combined effect of his theological, political and philosophical convictions. It was a combination that he shared in large part with that more famous scourge of Church and State, Joseph Priestley. While theology was undoubtedly a prime motive behind much political dissent, the case of Jebb suggests that we need to look more closely at the way Rational Dissenters espoused, in various forms, an Enlightenment faith in the unity of religion and reason and the inevitability of moral and material progress.

While Jebb's political and religious views have been sketched in previous studies, they have not been adequately set within the context of his philosophical convictions. In providing a comprehensive study of his 'rational dissent', I want to highlight the way Jebb's religious and political thought were profoundly influenced by a philosophical disposition that owed much to David Hartley's seminal *Observations on Man* (1749). Hartley had sought to reconcile

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[35] Colin Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1977).
[36] Haakonssen, 'Enlightened Dissent: an introduction', in *Enlightenment and Religion*, p. 9.

religion and science by demonstrating that in the mechanism of the human mind was revealed the hand of Providence. To a student schooled in Newtonian Latitudinarianism, Hartley offered a heady blend of unorthodox Christian idealism (including the doctrine of universal salvation) founded on a determinist psychology. This combination of providential optimism with a utilitarian moral philosophy underpinned Jebb's critique of all aspects of eighteenth-century politics and society. It allowed him to employ both utilitarian and natural rights arguments without concern for coherence or consistency; and it gave him the confidence to dismiss prudent concerns as to the prospects for, or consequences of radical reform. Jebb thought the morally autonomous individual had a right and duty to seek and act upon truth – and truth, he believed, was unified and entirely within the reach of reason and scientific scrutiny. This led Jebb to champion free enquiry and argue that Christianity should run with the breeze of enlightenment, or else risk being dashed upon rocks by a rising tide of scepticism. It was this optimistic faith in reason, progress and individual autonomy that led him to be among the earliest advocates for universal manhood suffrage. The dynamic interplay of his ideological development and practical political experience led Jebb to become, in Paul Langford's words, a 'rebel against his church and a reformer at odds with his society'.[37]

Throughout this book I have freely used the terms 'radical' and 'conservative'. They need to be justified and qualified. As James Sack has observed, there is 'difficulty in attempting any type of meaningful historical discourse without using the language of modern politics'.[38] With this in mind I have used these terms to indicate various positions, attitudes and temperaments relative to the status quo.[39] Jebb's reformist activism provoked opposition from various defenders of Church and State and it might be objected that they are too easily branded with the label 'conservative'. The strength, appeal and variety of orthodox Anglicanism in the eighteenth century has been highlighted by a growing body of scholarship.[40] However, while the various intellectual nuances of radical thought are teased out at length, it is not within the scope of this study to do the same for Jebb's opponents. 'Conservative' is at times used as shorthand to describe figures whose opinions ranged from extreme High Church to moderate support for the established religious and political order. This is in line with Samuel Johnson's eighteenth-century definition of 'conservative' as 'having the power of opposing diminution or injury'. This book is primarily concerned with showing how Jebb's thoughts and actions were relatively radical for the times in which he lived and the ways he contributed to developing traditions out of which nineteenth-century radicalism emerged.

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[37] Paul Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 1689-1798* (Oxford, 1991), p. 1.

[38] James J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative: reaction and orthodoxy in Britain, 1760-1832* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 4.

[39] For similar use of these terms see H.T. Dickinson, *The Politics of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York, 1994).

[40] For an overview see P.B. Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship, 1760-1857* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 1-32.

1

A Latitudinarian Education

John Jebb was schooled in the principles of liberal Latitudinarianism. Whig Latitudinarianism emerged out of late seventeenth-century disputes over the location of authority in religion. During the sixteenth century the Church of England sought to define itself as a Protestant church that preserved many Catholic elements in its structure and practice. During the reign of Elizabeth I this compromise was defined in the Thirty-Nine Articles. The English Civil War saw the breakdown of this compromise, with High Churchmen supporting the King and Puritans lining up behind Parliament. While High Churchmen were triumphant with the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, others promoted broad-church notions as a means of avoiding further religious conflict. They argued that a wide latitude of interpretation of the Thirty-Nine Articles should be tolerated. The Latitudinarians adopted the philosophy of John Locke and the science of Newton, and argued that the Anglican Church should occupy a middle ground between the extremes of sectarian enthusiasm and the authoritarian notions of the High Church. Against the enthusiasts they claimed that God had granted humanity reason in order to better understand revelation. They also used the authority of reason to dismiss some of the 'mysteries' grafted onto Christianity by Catholic tradition. They saw the primary role of the Anglican Church as the moral training and policing of society in accordance with the designs of a reasonable God.[1] Advanced Latitudinarians like Benjamin Hoadly (1676-1761) went so far as to argue for an Erastian view of the Church

[1] David A. Pailin, 'Rational Religion in England from Herbert of Cherbury to William Paley', in Sheridan Gilly and W.J. Sheils eds., *A History of Religion in Britain: practice and belief from pre-Roman times to the present* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 210-20; John Spurr, '"Rational Religion" in Restoration England', *JHI*, 49 (1988), pp. 563-85; R.K. Webb, 'The Emergence of Rational Dissent', in Haakonssen, *Enlightenment and Religion*, pp. 12-41.

and government based on contract.[2] In his influential study of the eighteenth-century Church, Norman Sykes wrote of 'the typical Latitudinarian churchmanship dominant in the century'.[3] This view has been somewhat qualified by revisionist historians: Tory and High Church notions survived and evolved throughout the century, and Latitudinarianism was by no means an all-encompassing, uniform and unchanging category.[4] Yet if there was a time when Latitudinarianism was dominant in the Church, it was during the years of Whig supremacy between 1740 and 1760; and if there was a place, it was Cambridge University, to which John Jebb was sent in 1754.[5]

FAMILY BACKGROUND AND EARLY EDUCATION

John Jebb was born in London on 16 February 1736, and attended several schools in England and Ireland. This suggests contact with scattered family members who were making their way in trade and the professions.[6] Jebb's grandfather Samuel Jebb (1670-1743) was a maltster in Woodborough near Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, where his family had lived for some generations. He had nine children with his wife Elizabeth (who hailed from Yorkshire): six sons and three daughters. The most notable of these was the second son Samuel Jebb M.D. (1694-1772) who entered Cambridge as a sizar and became a Non-juror.[7] Unable to take orders he became librarian to Jeremy Collier (1650-1726), the outspoken critic of political and moral corruption. Samuel Jebb became a noted scholar (publishing the first modern edition of Roger Bacon's *Opus Majus* in 1733) before turning to the practice of medicine following Collier's death. While their religious and political views differed, Samuel Jebb set an example for his nephew as a scholar who adhered to principles to the detriment of his career prospects in the Church, turning to medicine as an alternative profession.

Jebb's father and namesake John Jebb D.D. (1705-87) graduated from St John's College Cambridge in 1725, became a fellow of Christ's College, and went to Ireland as a clergyman. Jebb was a Whig and closely associated with John Hoadly, the Archbishop of Dublin (and brother of Benjamin). He also became acquainted with the ageing Jonathan Swift, who wrote:

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[2] John Gascoigne, 'Anglican Latitudinarianism, Rational Dissent and Political Radicalism in the Late Eighteenth Century', in Haakonssen, *Enlightenment and Religion*, pp. 224-26.

[3] Norman Sykes, *Church and State in England in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1934), p. 425.

[4] John Walsh, Colin Haydon and Stephen Taylor eds., *The Church of England, c.1689-c.1833: from toleration to Tractarianism* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 30-43.

[5] F.C. Mather, *High Church Prophet: Bishop Samuel Horsley (1733-1806) and the Caroline tradition in the later Georgian Church* (Oxford, 1992), p. 9.

[6] John Disney lists the towns of Drogheda, Carlow, and Dublin in Ireland, and Shrewsbury, Stand near Manchester, Leicester and Chesterfield in England as places where Jebb was schooled; 'Life of Jebb', p. 1; Jebb had extended family in Drogheda, Dublin, Manchester and Chesterfield. BL Jebb family papers.

[7] The Non-jurors were those clergymen who refused to swear the oath of allegiance to William and Mary following the Revolution of 1688.

> Mr Jebb hath a very good reputation among us, which I believe he well deserves and hath naturally good principles, but his friends being on the side of power, he is forced to tack the prudence of the serpent to the innocence of the dove. I do not know a more modest, decent, well-behaved person; I see him often, like him very well, and can give allowance for the party he is attached to.[8]

The elder John Jebb was a careerist Anglican clergyman, cultivating patrons on both sides of the Irish Sea.[9] He became chaplain to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Prebend of Ossory and married well. In 1740 he was made Treasurer of Christchurch in Dublin (an office he held until his death in 1787), to which he added the title Doctor of Divinity courtesy of Trinity College Dublin in 1743.[10] The elder John Jebb was clearly an intelligent and politic clergyman concerned only to make friends, to marry well, and raise a family with a comfortable income.

The correspondence between the physician and philosopher David Hartley (1705-57) and the Reverend John Lister reinforces the picture of Jebb as a politically tactful Whig attracted to intellectual company. Hartley became a physician based in London and Bath, and Lister a clergyman at Bury in Lancashire. They had met at school in Yorkshire, and attended Cambridge University together, where they probably met Jebb. Their correspondence is dominated by discussion of the ideas that would compose Hartley's influential *Observations on Man* (1749), but references indicate a close friendship between the elder Jebb and the author whose materialist Christian philosophy was to dominate the intellectual formation of his son.[11] Indeed, Joseph Priestley derived much satisfaction from a meeting with Jebb senior because he had been 'the intimate friend of Dr Hartley'.[12]

In 1769 the elder John Jebb was granted the lucrative Deanery of Cashell in Ireland that enabled him to settle for good in England at Egham Hill near London. The republican Sylas Neville gives the best description of Dean Jebb's philosophical and political opinions.[13] He thought Jebb 'a man of good

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[8] Swift refers to Jebb is in his correspondence with Robert Harley, Second Earl of Oxford (1689-1741). Jonathan Swift, *Correspondence* (6 vols., 1911-13), IV, pp. 437-38.

[9] Whilst waiting for a college fellowship in the summer of 1728, Jebb entertained the idea of offering himself for selection to the 'King's list' of twenty scholars to be instructed by the recently established Professor of Modern History and Modern Languages, with an eye to being appointed 'to a secretaryship in England or Ireland or to some envoy or nobleman'. Christopher Wordsworth, *Scholae Academicae: university studies in the eighteenth century* (1910), p. 149n.

[10] Swift, *Correspondence,* V, pp. 222-23; *Alumni Cantabrigiensis.*

[11] W.B. Trigg, 'The Correspondence of Dr David Hartley and Rev John Lister', *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society* (1938), p. 263.

[12] Joseph Priestley to Theophilus Lindsey, 20 April 1772, in Joseph Priestley, *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley* (J.T. Rutt ed., 25 vols., 1832), I, p. 165.

[13] Sylas Neville, *The Diary of Sylas Neville 1767-1788* (Basil Cozens-Hardy ed., Oxford, 1950), p. 79.

sense and most excellent principles. He abhors priestcraft and is an enemy to civil and religious tyranny of every kind'. Jebb spoke with pride of his former association with Jonathan Swift and made it 'clear that Swift was a Deist, if not worse, for he does not think that he had a proper sense even of Natural Religion. He did not believe a word of what he delivers in his sermon on the Trinity'. When the conversation turned to the validity of the orthodox concept of eternal punishment, Jebb observed that 'there are only two texts in Scripture which seem to favour that opinion, and these are only metaphorical expressions common in Eastern languages'. Finally, to characterise the temper of Dean Jebb's opinions, Neville noted that he referred to Joseph Priestley (the scientist and Rational Dissenter) as 'the divine Priestley'.[14] While he prudently courted patronage, it is evident that the elder Jebb was a particularly liberal Latitudinarian with heterodox theological views.

It seems that the young John Jebb was destined to follow his father in a clerical career. The most formative institution in Jebb's schooling seems to have been the Chesterfield Grammar school where he spent 'two or three years'.[15] We can imagine that this would have been the standard grammar school education dominated by Latin and some Greek grammar, learnt by rote under fear of the master's rod.[16] Jebb had the added experience of moving around schools in two kingdoms at an early age. Disney makes note of this, with the observation that it did not disrupt Jebb's attention to his studies.[17] It may however have reinforced a bookish pre-disposition as the young student, unable to form any lasting childhood friendships, retreated into literature as providing a stable and constant companion. It may have also contributed to an interest in national and Anglo-Irish politics, to the extent that in 1785 an American was led to describe Jebb as 'an Irishman for which reason he is so greatly interested in the Present Commercial arrangements with that country'.[18]

Whatever the case with his schooling, when Jebb enrolled as a pensioner at Trinity College Dublin on 4 July 1753, the figure he cut was of a small, slightly built seventeen-year-old, devoted to academic study. While Jebb was to spend only one year at Trinity, it left some impressions on him. When campaigning to introduce annual examinations at Cambridge he often referred to Trinity as the successful model from which he had drawn the idea. In addition, Jebb was keen to note that Trinity did not require students to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles.[19] Trinity College was a cultural bastion of the Anglo-Irish elite. There was a fair degree of social fluidity within the ranks of the Protestant Ascendancy and many of its most prominent figures were self-made men from

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[14] Neville, *Diary*, pp. 110-11.

[15] In the Trinity College register Jebb is noted as being referred by 'Mr Saunders, Chesterfield'. *Alumni Dublineses* (Dublin, 1935); 'Life of Jebb', p. 2.

[16] John Lawson and Harold Silver, *A Social History of Education in England* (1973), p. 176.

[17] 'Life of Jebb', p. 4.

[18] Miss Abigail Adams (daughter of John and Abigail Adams) to John Q. Adams, 26 August – 13 September 1785, MHS Adams papers.

[19] Jebb III, p. 15.

professional backgrounds.[20] Thus Jebb began his education in a broad-based social environment that was tinged with the ethic of reward for merit. This provided a contrast with the idle and privileged existence of the sons of the English aristocracy that he would later encounter and combat at Cambridge.

Jebb arrived at Trinity toward the end of the forty-year reign of the old and sickly provost Richard Baldwin. Though Baldwin's power was well on the wane when Jebb arrived, the atmosphere of the College still bore his stamp: Protestant, Whig, and disciplined. It seems that Baldwin, a man of obscure origins, was never promoted to a bishopric because the government valued his 'preoccupation with discipline and political orthodoxy' in an important strategic institution. By the time Jebb went to Trinity, the tradition of riots and drunken brawls involving the Trinity students around Dublin had given way to a more acceptable level of behaviour. In addition to a growing refinement of society, this was owing to 'the reaction which followed an incident in 1734, when the rowdies overreached themselves and killed one of the Fellows'.[21] Jebb was at Trinity College during a transitional phase between the plodding discipline of the first half of the century and the increase in scholarly activity and range of the late eighteenth century.[22]

Jebb's tutor was Thomas Leland, described by one acquaintance as 'the most charitable man alive'. A friend of Edmund Burke, during the American Revolution Leland preached a fast-day sermon in support of the colonists that the Whiggish *Monthly Review* described as 'seasonable and important'.[23] Whig politics aside, Leland's task was to tutor Jebb in academic study. Study for the four-year undergraduate degree at Trinity College was organised under two heads: science and classics. In the science stream logic was read for the first two years, natural science in the third, and ethics in the fourth. The main texts used for the study of logic were the *Institution logicae* of Burgersdicius, and Le Clerc's *Logica, sive ars ratiocinandi* (1692). The first year was devoted entirely to the former, a wearisome, pedantic, broadly Aristotelian text from the early seventeenth century – Edmund Burke referred ironically at the age of fifteen to 'that sprightly Dutchman Burgersdyk'. Le Clerc's *Logica* was used to introduce the second-year students to the principles of Lockean logic. Le Clerc, a French Protestant who befriended John Locke when he was exiled in the Netherlands, produced a number of works that developed the Lockean approach to philosophy and religion. His *Physics* (1700) was used later in the degree at Trinity to present the Newtonian conception of the world.[24] While Jebb's formal

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[20] R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (Harmondsworth, 1989), pp. 170-73.

[21] R.B. McDowell and D.A. Webb, *Trinity College Dublin 1592-1952: an academic history* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 49, 38.

[22] Jebb's tutor Thomas Leland is notable for being the first resident fellow to publish a scholarly work for several decades. None of the fellows appointed between 1716 and 1734 published anything. McDowell, *Trinity College Dublin*, p. 40.

[23] Paul Langford, 'The English Clergy and the American Revolution,' in Eckhart Hellmuth ed., *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the late eighteenth century* (Oxford, 1990) p. 283.

[24] McDowell, *Trinity College Dublin*, pp. 45-47.

study for the year would have been concerned with coming to grips with the Aristotelian logic, grammar and metaphysics of Burgersdicius, he would have been aware of Le Clerc's and Locke's modern empiricist and mechanistic alternative, and he certainly relied on their writings to a large degree later in life. When it came to the study of classical Greek and Latin authors it appears that Jebb was particularly well taught. During the period 1753-54 Leland only had two students other than Jebb assigned to him,[25] and at this time he published a very well received edition of *The Philippic Orations of Demosthenes* (1754). Jebb was evidently inspired by study of the classics, as he received copies of Horace, Juvenal, Terence and Plato's *Dialogues*, as 'the reward of his diligence and learning'.[26] Along with the idea of annual examinations, the distribution of rewards to encourage study is another practice that Jebb later sought to encourage at Cambridge.

The historians of Trinity College have delineated the principles that the College sought to impress on students as: 'mathematical precision in demonstration, an appreciation of the ordered harmony of the universe, rational empiricism as a habit of thought, liberal oligarchy as the basis of government, [and] the avoidance alike of deism, enthusiasm, and superstition.' There was a single-minded devotion to the works of Locke and Newton that went beyond that of Cambridge. While Locke was not officially included in the undergraduate course until the mid-century, the esteem for him is attested by the radical move of including his *Two Treatises of Government* in the fourth-year ethics course.[27] Though Jebb attended Trinity only for the first year of his degree, it is significant that he did so at an institution even more Whiggish than Cambridge. At Trinity Jebb had the experience of studying in Ireland's bastion of Protestant learning at a time when Enlightenment ideals were beginning to spread. In 1754 Jebb crossed back over the Irish Sea and enrolled at Cambridge University. This began a residence and active academic involvement in Cambridge that would last until he resigned his Church of England livings and moved to London in 1776.

CAMBRIDGE

In comparison to the new Dissenting Academies, the English universities experienced a recession in the eighteenth century. Where in the 1630s total entrants for the two universities had been approximately one thousand per year, this figure had slumped to five hundred in the 1690s, and continued to drop.[28] While Cambridge had an annual average of two hundred and ninety matriculations in the 1660s, this fell to a low point in the 1760s of only one hundred and twelve. This was in part a reflection of the growth of anti-clericalism in the eighteenth century, as the gentry increasingly provided private education for their sons. While in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the

[25] Trinity College Dublin mss., Catalogue of Students 1725-58.
[26] 'Life of Jebb', p. 3.
[27] McDowell, *Trinity College Dublin*, pp. 72-73.
[28] Lawson, *Social History of Education*, p. 177.

universities were thought to be giving an education for a variety of careers, in the eighteenth century Oxford and Cambridge increasingly reverted to their traditional role of training Anglican clergy.[29] Patronage was the key to clerical and academic advancement. While achieving academic honours would help, to have a future at Cambridge it was more important to be aware of what possible vacancies could arise as academics married or died, and to find the right patrons to ensure advancement.

Life at university reflected the structure of English society. Students entered as noblemen or fellow commoners, pensioners or sizars. The former, as sons of the aristocracy, paid higher fees and were by custom allowed many privileges by university dons eager to cultivate opportunities for future preferment. Fellow commoners were allowed to eat at the high table with the college fellows, and were usually exempt from performing any academic exercises. Most passed their days in extravagance, idleness and contempt for their social inferiors – and many left without taking a degree. The vast majority of students were pensioners and it was among this group that Jebb entered Cambridge. Pensioners were usually the sons of clergy or professionals and would have to earn their own living. Most were destined for a career in the Church, which for all but a talented few meant life spent in a quiet country parish. Below the pensioners, the sizars usually came from poor clergy or farming backgrounds and traditionally paid their way by acting as servants in the college. Not surprisingly, many talented products of the university (Isaac Newton and Samuel Jebb for example) came from this rank of students who had to struggle for their education.[30]

During Jebb's time most of the colleges had only forty or fifty students at best. Choice of a college depended on many factors such as family, region and patronage connections. While Trinity and St John's were the largest and most dominant, other colleges were at various times fashionable. In the middle of the century Peterhouse attracted many young aristocrats because its master, Dr Keene, had a politically influential brother.[31] Perhaps it was the opportunity to meet future Whig patrons that led Jebb to enrol at Peterhouse (his uncle Samuel's old college) rather than either of his father's old colleges. Cambridge University was in many ways an umbrella organisation representing the combined colleges. The course of education varied according to each college, and learning for its own sake was encouraged by tutors, friends and personal interest rather than by the goal of assessment. Many university lecturers never actually gave lectures, and so the students usually relied upon their college tutors for instruction in their studies.[32] William Frend thought his life at

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[29] John Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of Enlightenment: science, religion and politics from the Restoration to the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 21.

[30] D.A. Winstanley, *Unreformed Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1935), pp. 197-203. That Jebb's father was enrolled as a pensioner some years after his elder brother attended university as a sizar suggests that the fortunes of Jebb's grandfather were rising.

[31] Winstanley, *Unreformed Cambridge*, p. 193.

[32] Wordsworth, *Scholae*, pp. 16, 11. Jebb was enrolled as a pensioner under the tuition of Daniel Longmire (1729-89) and William Oldham (1728-95). Both were active at Cambridge

Cambridge 'resembled that of most other young men who attain to ... the honours of the place'. He 'passed many hours in company', but 'indulged much in solitary walks. When alone my time was dedicated to reading and thinking'.[33] Jebb's experience cannot have been too different.

The content of study at Cambridge was increasingly dominated by mathematics and Newtonian physics, which had been harnessed to Christianity by the Latitudinarians. William Whiston, Newton's successor as Lucasian Professor of mathematics, declared that: 'Mechanical philosophy, which relies chiefly on the Power of Gravity, is, if rightly understood, so far from leading to Atheism, that it solely depends on, supposes and demonstrates the Being and Providence of God; and its study by consequence is the most serviceable to Religion.' Whiston and his colleagues set about teaching a Newtonian philosophy and, after some initial High Church opposition, Newtonianism became the new orthodoxy at Cambridge.[34]

In addition to Latitudinarian encouragement, the rise to dominance of mathematics at Cambridge owed much to the increasing importance and emphasis placed on the Senate House examination at the conclusion of the undergraduate degree. To obtain their degree, students traditionally went through a process of disputations (or 'acts') in their final year that usually involved metaphysical and moral questions.[35] These were performed in front of a moderator who was appointed by the University (a role Jebb would come to perform several times). At the time Jebb graduated, these acts were still considered the main test of a young man's learning. However, while in previous centuries the final examination had been largely ceremonial, during the eighteenth century it evolved to become a real test of the students' abilities, and primarily of their mathematical ability. Just before Jebb arrived the University had begun to print an honour roll that ranked the participants in the final Senate House examination according to merit. As the century wore on this honours list came to supersede the acts as the real measure of ability.[36]

Only the diligent students were subjected to serious examination.[37] Jebb himself has left a detailed account of the Senate House examination that illustrates the dominance of mathematics and natural philosophy at Cambridge. The students were divided into groups of six to ten, of roughly equal ability, and each group would in turn sit around a table with the moderator.

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into the 1770's. William Cole described Longmire as 'a North Country man, excessively tall, Tutor in the College (Peterhouse) and Vicar of Linton, where he for the most part lives, loving social Company, and has a good Deal of it. His father, I am told, keeps a low ale-house in Cumberland'. BL Cole mss. 5875:144.

[33] Frend writing in 1795, cited in Frida Knight, *University Rebel: the life of William Frend 1757-1841* (1971), p. 28.

[34] Gascoigne, *Cambridge*, pp. 271, 145, 140-84; John Gascoigne, 'From Bentley to the Victorians: the rise and fall of British Newtonian natural theology', *Science in Context,* 2 (1988), pp. 222-30.

[35] Gascoigne, *Cambridge*, p. 23.

[36] Winstanley, *Unreformed Cambridge*, pp. 43-50.

[37] Cited in Winstanley, *Unreformed Cambridge*, p. 49.

> The examination is varied according to the abilities of the students. The moderator generally begins with proposing some questions from the six books of Euclid, plain trigonometry, and the first rules of algebra. If any person fails in an answer, the question goes to the next. From the elements of mathematics, a transition is made to the four branches of philosophy, viz. mechanics, hydrostatics, apparent astronomy, and optics, as explained in the works of Maclaurin, Cotes, Helsham, Hamilton, Rutherforth, Keill, Long, Ferguson, and Smith. If the moderator finds the set of questionists, under examination, capable of answering him, he proceeds to the eleventh and twelfth books of Euclid, conic sections, spherical trigonometry, the higher parts of algebra, and Sir Isaac Newton's *Principia*; more particularly those sections, which treat of the motion of bodies in eccentric and revolving orbits; the mutual action of spheres, composed of particles attracting each other according to various laws; the theory of pulses, propagated through elastic mediums; and the stupendous fabric of the world. Having closed the philosophical examination, he sometimes asks a few questions in Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding*, Butler's *Analogy*, or Clarke's *Attributes*. But as the highest academical distinctions are invariably given to the best proficients in mathematics and natural philosophy, a very superficial knowledge in morality and metaphysics will suffice.

The highest classes of students were tested with more advanced calculations. Each group was examined twice – once by each of the two moderators. In addition, senior members of the colleges would examine individual students at their own discretion for up to an hour and a half at a time. During the three days of examination, the moderators and tutors representing the various colleges would breakfast and dine together, discussing the relative merits of the students. Twenty-four pupils were settled on, examined again one-on-one, and ranked in a list according to academic proficiency.[38] When Jebb graduated he was ranked 'second wrangler' behind his friend and future Lucasian Professor of mathematics, Edward Waring (1734-98). The mathematical bent to Jebb's Cambridge education culminated in his eventually co-authoring a mathematical textbook that was used extensively in the university.[39]

The increasing emphasis on mathematics does not mean that classical learning was neglected at Cambridge. The mathematical disputations and most textbooks were composed in Latin, and serious students learned to write, speak and even think in Latin.[40] There is ample proof that Jebb devoted much time to study of the classics: in 1758 he won second prize in the university's annual

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[38] *Remarks ... Upon Education*, Jebb II, pp. 291-96.

[39] Robert Thorpe, George Wollaston and John Jebb, *Excerpta quaedam e Newtoni Principiis philosophiae naturalis, cum notis variorum* (Cambridge, 1765).

[40] Wordsworth, *Scholae*, p. 90.

Latin prose competition, and his proposals for education reform included examination and honours lists that would encourage study of the classics as well as mathematics.[41] Nevertheless, study of the classics or any other branch of knowledge took place within an intellectual context shaped by Newtonianism. Late in the century Edmund Law could claim that Newtonian mathematics 'together with Mr. Locke's *Essay* [and] Dr Clarke's works went hand in hand through our public schools and lectures'.[42]

In early 1756 Jebb fell sick with a fever and was sent by his father to Bath to recover his health. He resided at college during the summer vacation in order to catch up on his studies and graduated B.A. in January 1757.[43] On receiving their degrees Jebb and Edward Waring established the Hyson Club, to which students who obtained honours were invited to drink tea and relax with free ranging 'rational conversation'.[44] A manifestation of the salon culture that was a marked feature of the Enlightenment, in the following years the Hyson Club was attended by some of the most intellectually eminent figures in the University.

With increasing competition for honours in the Senate House examination, there was a corresponding rise in demand for private tutors.[45] On completing his degree Jebb undertook private pupils (a practice he continued throughout his entire time at Cambridge), and instructed as many as 'six or eight young persons, at separate parts of the day', which demonstrates a commitment and ability that, according to Disney, was 'unusual at his early age'.[46] While pecuniary reward was no doubt an important reason, this was also an early manifestation of Jebb's life-long commitment to the promotion of learning. One former student recalled 'with the highest satisfaction' his time with Jebb, as he was taught 'with views much more enlarged than those commonly entertained by the commonality of tutors'.[47] Coaching private pupils was not a familiar practice during Jebb's time, as it would become in the nineteenth century. It was an uncertain field of endeavour both in terms of status and financial reward, but Jebb's success reinforces the picture of him being widely respected for his abilities.[48] He did this work while continuing his own studies, and in 1758 obtained second prize in a competition held annually for best Latin essay in the university. Right from the start Jebb's industrious practice was at variance with the dominant way of life in the eighteenth-century university.

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[41] 'Life of Jebb', p. 6; See chapter 6.

[42] Cited in Gascoigne, *Cambridge*, p. 174.

[43] 'Life of Jebb', pp. 4-5.

[44] G.W. Meadley, *Memoirs of William Paley* (1809), p. 46; Mary Milner, *The Life of Issac Milner* (1842), p. 9; Christopher Wordsworth, *Social Life at the English Universities in the Eighteenth Century* (1874), p. 334.

[45] Wordsworth, *Scholae*, p. 260.

[46] 'Life of Jebb', p. 6. Private tutors received about 20 pounds a year per pupil. Six to eight students would seem to be the maximum number Jebb tutored at any one time. This would have provided him with a yearly income of at least 120 pounds. Wordsworth, *Social Life*, pp. 112-14.

[47] John Baynes cited in, 'Life of Jebb', p. 16.

[48] M.L. Clarke, *Paley: evidences for the man* (1974), p. 8.