THE MORAL PHILOSOPHY OF SAMUEL JOHNSON

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THE MORAL PHILOSOPHY OF SAMUEL JOHNSON

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CHAPTER I

THE AGE OF JOHNSON

Samuel Johnson, "the most abnormally English creature God ever made,"1 passed his judgment on practically every phase of eighteenth-century life. The purpose of the author is to give a resumé of Johnson's England and by examining The Rambler and Boswell's Life of Johnson, to determine what the Doctor thought concerning the prevailing conditions, social practices, and ideas of his time.

The eighteenth century was a period of prosperity in which England enjoyed the respect and admiration of Continental Europe. It was also a period of transition that made the break with the Medieval world. Politically, the island was peaceful and the Hanoverian Kings ruled with no arbitrary injustice, but were too little concerned with their new kingdom to initiate much reform. England expanded her trade and commerce because of the newly acquired colonies, the growth in native population that meant more producers and consumers, a number of inventions that speeded up production, and finally because she maintained supremacy of the sea. A rise of the middle class, which included the

wealthy merchant and manufacturer, resulted from the prosperity of industry, trade, and commerce. While the prosperous merchant or manufacturer was screaming for the cessation of obnoxious governmental control, he was also demanding protection of property. The undisturbed reign of the House of Hanover was possible mainly because the succession of Georges respected or at least succumbed to many of these demands. Parliament recognized the importance of industry "and in the name of industrial morality . . . passed eleven laws during Johnson's lifetime to regulate the making and makers of Yorkshire cloths alone."²

Parliament had gained in prestige following the "Glorious Revolution"; the Whig and Tory parties were more firmly established, and the most clearly discernible feature in eighteenth-century life is the violence and thoroughness of their strife. Besant says that "a Tory would have been as much out of his element at the St. James's as a Whig at Ozinda's."³ The Whigs represented the rich business man while the Tories were made up largely of the country squires and the clergy. The lives of the clergy, the great men of letters, and the chief thinkers of the time were made or marred by the fortunes of their political association.

²Ibid., p. 229.
The Church lost much of its prestige following the Revolution and in 1717 the Convocation was suspended. Defenders of the High Church doctrine became Non-Jurors; the clergy who remained active took the political coloring of the government; thus, the bishops during Walpole's ministry were chiefly Whigs, but the lower clergy of the parishes were mainly Tories. The Church was still shackled by Medieval mechanics and in many cases the clergy were given preferments that far surpassed their competency. The bishops waxed rich, but the lesser clergy were often reduced to penury; thus, "to the aspiring cleric the way to preferment was clear, by the means of the favor of some influential patron."

Often the bishops neglected their ecclesiastical duties and were none too pious. The income of the country parson was a factor in forming public opinion of him, but it was a common practice to regard him as a despicable underling, vapid in character as in the novels of Jane Austen. Fielding and Goldsmith, however, portrayed the clergy as possessing patience and humility as is exemplified by Parson Adams and the vicar of Wakefield.

The Church not only suffered attacks upon its episcopate and method of administration, but it was also harassed by the Deistic tendencies of the time. The demands of the

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4Turberville, op. cit., p. 21.
secular thought forced the church to adopt a Latitudinarian concept of theology. In order to understand the attacks upon all chartered institutions, one must turn to the intellectual background of the time.

From Descartes and Newton, Johnson's Age developed the rationalistic point of view that from investigation by experiment and observation man can increase his knowledge of the physical laws of nature. On the basis of his discoveries made by experimentation, Newton formulated what he called the general Laws of Nature. These laws are without mutation. The world was viewed as a mechanical and orderly creation. There was "no more chaos, no more confusion, but an essentially rational and harmonious machine." Since the world is an orderly and rational universe, the creator is necessarily a rational being. The universe ceased to be a mystery. Reason was identified with nature and what was natural was reasonable; that which was reasonable was natural. The deification of reason and nature had a revolutionary effect on religion because for the rationalist "the laws of nature and nature's God appeared henceforth to be one and the same thing, and since every part of God's handiwork could all in good time be reasonably demonstrated, the intelligent man could very well do with a minimum of faith."\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{5} J. H. Randall, \textit{The Making of the Modern Mind}, p. 274.

\textsuperscript{6} C. L. Becker, \textit{The Heavenly City of Eighteenth Century Philosophers}, pp. 21-22.
Religious leaders were soon divided into two groups, namely the Orthodox who believed in the necessity of revelation and the radicals or Deists, who rejected the necessity of revelation and maintained that natural religion sufficed. Voltaire stated the creed of natural religion when he said, "I understand by natural religion the principles of morality common to the human race." It is easily discernible that Deism was the outgrowth of rationalism, and it is ironic that by the same method of rationalistic approach natural religion was itself destroyed. Carlyle calls Johnson's Age "a godless world," that "has died out into the clanking of a World-Machine." Deity was transferred from God to nature or the machine and was no longer necessary to the operation of the general scheme of things.

The rationalistic skepticism of the eighteenth century and its habits of criticizing all practices in the light of reason produced in the field of literature an era of restraint. There was a lack of emotion or enthusiasm and it was only natural that the writer should turn toward the prose form as the instrument of reason. Johnson's Age was one of journalists, diarists, letter writers and essayists. The content was didactic; the style carefully conformed to

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7Randall, op. cit., p. 287.

traditional standards. Poetry had little lyrical value and like prose aimed at moralizing. Pope expressed many of the eighteenth-century ideas when he wrote:

All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee;  
All Chance, Direction, which thou canst not see;  
All Discord, Harmony not understood;  
All partial Evil, universal Good;  
And, in spite of Pride, in erring Reason's spite,  
One truth is clear, Whatever is, is right.

Christian tradition, which preached the depravity of man, had erred. Man was merely filling his place in the universe, and "the universal system, which is the best of all possible systems that God might have created, is the manifest product of design in its symmetrical and harmonious pattern." It was an optimistic view to think that man, regardless of his apparent imperfections, fits into the general scheme of things.

The principles of plenitude, continuity, and gradation underlay the "design of the whole" which was given the name, Chain of Being. Plenitude meant the "fullness" of the earth. God germinated not one germ but all possible because of His infinite goodness. One part was not made for the utility of another. Each was an end in itself. Imperfection started at the bottom of the chain and at the top was

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the perfection of God. Man's relative position in this chain caused much controversy, but it was customary to refer to him as the "middle link." This did not necessarily mean that there were an equal number of degrees of perfection ranging above and below man. Locke stated that "we have reason to be persuaded that there are far more species of creatures above us, than there are beneath; we being in degrees of perfection much more remote from the infinite Being of God, than we are from the lowest state of being, and that which approaches nearest to nothing."\(^{10}\) Later Bolingbroke maintained that man is the highest of earthly creatures, but he stated also that "there is a gradation from man, through various forms of sense, intelligence, and reason, up to beings who cannot be known by us, because of their distance from us, and whose rank in the intellectual system is above even our conceptions."\(^{11}\) Pope put this idea into poetry when he said:

Superior beings when of late they saw
A mortal man unfold all Nature's law,
Admir'd such wisdom in an earthly shape
And shew's a NEWTON as we shew an Ape.

The relative position allocated to man in the vast chain aided the eighteenth-century thinker in the determination of his idea of progress and in his disposition of the

\(^{10}\) A. O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being, p. 190.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., p. 192.
age old question of good and evil. Many of those who accepted
the idea of the Chain saw no hope for the ultimate progress
of man. His only hope of happiness lay in his ability to
accept his stationary position and be happy with his limi-
tations. Applied to society this meant "that a creature so
limited and so near to the other animals, in kind if not
in kinship, must necessarily be incapable of attaining any
very high level of political wisdom or virtue, and that
consequently no great improvement in man's political be-
behavior or in the organization of society could be hoped
for."¹² Soame Jenyns uses this theory when he concludes
that there never has been a good form of government and
man can never expect one.¹ The evils of politics, society,
religion, indeed, all evils fit into the scheme of things
and are natural. Many eighteenth-century thinkers used
this theory when advocating or supporting the existing
order.

The foregoing discussion shows that the philosophers
were not insensible to all pain and conflict, but they
believed that the evils of our world are negligible in
comparison with the happiness and perfection of the whole
cosmos. Mandeville's Fable of the Bees aimed at proving
that it is not the virtues and amiable qualities of man
that are the aids of civilized society, but that the vices
are necessary because they support all trades and employment.

¹²Ibid., p. 203.
By the middle of the eighteenth century men began to see that the Nature of man was not his "reason" but his "senses." Shaftesbury's ethical theory is the direct result of the deistic theology. Men no longer had faith in the Bible and lacked a guide for good conduct. He contended that man is naturally a virtuous being, and is endowed with a "moral sense" which distinguishes good from evil. Although the "moral sense" requires cultivation, man becomes virtuous merely by following the preferences of this instinct. Instead of the utilitarianism of the Orthodox, Shaftesbury proposed as the only reward of virtuous conduct the immediate satisfaction it produces which is the only genuine happiness to be attained.

The belief that man is by nature good and becomes corrupted only by incorrect social orders caused the trend toward the glorification of the original or primitive man. The first half of the century abounds with "praise of primitive man both for his knowledge of the law of nature and his willingness to follow it."13 Primitivism was the natural outgrowth from the stress placed upon nature and the idea of man living in harmony with the laws of nature. The natural came to be identified with the original and primitive, that which existed before man interfered with rational ways of doing things. In the original state of

13Whitney, op. cit., p. 70.
nature there had been order and perfection until regulations and schemes for selfish purposes had spoiled that order. God gave humanity intelligence to comprehend the laws of nature, and if he now failed, it was because he had let his mind be corrupted by civilization. Later in the century primitivism was relegated to the emotional rather than to man's reasoning power. Sentimentalism had been a common feature of middle class writing throughout the century, but it also appeared among the superior writers after 1750.

Rousseau was a sentimentalist whose theory of primitivism was not based on the ability of man's reasoning power, but on his ability to feel. He believed that natural instincts when not contorted by society will cause man to act nobly. His theory of government and education is based on the premise that man at birth possesses natural goodness. The only duty of education is to cultivate the natural instincts of man and let him grow naturally.

Rousseau preached the eighteenth-century revolutionary movement of democracy. He believed that the majority of men could be trusted to do what is right and for this reason advocated the democratic rule of the majority.

The preceding discussion shows that the Age of Johnson was one of transition and adjustment. The authority of the Church and State became weaker as the middle class thrust itself upward. Neo-classical literary tastes were being
exchanged for a sentimentality that was to lead to romanticism. The Whigs were preaching a doctrine of freedom that culminated in the American Revolution. Rationalism created deism, and the rational skeptics destroyed even the natural religion. Into this maze of rationalism, deism, and primitivism was placed the assertive Samuel Johnson, a devout Christian, who clung doggedly to the established order. Carlyle says "how he harmonized his Formulas with it, how he managed at all under such circumstances: that is a thing worth seeing."\footnote{Carlyle, op. cit., p. 402.} For that purpose the author turns first to \textit{The Rambler}.\footnote{Carlyle, op. cit., p. 402.}
CHAPTER II

THE MORAL PHILOSOPHY OF SAMUEL JOHNSON:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE RAMBLER

Before undertaking an examination of the contents of The Rambler one should note a few facts concerning the development of the periodical essay, the circumstances under which The Rambler was published, the style of the author, and its contemporary and subsequent history.

Montaigne, the French philosopher, retired from active life and spent his leisure in contemplative reflection and followed the custom of his time, which was to collect any maxims, aphorisms, anecdotes or quotations from his reading. After recording these he made a self-analysis and wrote his findings. In 1590 a collection of such writings appeared under the title Essais. The word means "attempts" and by this title Montaigne admitted that his writings were incomplete and were not to be compared with the usual philosophical writings. He added the personal element to the usual moral teachings and created the modern essay.

Bacon became the first English essayist and aided in the development of the essay as a form of literature. His purpose was to give rational advice to young gentlemen who wanted to become men of affairs. These essays were practical and utilitarian. The style was noted for clarity, imaginative
richness, phrasal power, and sentence-rhythm which helped to make essays an enduring form of the world's literature.

The seventeenth century gave little to the development of the informal essay as a type of literature. Some of the forerunners of the eighteenth-century essay are Milton's *Areopagitica*, Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, and Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding*. During the seventeenth century the chief contribution to this type of writing was the combination of character and essay by the French writer of characters, La Bruyère.

The periodical writings were the second great step in the history of the informal essay. This new creation was made by Addison and Steele in the early part of the eighteenth century and reached great heights of popularity. The best writers of the time employed their efforts in the new art-form. Addison and Steele took the germ for the *Tatler* and *Spectator* from a feature of Daniel Defoe's *A Weekly Review of Affairs in France* which was called "Advice from the Scandalous Club," gossipy in character. The chief purpose of Addison and Steele was "to recommend truths, innocence, honor, virtue, as the chief ornaments of life."¹ Steele wanted "to trace human life through all its mazes and recesses, and show much shorter methods than men ordinarily practice, to be happy, agreeable, and great."² The

²Walter Graham, *English Literary Periodicals*, p. 76.
The *Tatler* established the periodical essay as a type; "in the *Spectator* it was perfected." The periodical form not only prescribed the length, but gave the general spirit of the times. As compared with earlier essays, the periodical form is more informal in style, briefer, less aphoristic and uses more humor and satire. The *Spectator* papers were of two types: the "serious" on such topics as death, friendship, marriage, and education; the "occasional papers" dealt with the folly of the time.

Johnson assisted Dodsley in his work on The *Preceptor* by contributing the preface and a fable, The *Vision of Theodore*, The *Hermit of Teneriff*. This fable in which he states the part religion holds in the conduct of life, may be regarded as a prelude to The *Rambler*.

A period of forty years had elapsed since the publication of the *Spectator*. In this interval conditions had changed. The needs of the reading public, which had grown in size and power, had been met by more than one hundred and fifty periodicals. People had become accustomed to the periodical, and it was no longer a novelty. Politics and news were filling the newspapers or being aired in political tracts, so that the time did not seem propitious for this type of literature devoted almost entirely to thoughts on matters of no immediate importance.

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Johnson, living in Gough Square, faced with the necessity of having to eat while employed in the laborious mechanism of compiling the Dictionary, looked around him for some means of financial relief and decided upon the periodical essay. Johnson related to Sir Joshua Reynolds the following information concerning the name of the periodical. He said:

What must be done, Sir, will be done. When I was to begin publishing that paper, I was at a loss how to name it. I sat down at night upon my bedside, and resolved that I would not go to sleep till I had fixed its title. The Rambler seemed the best that occurred, and I took it. 4

The first issue of the periodical was on March 20, 1750. The paper appeared regularly each Tuesday and Saturday; the concluding number, 208, was dated Saturday, March 14, 1752. Each issue was printed on three half-sheets and was sold at two pence. The essays, as published singly, didn't sell rapidly. According to Arthur Murphy, fewer than five hundred of each were sold and this was not enough to make for financial success, since Cave, the publisher, was paying the essayist four guineas per week. Soon, however, these single copies were collected into an edition by Payne, and Johnson lived to see ten editions of his work in London in addition to those of Ireland and Scotland. Mr. James Alphinston of Edinburgh followed the London publication with his edition of the essays. This edition "was executed

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in the printing office of Sands, Murray, and Cochran, with uncommon elegance, upon writing paper, of a duodecimo size, and with the greatest of correctness." The eight volumes included translations of the mottoes, and this edition is the most beautiful and costly of the collected essays. Boswell estimated that the sale of The Rambler far surpassed any other periodical papers since the reign of Queen Anne. It reached great heights of popularity and was the only periodical of the time to compete with The Spectator. The Rambler was so well known that Boswell, years after its publication, referred to its author by that name. This work alone was enough to establish Johnson's reputation in his own day. And for the remainder of his life, many of his contemporaries, friends, and enemies, formed their views of Johnson by The Rambler, and not by other of his better writings. It must be noted that it was by the reputation of The Rambler that Boswell first knew and desired the acquaintance of Doctor Johnson.

The style is not that of a rambler in any single instance; one subject is treated in a steady unswerving march. By the title Johnson suggested that he would pass in each essay from subject to subject; upon examination one finds that the contents are well organized, straight-forward dissertations upon life. In his style of writing Johnson was guilty of some of the things for which he criticized other

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5Ibid., n. 1 pp. 122-3.
writers. He disliked writings in which common truths were so obscured that they could not be perceived, and frowned upon the writer who used ponderous sentences. Johnson wrote in much haste, seldom read an essay before publication and was often reprimanded by the publisher for being late with the copy. Knowing his rapidity in composition, one concludes that his elevated diction, rhetorical, and sometimes pedantic sentences were natural to him. The full scope of his thought may not be understood at a glance because he placed much thought in a small compass. His words of Latin origin require careful reading because they are rather abstract. The sentences are perfectly balanced, even if extreme in their length, and contain parallel phrases, with thoughts sometimes parallel and at other times antithetical. The inflated and ponderous sentences with their constant balance become monotonous in tone.

Horace Walpole said that he detested these essays because Johnson repeated the same thing three times, so that three papers to the same effect might have been made from a single copy. The wags accused Johnson of using polysyllabic words so that he might convey the need of a folio dictionary. Since these essays were seldom read by their author after writing, or before taking them to the publisher, it can be supposed that there was no conscious effort to pad sentences with words of Latin origin. Johnson, the man, evidently wrote abstractly, as he thought, when not interrupted by society.
This collection of essays, because of the nature of any essay which puts its author on formal display, does not give one the personality of Johnson with his prejudices and eccentricities that one finds in Boswell's Life of Johnson. However, some of Johnson's humor and down-to-earth reasoning is ever present. The more serious essays, which constitute the greater part of this work, have an extremely dignified and somber mood. According to Boswell, Johnson, the moralizer, here, as in no other of his writings, produced the pure Johnsonian style. The satirists who tried to produce parodies on the style of these essays were unable to develop anything which ran parallel in every way. The periodical is didactic, the moral being very clearly perceived in each number. Johnson's chief purpose to promote truth overshadows even the lighter essays, but his method of instruction is not such that would attract any unwilling attention. Johnson, himself, realized that he had been too severe in his dictatorial method of instruction and admitted that the tone had been seldom relieved.

It is of interest to note the varied opinions of the contemporary critics concerning The Rambler. Samuel Richardson, in a letter to Cave, dated August 9, 1750, gave the following opinion:

I am inexpressibly pleased with them... I hope the world tastes them; for its own sake I hope the world tastes them... I would not, for any consideration, that they should be laid down through discouragement.

—C. W. Moulton, Library of Literary Criticism, Vol. III,
Lady Montagu expressed her contempt for the laborious writing in a letter written June 23, 1754, to the Countess of Bute. An excerpt from the letter follows:

_The Rambler, is certainly a strong misnomer: he always plods in the beaten road of his predecessors, following the "Spectator" (with the same pace as a pack-horse would do a hunter) in the style that is proper to lengthen a paper._

William Shenstone expressed his appreciation of _The Rambler_ in the following remark:

_I have lately been reading one or two volumes of "The Rambler"; who, excepting against some few hard-nesses in his manner, and the want of more examples to saliven, is one of the most nervous, most perspicuous, most concise (and) most harmonious prose writers I know._

From "An Essay on the Life and Genius of Samuel Johnson" one sees with what admiration Arthur Murphy regarded these essays. He called them the great work of Johnson and believed that their sale was not equal to their merit. He knew that the _Spectator_ had more charm because of the variety of material treated, but this was not considered a fault when he recalled that Addison and Steele had contributions given them by the wits of their time, whereas, Johnson alone, except for a very few numbers, produced _The Rambler_ clock-like, twice each week, for a period of two years. Murphy praised Johnson as a moral teacher and felt that the critical, but instructive papers had done much to promote the cause of literature.

7Ibid. 
8Ibid.
By 1855 The Rambler was regarded as a work without any extraordinary elevation because men of letters had raised their own standard of the English language and notions of morality to fit that norm as established by Johnson. The Rambler today is little noticed by even the followers of Johnson, but any one of these essays, chosen at random, will invariably afford one a lesson in morality rarely to be rivalled by any other writing.

Johnson, because of his own miserable life, was keenly aware that the state of man was such that calamities surrounded him. Stumbling blocks in the path of Johnson included a disfigured body, impaired eyesight caused by scrofula, and an inherent tendency toward a morbid melancholy which made him apprehensive of his own sanity.9 Finally, there was the incessant struggle against poverty which caused him to become usher in the school of Market-Bosworth, and later master of his own academy, both of which positions were exceedingly irksome to a man of Johnson's impetuous nature. Stories of his meager subsistence in London are too commonly known to need repeating, yet the character of Johnson was such that he could not stoop to court the great, and even when he walked the streets of London for hours at night with Savage because they had no lodging, he remained

in high spirits. Johnson came face to face with reality, pronounced it as such, and his test of truth based upon experience and reason would not allow him to follow the idle dreams of philosophy.

Philosophers of the day had been attempting to reason away all apparent external evil by saying that evils are caused by ignorance or perverseness, and that nature for every vicissitude has supplied some advantage. To this reasoning Johnson replied:

This attempt may, perhaps, be justly suspected of resemblance to the practice of physicians, who, when they cannot mitigate pain, destroy sensibility, and endeavour to conceal, by opiates, the inefficacy of their other medicines. The panegyристs of calamity have more frequently gained applause to their wit, than acquiescence to their arguments; nor has it appeared that the most musical oratory, or subtle ratiocination, has been able long to overpower the anguish of oppression, the tediousness of languor, or the longings of want. ¹⁰

Since Johnson was acutely aware of existing evils, it is interesting to note his explanation of them. He says:

Of the happiness and misery of our present state, part arises from our sensations, and part from our opinions; part is distributed by nature, and part is a great measure apportioned by ourselves. ¹¹

Johnson recognized that man himself is responsible for the greater part of his unhappiness. Deformity, loss of the senses, and old age are examples of evils allotted by

¹⁰Rambler, No. 150.
¹¹Ibid., No. 186.
Providence, but "of your calamity, a small part is the infliction of Heaven, the rest is little more than the corrosion of idle discontent."\textsuperscript{13} Perhaps if man expects less of life, he will enjoy it the more. In any case one must realize that there is nothing unique in his own dissatisfaction with the universe.

To those who complained of their own unhappy state and looked with envy upon the condition of their fellow man, Johnson said:

Such is the state of every age, every sex, and every condition: All have their cares, either from nature or from folly: and whoever therefore finds himself inclined to envy another should remember that he knows not the real condition which he desires to obtain, but is certain that by indulging a vicious passion he must lessen that happiness which he thinks already too sparingly bestowed.\textsuperscript{13}

Misery, then, is universal, and "the utmost felicity which we can ever attain will be little better than alleviation of misery, and we shall always feel more pain from our wants than pleasure from our enjoyments."\textsuperscript{14}

Johnson could not accept metaphysical abstractions in exchange for the contradictions of life. He always maintained a strong sense of the real, and with it made smashing attacks upon whatever he considered shallow idealism or smart-alec philosophy. Thus, his famous opinion of Hume, Malebranche, and Berkeley:

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., No. 133. \textsuperscript{13}Ibid., No. 128; 
Adventurer, No. 111. 
\textsuperscript{14}Rambler, No. 165.
The bigot of philosophy . . . is entangled in systems by which truth and falsehood are inextricably complicated, or undertakes to talk on subjects which nature did not form him able to comprehend. The Cartesian, who denies that his horse feels the spur, or that the hare is afraid when the hounds approach her; the disciple of Malebranche, who maintains that the man was not hurt by the bullet, which, according to vulgar apprehension, swept away his legs; the follower of Berkeley, who while he sits writing at his table, declares that he has neither table, paper, nor fingers; have all the honour at least of being deceived by fallacies not easily detected, and may plead that they did not forsake truth, but for appearances which they were not able to distinguish from it.15

Johnson, though not a deep thinker, or a philosopher in the strictest sense of the term, made many observations concerning man, and his truisms might serve as well in the twentieth century as in the eighteenth. According to Johnson, one of the most noticeable characteristics of life in general is the small amount of time man spends in contemplating his present state. Humanity is ever living a life of retrospection or introspection; never satisfied with the immediate state of affairs. He said that "the natural flights of the human mind are not from pleasure to pleasure, but from hope to hope."16 From this world of gloom man borrows happiness from expectation of a better state in the future; therefore, "hope is the chief blessing of man, and that hope is rational, of which we are certain that it cannot deceive us."17

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15Idler, No. 110. 16Rambler, No. 2.
17Ibid., No. 204.
The unhappy state of man and the futility of hope paints a morose picture if left without any suggested remedy. Since there is more evil than good in the world, one can never expect much happiness on this earth where there is more to be endured than enjoyed. As in Rasselas, Johnson constantly pointed out the unsatisfactory nature of things temporal, but he does so with the hope of directing man's attention to things eternal. Even though "life has many miseries, and ... those miseries are, sometimes at least, equal to the powers of fortitude,"\(^{18}\) there is positive security for man against all disturbances. What did Johnson, the moralizer, suggest?

Johnson felt that a state of happiness can be found within the soul of man if he equips himself properly with wisdom and reason joined to a religion which raises the moral sentiment. He did not believe with Shaftesbury that men are basically good, pure, and sweet. Men even with the desire to live a good life have difficulties in doing so. After surveying the moral problems of man, he divides humanity into three classes and concludes:

There are some whose principles are so firmly fixed, whose conviction is so constantly present to their minds, and who have raised in themselves such ardent wishes for the approbation of God, and the happiness with which he has promised to reward obedience and perseverance, that they rise above all other cares and consideration, and uniformly examine every action

\(^{18}\text{Ibid.}, \text{No. 32.}\)
and desire, by comparing it with the divine commands. There are others in a kind of equipoise between good and ill; who are moved on the one part by riches and pleasure, by the gratifications of passions and the delights of sense; and, on the other, by laws of which they own the obligation, and rewards of which they believe the reality, and whom a very small addition of weight turns either way. The third class consists of beings immersed in pleasure, or abandoned to passion, without any desire of higher good, or any effort to extend their thoughts beyond immediate and gross satisfaction.\textsuperscript{19}

The essayist realized that most people regulate life by the virtues of other men and "lull their own remorse with the remembrance of crimes more atrocious than their own and seem to believe that they are not bad while another can be found worse."\textsuperscript{20} This idea found in the Rambler also prevails in the Idler. Paper number eighty-nine of the Idler classifies goodness according to sobriety, righteousness, and godliness. The first class simply indicates those who forbear pleasure for the reason that pain follows. The second class includes those who practice social duties of justice and charity. Of the third class Johnson says:

None would have recourse to an invisible power; but that all other subjects have eluded their hopes. None would fix their attention upon the future, but that they are discontented with the present. If the senses were feasted with perpetual pleasure, they would always keep the mind in subjection. Reason has no authority over us, but by its power to warn us against evil.\textsuperscript{21}

Johnson would not have one believe that misery always brings the individual back to virtue, but he does contend that the

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., No. 79. \textsuperscript{20}Ibid., No. 28.
\textsuperscript{21}Idler, No. 89.
small amount of existing virtue is the result of some physical evil. For Jemyns's book, A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil, based on the scale of being, and holding that evil is good in relation to the whole cosmos, Johnson had the most ironic contempt. He objected to any hypothesis or fantastic notion beyond the comprehension of human understanding. Johnson accepted the fact that in this life men are not fitted either for the achievement or the understanding of happiness, but that one may face the mad world with sanity and kindliness, with common sense and with a ready sympathy. Philosophical discourse could not go far enough to clarify obscurities; of this, Johnson was sure. Pressed with the need to believe something fundamental, something solid, Johnson accepted Christianity with every traditional and orthodox concept. It must not be supposed that the great moral teacher was of a religious nature, or that it was easy for him to accept a religion of faith. His inquiring mind was more suited to that of the eighteenth-century skeptic, and it must be observed that Johnson never felt any great joy in religion, but had the will to believe. The story of his life is the desperate battle to hold fast to religion.

One of his often repeated reasons for religion, 'None would have recourse to an invisible power, but that all other subjects have eluded their hopes,' tends to make one conclude that misery was a great incentive to the piety of Johnson. To this may be added the frequency of his
melancholy reflections on death when fear of the future state of man predominates. He says:

The great incentive to virtue is the reflection that we must die; it will therefore be useful to accustom ourselves, whenever we see a funeral to consider how soon we may be added to the number of those whose probation is past, and whose happiness or misery shall endure forever. 22

The anguish that Johnson suffered in contemplating the insecurity of his corporal being and in realizing that he ultimately must face his God is obvious when he writes:

For surely, nothing can so much disturb the passions, or perplex the intellect of man, as the disruption of his union with visible nature; a separation from all that has hitherto delighted or engaged him; a change not only of the place, but the manner of his being; an entrance into a state not simply which he knows not, but which perhaps he has not faculties to know; an immediate and perceptible communication with the Supreme Being, and, what is above all distressful and alarming, the final sentence, and unalterable allotment. 23

Reason and wisdom tell men what is right, but there has to be some motivation before men will conform to reason. Religion furnishes that motive by promising rewards for virtue and, what Johnson feared most, punishment for wickedness.

Possessing this orthodox view, Johnson says:

The great task of him who conducts his life by the precepts of religion, is to make the future predominate over the present, to impress upon his mind so strong a sense of the importance of obedience to the divine will, of the value of the reward promised to virtue, and the terrors of the punishment denounced against crime, as may overbear all the temptations which temporal hope or fear can bring in his way, and enable him to bid equal

22 Rambler, No. 78 23 Ibid., No. 78
defiance to joy and sorrow, to turn away at one time from the allurements of ambition, and push forward at another against the threats of calamity.24

Johnson followed his orthodox reasoning to its logical conclusion and opposed the levity and tolerance of the eighteenth century. To restrain society in all licentious or harmful practices is the duty of the state. He amplifies this opinion in a conversation with Goldsmith.25 The man who is not capable of thinking morally or justly must be prevented from teaching ideas that are derogatory to the best interest of society.

Rationalism had produced a change in attitude toward the supernatural, and tolerance prevailed to such an extent that there was very little religion in the Church of England. Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire aimed at undermining traditional beliefs in Christianity; Hume, in his Essay on Miracles, attacked the probability of miracles; yet in this age of universal skepticism when many men outwardly conformed merely because it was considered good form, Samuel Johnson held on to all the traditional beliefs of Christianity and proved them in rational argument. His methods of defense for Christianity will be noted later in the discussion of Boswell's Life of Johnson.

Johnson, like most of the eighteenth-century philosophers, was chiefly interested in moral and ethical questions. Science had given man a knowledge of the universe and many

\[24\text{Ibid., No. 7.} \quad 25\text{Boswell, Op. Cit., p. 461.}\]
theories developed from the attempt to harmonize the conduct of man with the rational world. Johnson frequently appealed to reason in regard to theory and recognized that "the threads of reasoning, on which truth is suspended, are frequently drawn to such subtlety, that common eyes cannot perceive and common sensibility cannot feel them." 26 He saw the futility of trying to construct any theory of morality based on science because "in moral discussions, it is to be remembered that many impediments obstruct our practice, which very easily give way to theory." 27 Thus, again, Johnson, the realist, rejects the flimsy and accepts only the concrete which is attainable by the method of trial and error.

In the ninety-fifth number of The Rambler, Johnson satirizes skepticism, which he terms an intellectual malady. The following quotation from Francis introduces this very amusing essay:

A fugitive from heav'n and prayer
I mock'd at all religious fear,
   Deep science'd in the mazy lore
Of mad philosophy; but now
Hoist sail, and back my voyage plow
   To that blest harbour, which I left before. 28

By the allegorical creation of Pertinax, Johnson describes the typical skepticism. Pertinax, the skeptic, could take

26 Rambler, No. 13. 27 Ibid., No. 14.
28 Ibid., No. 95.
either side of a question and by contrivances prove his point. His opinions were always against the established rule whether in science, politics, or religion. He applied himself to such perplexing topics as "matter and motion, time and space, identity and infinity." Johnson's deep sense of humor is revealed in the following declaration: "I was equally able and equally willing to maintain the system of Newton or Descartes, and favored occasionally the hypothesis of Ptolemy, or that of Copernicus. I sometimes exalted vegetables to sense, and sometimes degraded animals to mechanism..." He continued by saying:

To every acknowledged fact I found innumerable objections; for it was my rule, to judge of history only by abstracted probability, and therefore I made no scruple of bidding defiance to testimony. I have more than once questioned the existence of Alexander the Great; and having demonstrated the folly of erecting edifices like the pyramids of Egypt, I frequently hinted my suspicion that the world had been long deceived, and that they were to be found only in the narratives of travellers.

The story of Pertinax reminds one of Johnson's own confession that when a boy he often took the wrong side of a question for the sake of argument. In later life he frequently employed a laxity in talk to squelch his opponent, but when not talking for victory, Johnson stayed on the conservative side and advocated the status quo.

29 Ibid. 30 Ibid. 31 Ibid.
Johnson, who could see the errors of philosophical discourse, wrote many home-truths during the eighteenth century, which if followed today would make man a more sociable creature. A man who has endured hardness, who has been acquainted with sorrows, is sometimes hardened into insensibility, but this cannot be said of Johnson. After receiving his modest pension he gave freely to the poor. He added to his household queer, infirm, destitute, and quarrelsome old dependents, and endured them to the end of their lives or his own. On the hard inhospitable cobble of Fleet Street and the Strand he found poor harlots starving, took them to taverns, fed them, and heard their tales. Knowing the practices of charity in his own life, one feels no surprise when Johnson writes of the duties of man to society. He says that "the great end of society is mutual beneficence."\(^{32}\) Man should not be insensible to every spectacle of distress; men are designated for the succor and comfort of each other. Johnson ridicules the philosophers and scientists who spend all their time in abstract studies and lose touch with humanity. In Rasselas Johnson uses the story of the astronomer to prove that it is only through contact with society that individuals ever attain any considerable degree of happiness. The abstraction of study often produces a callousness that incapacitates the individual for any fulfillment of his

\(^{32}\text{Ibid.}, \text{ No. 56.}\)
duties to society. In *The Rambler* Johnson uses the story of a man of science to prove his point. Upon hearing that his brother had been shipwrecked, and had swum to land without the necessities of life, the scientist exclaimed: "Naked and destitute! . . . reach down the last volume of meteorological observations, extract an exact account of the wind, and note it carefully in the diary of the weather." 33

Johnson often expressed his love of London society, and no wonder, when one considers the bulky frame of this moral teacher surrounded by fond admiring friends. He was able and willing to converse with the highest or lowest form of social being, and writes that "to hear complaints with patience, even when complaints are vain, is one of the duties of friendship." 34 If man expects to be forgiven his mistakes, he must be able to forgive others theirs. This is a duty based not only on social benevolence but upon the plan of salvation. Man also owes more to society than charity and benevolence. Each individual owes to the world his best in whatever profession he chooses. He says:

> Every man, from the highest to the lowest station, ought to warm his heart, and animate his endeavours with the hopes of being useful to the world, by advancing the art which it is his lot to exercise, and for that end he must necessarily consider the whole extent of its application, and the whole weight of its importance. 35

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Johnson repeats this idea of duty to society when he says:

There are qualities in the products of nature yet undiscovered, and combinations in the powers of art yet untried. It is the duty of every man to endeavour that something may be added by his industry to the hereditary aggregate of knowledge and happiness. To add much can indeed be the lot of few, but to add something, however little, every one may hope; and of every honest endeavour, it is certain, that, however unsuccessful, it will be at last rewarded. 36

Johnson was not in the least addicted to a vapid and meaningless benevolence towards the race at large. He expected man to shoulder his own burdens, and by diligent application rise in the world. He says: "Let a man give application; and depend upon it he will soon get above a despicable state of helplessness, and attain the power of acting for himself." 37 This was the typical attitude of the eighteenth century toward society. If a man could not make an honest living, he was expected to take to the highway and make his livelihood as best he could; but toward the unfortunate and the outcast, Johnson’s own wretchedness made him infinitely pitiful and tender.

In his theory of education, Johnson once more requires vigorous labor. As in every other social or moral question, he distrusted the trend toward liberalism. He objected to the theories of Locke and Milton, 38 recommended theology, 39

36 Ibid., No. 129. 37 Boswell, op. cit., p. 965.
38 Ibid., p. 449. 39 Ibid., p. 286.
Latin and Greek,\textsuperscript{40} and preferred books to lectures as a means of instruction. In a very satirical essay Johnson traced the education of a fop. The young son was not allowed to attend the common grammar school and associate with other children, but was given private instruction by a tutor of poor conversation and little wisdom. There was very little knowledge taught except the proper manners expected in society, recognition of the latest fashion, and observation of any deviation from the fashionable. As a result of his limited knowledge, in later years the supposedly educated young man found no place in society for which he was fitted,

Scholars often frightened students from the choice studies by describing them as too difficult, not worth the time required to learn, or as unsuited to the personality of the pupil. Johnson disapproved of this because "the same soil will, with different culture, afford different products."\textsuperscript{41} He believed that by application and perseverance one person might learn one art or grace as well as he could learn another. Knowledge and education require diligent albor; of these Johnson said that "every man who proposes to grow eminent by learning, should carry in his mind the difficulty of excellence, and the force of industry; and that fame is not conferred but as the recompense of labour, and that labour vigorously continued has not often failed of its reward."\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{40}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 276. \textsuperscript{41}\textit{Hamblen}, No. 20.

\textsuperscript{42}\textit{Ibid.}, No. 25.
Johnson was the last defender of the neo-classical period of literature. The period is so named because its ideas were drawn largely from contemporary French attitudes and from the Roman Horace rather than directly from the Greeks. Neo-classicism represents a reaction against the imaginative and the emotional enthusiasm of the Renaissance. Johnson, as typical of the neo-classic critic accepted imitation in the sense of copying illustrious models in the various types of poetry. He did not believe that imitation should replace genius; but an adherence to classical modes was considered a safe method of avoiding literary vices and attaining virtues. Johnson desired adherence to literary rules which were clear and reasonable. Fiction called for order, logic, and accuracy. Because of Johnson's belief that all writing should aim at elevating the morals of man, he disliked those writers of the day who copied from the ancients. He said that the ancient writers echoed the songs of the bacchanals and repeated the maxims of debauchery; they were not teachers of morality and were very little concerned with reason. The purpose of any writer, ancient or modern, should be to improve morality.

The popularity of Roderick Random and Tom Jones, which were published about the time of The Rambler, was the occasion of an essay in which Johnson expresses his admiration for this fiction that allows no antiquated images. But he insists that even fiction should be written not only for
entertainment, but for the portrayal of characters from
which young people, the most common readers of the novel,
can easily derive moral benefit. Of fiction Johnson says:

It is . . . not a sufficient vindication of a
character, that it is drawn as it appears; for many
characters ought never to be drawn: nor of a narra-
tive, that the train of events is agreeable to observ-
ervation and experience; for that observation which is
called knowledge of the world, will be found much more
frequently to make men cunning than good. The purpose
of these writings is surely not only to shew mankind,
but to provide that they may be seen hereafter with
less hazard; to teach the means of avoiding the snares
which are laid by Treachery for Innocence, without
infusing any wish for that superiority with which the
betrayer flatters his vanity; to give the power of
counteracting fraud, without the temptation to practice
it; to initiate youth by mock encounters in the art of
necessary defence, and to increase prudence without
impairing virtue. 43

Although this is the picture of an exacting critic not satis-
fied with the actual portrayal of life, but expecting also
an obvious lesson, it is at the same time an example of the
genuineness, the sincerity of the great moralist.

In speaking of the historian Johnson refutes the assump-
tion that a simple narrative is artless or that the writing
of history is a simple task. He enumerates the difficulty
faced by writers of philosophy, poetry and fiction that are
not common to the historian, yet few great histories have
ever been written. Johnson, the critic, then proceeds to
evaluate. He says:

The attempt of Raleigh is deservedly celebrated
for the labour of his researches, and the elegance of
his style; but he has endeavoured to exert his judgment

43 Ibid., No. 4.
more than his genius, to select facts, rather than
dorn them; and has produced an historical dissertation,
but seldom risen to the majesty of history.\footnote{44}

While he concludes that most history is no more than a
chronological memo of facts, Johnson seems to distrust the
opinions of the historian. He says:

We must consider how very little history there is;
I mean real authentick history. That certain Kings
reigned, and certain battles were fought, we can depend
upon as true; but all the colouring, all the philoso-
phy of history is conjecture.\footnote{45}

Johnson had a great respect for biography as a form of lit-
erature. The biographer was expected like the historian to
do more than simply record chronological facts concerning
his subject. Every life is worth recording because some-
thing may be learned from the failures and successes of
each. If biography is written merely to eulogize, then all
characters become the same except for a few differences in
circumstances. However, at times, it is questionable whether
or not a character should be portrayed in his exact like-
ness, for there is the fear that his limitations may have
undue influence on the reader. One is reminded of Johnson's
attitude toward the characters of fiction when he says:

The question is, whether or not a man's vices
should be mentioned; for instance, whether it should be
mentioned that Addison and Parnell drank too freely;
for people will probably more easily indulge in drink-
ing from knowing this; so that more ill may be done
by example, than good by telling the whole truth.\footnote{46}

\footnote{44}Ibid., No. 122 \footnote{45}Boswell, op. cit., p. 536.
\footnote{46}Ibid., p. 717.
Here is an example of Johnson contradicting his own statement, for upon another occasion he says:

If a man is to write a Panegyric, he may keep vices out of sight; but if he professes to write a Life, he must represent it really as it was... It would produce an instructive caution to avoid drinking, when it was seen, that even the learning and genius of Parnell could be debased by it.⁴⁷

If one is inclined to censor Johnson for his contradictory statements, it must be remembered that the question evolving in his mind was which method of treatment best conveys a moral. This is not necessarily an example of Johnson's arguing to win, but it is the rationalist weighing both sides with a sincere interest in raising the morals of the reading public.

In his criticism of Samson Agonistes the Rambler recalled the requirements of a tragedy as laid down by Aristotle. A tragedy should contain a beginning, middle, and end. Johnson recognized this as a requirement of any composition. He says:

It must begin, where it may be made intelligible without introduction; and end, where the mind is left in repose, without expectation of any farther event. The intermediate passages must join the last effect to the first cause, by a regular and unbroken concatenation; nothing must be therefore inserted which does not apparently arise from something foregoing, and properly make way for something that succeeds it.⁴⁸

According to Johnson, even Aristotle could not disprove that Milton's tragedy had a beginning and end, but he says:

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 718. ⁴⁸Rambler, No. 139.
It must be allowed to want a middle, since nothing passes between the first act and the last, that either hastens or delays the death of Samson. The whole drama, if its superfluities were cut off, would scarcely fill a single act; yet this is the tragedy which ignorance has admired, and bigotry applauded.49

As a literary critic Johnson seems severe, at times even harsh, but even so, one is aware that his opinions are genuine, his desires are for the elevation of the English language and for the improvement of the morals of society. In the first volume of The Rambler Johnson presented an allegory on criticism in which Time passed his sentence at leisure without any regard to the determinations of Flattery and Malevolence; thus, time is the only true test of literature.

The Rambler excludes much of Johnson's opinions on the proper form of government, but when references are made to that topic, he uses time and experience again as in literature to justify his belief in an authoritarian form. The eighteenth century had what he thought was a fair and comfortably proved system, and as long as the established order was still workable there could be no need for change. He thought it unwise to upset the whole social order just because a few of its parts might be defective. Johnson considered the welfare of the whole state rather than that of the individual. Not having the romantic view of man's natural piety, he believed with Hamilton that the proper

49 Ibid., No. 139.
form of government was a centralized one with the powers vested in the hands of the few. He distrusted the masses and believed that the theory of subordination was in accordance with the laws of nature because "it is impossible to fall into any company where there is not some regular and established subordination." 50 It is futile to try to establish rank by the usefulness of a man's occupation. Johnson said:

If we estimate dignity by immediate usefulness, agriculture is undoubtedly the first and noblest science; yet we see the plough driven, the clod broken, the manure spread, the seeds scattered, and the harvest reaped, by men whom those that feed upon their industry will never be persuaded to admit into the same rank with heroes, or with sages; and who, after all the confessions which truth may extort in favour of their occupation, must be content to fill up the lowest class of the commonwealth, to form the base of the pyramid of subordination, and lie buried in obscurity themselves, while they support all that is splendid, conspicuous, or exalted. 51

The lower class then serves the select few and gives them leisure to pursue matters necessitating reason. The intellect of the few compensates for the penury of the masses. Because only a few are vigilant, power invariably tends toward the minority and eventually contracts until it is centered in a single personality. It must not be supposed that Johnson stood for despotism. He believed that if the vested authority misused its power the people had a right to

50 Ibid., No. 31.
51 Ibid., No. 145; Boswell, op. cit., p. 271.
demand a change. He doubted that any form of government whether of the few or many, in monarchies or commonwealth, would ever superintend its individuals to the extent of restraining their personal conduct. Johnson's writings during the early part of the eighteenth century are filled with acid attacks upon the laxity of the national politics.

His contempt is expressed in the *Vanity of Human Wishes*:

Through Freedom's sons no more remonstrance rings,  
Degraded nobles and controlling kings;  
Our supple tribes repress their patriot threats,  
And ask no questions but the price of votes;  
With weeky libels and septennial ale,  
Their wish is full to riot and to rail. 52

With the fall of Walpole Johnson's violence seems to have been somewhat abated; he could then write these lines contributed to *The Traveller*:

In every government, though terrors reign,  
Though tyrant kings, or tyrant laws restrain,  
How small, of all that human hearts endure,  
That part which laws or kings can cause or cure.  
Still to ourselves in every place consign'd,  
Our own felicity we make or find. 53

Johnson, siding with the central government, was during the eighteenth century considered a conservative in advocating order, authority, and stability. Today his authoritarian ideas seem tyrannical. How very much opposed Johnson was to allowing the free inclinations of the masses! He could see no short way to happiness; society would never benefit from

52 *Vanity of Human Wishes*, lines 93-98.
the free play of its citizens because the individual could never be trusted to do what is best for society as a whole. Johnson's opinions are the very antithesis of Adam Smith's theory of *laissez-faire* and of Rousseau's theory of democracy.

Despite his avid objection to the eighteenth-century trends toward democracy, Johnson's love of personal liberty prevails throughout *The Rambler*. It was a common practice in this century for a writer of little means to attach himself to a patron who had been financially blessed; the dislike for these patrons of literature seemed to have developed to near an obsession with Doctor Johnson. Several numbers of *The Rambler* are devoted to the miseries of a writer when obliged to listen and adhere to the advice of patrons. Johnson considered this an injustice to reason and human understanding. To become an adherent of the patron was to sell personal independence and thus become involved in slavery. Number ninety-one of *The Rambler* is introduced by the following lines:

To court the great ones, and to soothe their pride,
Seems a sweet task to those that never tried;
But those that have, know well that danger's near. 54

In the same essay Johnson treats allegorically the miseries of any individual who has to resort to the patron for aid. Patronage resided on Parnassus and at first dealt out fortune according to Justice and Truth. Hope was always

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54 *Rambler*, No. 91.
vigilant at the portal. Later Patronage became acquainted with Pride, Falsehood, Flattery, and Caprice; she soon succumbed to these and allowed them to guard the door. Johnson says:

Some were indeed admitted by Caprice, when they least expected it, and heaped by Patronage with the gifts of Fortune, but they were from that time chained to her footstool, and condemned to regulate their lives by her glances and her nods; they seemed proud of their manacles, and seldom complained of any drudgery, however servile, or any affront, however contemptuous; yet they were often, notwithstanding their obedience, seized on a sudden by Caprice, divested of their ornaments, and thrust back into the Hall of Expectation.55

Any student of literature is familiar with Johnson's letter filled with "lofty contempt, and polite, yet keen, satire" addressed to Lord Chesterfield.56 There is no finer example of the proud, no better picture of Johnson's independence or sense of personal freedom than this.

Despite the piety and somewhat severe moral philosophy of Johnson, he still was not sympathetic with the contemporary attacks on luxury or with the belief in the nobility of primitive man. The life of the noble savage might attract attention and recall pleasant scenes of pastoral life, but in the savage state man misses more than he gains. Even if man is corrupted by society, it is only with the association of others, to receive and give assistance, that he can secure any degree of happiness. Living in society, doing his part of the common business, he gains time for

55 Ibid. 56 Boswell, op. cit., p. 158.
intellectual improvement, and experiences the pleasure of reason and reflection. Man's happiness is also increased in proportion to his amount of knowledge; therefore, the man in society has a greater capacity for happiness than the savage who must spend all his time in preservation of life. Johnson employs irony in the twenty-second chapter of Rasselas to put to rout all the ideas of founding a Utopia on earth by reverting to nature. After the prince had asked for an explanation of the words, "live according to nature," the philosopher said:

To live according to nature, is to act always with due regard to the fitness arising from the relations and qualities of causes and effects; to concur with the great and unchangeable scheme of universal felicity; to co-operate with the general disposition and tendency of the present system of things.57

Following this explanation, Johnson says:

The prince soon found that this was one of the sages whom he should understand less, as he heard him longer. He, therefore, bowed, and was silent, and the philosopher, supposing him satisfied, and the rest vanquished, rose up and departed, with the air of a man that had co-operated with the present system.58

Thus, the realist once more attempts to squelch what he considers shams and fantastic notions employed by the idle who have run out of reason.

The philosophers who deified nature and idealized the primitive life came to think of riches as corruptions of society and wrote consistently against the accumulation of

58 Ibid., pp. 74-75.
money. Of these persons Johnson says:

They who are acquainted with these authors need not be told how riches excite pity, contempt, or reproach, whenever they are mentioned; with what numbers of examples the danger of large possessions is illustrated; and how all the powers of reason and eloquence have been exhausted in endeavours to eradicate a desire, which seems to have entrenched itself too strongly in the mind to be driven out...

But the philosophical arguments and the songs of the poets have failed:

Their arguments have been, indeed, so unsuccessful, that I know not whether it can be shown, that by all the wit and reason which this favourite cause has called forth, a single convert was ever made; that even one man has refused to be rich, when to be rich was in his power, from the conviction of the greater happiness of a narrow fortune; or disburthened himself of wealth when he had tried its inquietudeness, merely to enjoy the peace and leisure and security of a mean and unsavied state.

Johnson was too much of a realist to doubt that poverty is an evil, but neither did he lean so far to the other side as to conclude that luxury is the panacea for all unhappiness. Wealth does not produce greatness, for nothing can become great that nature has made small. But its power is such "that it commands the ear of greatness and the eye of beauty, gives spirit to the dull, and authority to the timorous, and leaves him from whom it departs without virtue and without understanding, the sport of caprice, the scoff of insolence, the slaves of meanness, and the pupil of ignorance."

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59 Rambler, No. 58. 60 Ibid., No. 58.
61 Ibid., No. 97.
The dread of poverty and the desire of luxury puts the whole world to revolving. The immediate desire of everyone is to be rich, but the harm comes in the method of procurement and later in its use. Johnson constantly advised Boswell to practice frugality, never to borrow, but to live always within his means. His own life of little means had again taught him the dread of poverty. Johnson thought that Rousseau was dealing in paradoxes and had been led by the desire of attracting attention. In *The Life of Samuel Johnson* Boswell has recorded numerous instances where his subject defended luxury against poverty. Perhaps the best example of his reasoning was provoked by the treatise of Rousseau on the inequality of mankind.\(^{62}\)

The most delightful and amusing essays of *The Rambler* are those in which Johnson is critic of the manners and customs of eighteenth-century life. These essays are often satirical treatments of the affectations of women, and it is interesting to note the raillery with which Johnson views their petty actions. A very delightful treatment of this subject is found in the form of a letter from a young man who had attempted to become better acquainted with his betrothed by asking her to become one of a party on an expedition to view the gardens a few miles from town. The young

\[^{62}\text{Boswell, op. cit., p. 266.}\]
lady found fault with the color of the carriage, the speed of the horses, but upon going faster, was frightened; hence, her affected cowardice resulted in a very unpleasant trip.

In the first essay of volume two, the vanity of women and the jealousy it produces, even between mother and daughter, becomes the subject of an essay in which the gay widow is impatient of the untimely growth of her daughter. Miss Giddy tells the widow of balls, and comedies where others attracted attention only because of her absence. The widow readily threw off her sorrow, followed the rounds of entertainment, and remained in a state of ecstasy until the daughter returned from school a grown young lady and received the compliments formerly bestowed upon the mother.

A letter from a lady that has lost her money gives Johnson the opportunity of moralizing on the eighteenth-century craze for gambling. He writes:

There is no grievance, public or private, of which, since I took upon me the office of a periodical monitor, I have received so many, or so earnest complaints, as of the predominance of play; of a fatal passion for cards and dice, which seems to have overturned, not only the ambition of excellence, but the desire of pleasure; to have extinguished the flames of the lover, as well as of the patriot; and threatens, in its further progress, to destroy all distinctions, both of rank and sex, to corrupt all those classes of our people, whose ancestors have, by their virtue, their industry, or their parsimony, given them the power of living in extravagance, idleness, and vice, and to leave them without knowledge, but of the medley games, and without wishes, but for lucky hands. 63

63 Rambler, No. 15.
The lady complains that her husband has deserted her unmercifully; she can't understand why because she stayed at home, had only six routs, sent out ten packs of cards as invitations to parties, and sent the children off to a nurse to be cared for. She did play at Brag and would have changed to Faro except for the loss of all her money in the former game; having learned no moral from her miserable state she concludes that perhaps she will beat Lady Packer yet. This, and other essays treating of the pride, vanity, and pettiness of the fairer sex are carried to the extreme and become ridiculous, but there is charm because each so truly reflects the peculiarities of women.

Johnson used ridicule again to point out the foibles of men. He introduced Mr. Frolick, who lived in the country and was known to steal and suck eggs, but after living in London, he returned with an air of haughtiness and superiority. He told of great feats of bravery, of innumerable accomplishments while in London, and the following ridiculous paragraph shows Johnson with a lengthy but well balanced sentence once more teaching his moral. Of Frolick he says:

But yet greater is the fame of his understanding than his bravery; for he informs us that he is, at London, the established arbitrator of all points of honour, and the decisive judge of all performances of genius; that no musical performer is in reputation till the opinion of Frolick has ratified his pretensions; that the theatres suspend their sentence till he begins to clap or hiss, in which all are proud to concur; that
no public entertainment has failed or succeeded, but because he opposed or favoured it; that all controversies at the gaming-table are referred to his destinations; that he adjusts the ceremonial at every assembly, and prescribes every fashion of pleasure or of dress. 64

The follies of the time are attacked by Johnson, and he regretted that the polite society spent so much time in the following acquirements:

A complete history of forms, fashions, frolics; of routs, drums, hurricanes, balls, assemblies, ri-dottos, masquerades, auctions, plays, operas, puppet-shows, and bear-gardens; of all those delights which profitably engage the attention of the most sublime characters, and by which they have brought to such amazing perfection the whole art and mystery of passing day after day, week after week, and year after year, without the heavy assistance of any one things that formal creatures are pleased to call useful and necessary. 65

It has been noted that even in the lighter essays Johnson never varied from his purpose of raising the moral sentiments of man. He was rationalist enough to want truths to confirm his beliefs, but he satirized the prevailing scepticism which offered objections to traditional beliefs and establishments without suggesting rational solutions. His piety was based upon the principles of religion to which he securely fastened himself and preached its Christian doctrines. Johnson stayed on the conservative side and advocated authority whether in morals, religion, politics, or

64 ibid., No. 61
65 ibid., No. 100
literature. His position was based on an absolute conviction of its truth. One of the most obvious characteristics of Johnson as portrayed by Boswell is sincerity and genuineness. To complete the picture, the author now turns to Boswell's great biography.
CHAPTER III

THE MORAL PHILOSOPHY OF SAMUEL JOHNSON;
AN EXAMINATION OF BOSWELL'S LIFE OF JOHNSON

Samuel Johnson, the first son of Michael and Sarah Ford Johnson, was born in Lichfield, in Staffordshire, September 18, 1709. His father, though termed a gentleman on the record of St. Mary's parish, was not of gentility. He was a native of Derbyshire who settled in Lichfield as a bookseller and stationer. Michael Johnson suffered from "a weariness of life, an unconcern about those things which agitate the greater part of mankind, and a general sensation of wretchedness"; however, his financial circumstances forced him to be attentive to his shop at Lichfield, and he often traveled to other towns to open shop on market-day. He was considered a fair Latin scholar and was respected enough to be made a magistrate of Lichfield, yet he seems to have been burdened down with debts for the greater part of his life.

Sarah Ford Johnson was a descendant of a line of yeomanry in Warwickshire. Both she and her husband were quite advanced in years at the time of their marriage, and the only other son besides Samuel born to this union was

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Nathanael, who died at the age of twenty-five. Johnson's parents seem to have been poorly matched, for he writes:

My father and mother had not much happiness from each other. They seldom conversed; for my father could not bear to talk of his affairs; and my mother, being unacquainted with books, cared not to talk of anything else. Had my mother been more literate, they had been better companions. She might have sometimes introduced her unwelcome topic with more success, if she could have diversified her conversation. Of business she had no distinct conception; and therefore her discourse was composed only of complaint, fear, and suspicion. Neither of them ever tried to calculate the profits of trade, or the expenses of living. My mother concluded that we were poor, because we lost by some of our trades; but the truth was, that my father, having in the early part of his life contracted debts, never had trade sufficient to enable him to pay them, and to maintain his family: he got something, but not enough.2

Even though his parents possessed no unusual powers of understanding, Samuel Johnson was a precocious child possessing an incredible power of memory which he retained throughout his life. The following incident is proof enough of his infant precocity:

When he was a child in petticoats, and had learnt to read, Mrs. Johnson one morning put the common prayer-book into his hands, pointed to the collect for the day, and said, "Sam, you must get this by heart." She went up stairs, leaving him to study it: but by the time she had reached the second floor, she heard him following her. "What's the matter?" said she. "I can say it," he replied; and repeated it distinctly, though he could not have read it more than twice.3

Dame Oliver, a widow who maintained a school at Lichfield, first taught Johnson English and said that he "was

2Ibid., n. 1 p. 15.
3Ibid., p. 16.
the best scholar she ever had." Little is known of Tom Brown, Johnson's next instructor, but following this obscure teacher, Johnson received for two years instruction in Latin from Mr. Hawkins, undermaster of Lichfield school. He later became a student of Mr. Hunter, the headmaster, who was very severe, often cruel in his methods of punishment. Johnson was well aware that he owed much to Mr. Hunter for his fine knowledge of Latin. He said: "My master whipt me very well. Without that, Sir, I should have done nothing."  

Mr. Hector, a school fellow who knew Johnson well, related the following opinion of Johnson's intellectual vigour. He says:

He seemed to learn by intuition; for though indolence and procrastination were inherent in his constitution, whenever he made an exertion he did more than any one else . . . His favourites used to receive very liberal assistance from him; and such was the submission and deference with which he was treated, such the desire to obtain his regard, that three of the boys, of whom Mr. Hector was sometimes one, used to come in the morning as his humble attendants, and carry him to school. One in the middle stooped, while he sat upon his back, and one on each side supported him; and thus he was borne triumphant.

At the age of fifteen Johnson attended the school of Stourbridge, in Worcestershire, where he acted as assistant to Mr. Wentworth, the headmaster. Of the two grammar schools which he attended, Johnson said, "at once, I learned

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4Ibid., p. 19. 5Ibid., p. 20. 6Ibid., p. 21.
much in the school, but little from the master; in the other, I learnt much from the master, but little in the school."  

After a period of two years Johnson returned home and says that he spent his time loafing in the fields, but he added,

"I would not have you think I was doing nothing then." According to his own account he read "not voyages and travels, but all literature, Sir, all ancient writers, all manly: though but little Greek, only some of Anacreon and Hesiod: but in this irregular manner . . . I had looked into a great many books, which were not commonly known at the Universities, where they seldom read any books but what are put into their hands by their tutors; so that when I came to Oxford, Dr. Adams, now master of Pembroke College, told me, I was the best qualified for the University that he had ever known come there."  

At the age of nineteen Johnson went to Oxford and enrolled as a Commoner of Pembroke College, October 31, 1728. He was tutored by Jordan, and though Johnson respected him, there was very little benefit derived from his instruction. Although Johnson's associates thought him a gay fellow while at Pembroke, Johnson himself said,

"Ah, Sir, I was mad and violent. It was bitterness which they mistook for frolick. I was miserably poor, and I thought to fight my way by my literature and my wit; so I disregarded all power and all authority."  

Because of his financial condition Johnson was forced to withdraw from Pembroke without a degree in December, 1731.

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7 Ibid., p. 22.  
8 Ibid., p. 23.  
9 Ibid., p. 36.
Soon quitting his two attempts at teaching, Johnson began to make his small subsistence by the use of his pen. After his marriage, July 9, 1735, to the widow of Henry Porter, and following the abandonment of his "private academy," Johnson and Garrick in 1737 set out together for London, where Cave, publisher of the Gentleman's Magazine, employed Johnson as a hack writer and general handyman of literature.

It was not until after Johnson had published his more important literary works, London, Life of Savage, The Vanity of Human Wishes, Irene, The Rambler, Dictionary of the English Language, The Idler, and Rasselas, that Boswell made the acquaintance of Dr. Johnson.

James Boswell met the eminent Samuel Johnson in London, May 16, 1763, while visiting with Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Davies. Although the moment of meeting was accidental, Boswell had gone to the city for the expressed purpose of making the acquaintance of Johnson. As Johnson approached, Davies announced the eminent doctor's presence as one might announce the appearance of a ghost, "Look, my Lord, it comes." Boswell was aware of Johnson's prejudice against the Scotch and, attempting pleasantry, said, "Mr. Johnson, ... I do indeed come from Scotland, but I cannot help it." Instead of being soothed or taking the remark as intended, Johnson with his quick wit turned the meaning of the phrase

10Ibid., p. 238.
and retorted, "That, Sir, I find, is what a very great many of your countrymen cannot help." A second time during this first meeting Johnson seemed to delight in "tossing and goring" Boswell so that it seems obvious that if there had not been a determination and resolution on the part of the biographer to make friends, he might have been deterred after his first effort. The second meeting of Boswell and Johnson was on Tuesday, May 24, of the same year when Boswell called at the residence of Johnson, Number one, Inner-Temple-lane. This meeting was much more pleasant than the previous one, for Boswell says, "he received me very courteously,"11 and when other friends left, Johnson asked Boswell to remain.

Boswell at the age of twenty-two had sought out Samuel Johnson when the latter was in his fifty-fourth year. It is well known that the lasting friendship which followed was no accidental thing, but the meeting represents an end to Boswell's search for what was lacking in his own nature. In Johnson he found superior intellect, a heart filled with the reality of human life, and above all a stability of character that was needed by Boswell to improve his own poorly adjusted life. Carlyle says:

On the whole, shall we not say, that Boswell's admiration was well bestowed; that he could have found no soul in all England so worthy of bending down before?

11Ibid., p. 241.
Shall we not say, of this great mournful Johnson too, that he guided his difficult confused existence wisely; led it well, like a right valiant man?\textsuperscript{12}

There is no finer example of hero-worship than the avid attention given by Boswell when Johnson asserted his opinions. Fanny Burney has exaggerated and perhaps been somewhat unkind when she wrote:

The moment that voice burst forth, the attention which it excited in Mr. Boswell amounted almost to pain. His eyes goggled with eagerness; he leant his ear almost on the shoulder of the Doctor; and his mouth dropt open to catch every syllable that might be uttered; nay, he seemed not only to dread losing a word, but to be anxious not to miss a breathing; as if hoping from it, latently, or mystically, some information.\textsuperscript{13}

Even if the picture painted by Miss Burney is an overstatement, it shows with what degree of attention Boswell listened to the minutest details of Johnson's conversational sallies. Boswell recognized a well of knowledge, and never grew tired while in the company of the sage. Boswell writes, "for during all the course of my long intimacy with him, my respectful attention never abated, and my wish to hear him was such, that I constantly watched every dawning of communications from that great and illuminated mind."\textsuperscript{14}

Boswell's first desire was for his own instructional needs, but he also had another purpose in recording Johnson's

\textsuperscript{12}Carlyle, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 405.

\textsuperscript{13}Bronson, Bertrand H., "Boswell's Boswell," \textit{Johnson Agonistes}, pp. 77-78.

\textsuperscript{14}Boswell, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 531.
famous opinions. The second purpose culminated in the Life of Johnson where Boswell has saved from oblivion, and recorded for posterity the dynamic personality of the man who guided him throughout their twenty years of friendship.

In the introduction to the Life of Johnson Boswell enumerates the advantages in his possession which enabled him to record with great accuracy the living drama of Samuel Johnson. He says:

As I had the honour and happiness of enjoying his friendship for upwards of twenty years; as I had the scheme of writing his life constantly in view; as he was well apprised of this circumstance, and from time to time obligingly satisfied my enquiries, by communicating to me the incidents of his early years; as I acquired a facility in recollecting, and was very assiduous in recording, his conversation, of which the extraordinary vigour and vivacity constituted one of the first features of his character; and as I have spared no pains in obtaining materials concerning him, from every quarter where I could discover that they were to be found, and have been favoured with the most liberal communications by his friends; I flatter myself that few biographers have entered upon such a work as this, with more advantages . . . "15

To read Boswell's great work is proof enough that he was particularly apt in using the advantages at hand. He employed the plan of Mason, used in the Memoirs of Gray; narrative is supplied when necessary, but the chronological order of Johnson's life is traced distinctly with the use of Johnson's own letters, notes, and lively conversation. Boswell was correct in valuing his work for "the quantity

15Ibid., p. 7.
it contains of Johnson's conversation; which is universally acknowledged to have been eminently instructive and entertaining..."16 After the completion of his work Boswell was amazed at his own success and wrote: "The stretch of mind and prompt assiduity by which so many conversations were preserved, I myself, at some distance or time, contemplate with wonder..."17 Again Boswell expresses satisfaction with his efforts to write a life: "As it is, I will venture to say that he will be seen in this work more completely than any man who has ever yet lived."18

The story of Boswell's "Guide, Philosopher, and Friend," with whom Boswell never talked but that he became better instructed and more religious, is necessarily the progress of Johnson's mind in matters of a religious and moral nature.

"Johnson's mother attempted to instill in her son that piety and attention to religion that he maintained throughout his life. He related to Boswell that his first notion of a future state was taught him by his mother when he was a little child in bed with her. Heaven was "a place where good people went" and hell, "a place to which bad people went..."19 His mother continued her religious teachings, but Johnson thought very little of her methods:

16Ibid., p. 10.
18Ibid., p. 10.
19Ibid., p. 15.
Sunday (said he) was a heavy day to me when I was a boy. My mother confined me on that day, and made me read 'The Whole Duty of Man,' from a great part of which I could derive no instruction. When, for instance, I had read the chapter on theft, which from my infancy I had been taught was wrong, I was no more convinced that theft was wrong than before; so there was no accession of knowledge. 20

Johnson gave Boswell the following particulars concerning his religious progress:

I fell into an inattention to religion, or an indifference about it, in my ninth year. The church at Lichfield, in which we had a seat, wanted reparation, so I was to go and find a seat in other churches; and having bad eyes, and being awkward about this, I used to go and read in the fields on Sunday. This habit continued till my fourteenth year; and still I find a great reluctance to go to church. I then became a sort of lax talker against religion, for I did not much think against it; and this lasted till I went to Oxford, where it would not be suffered. When at Oxford, I took up Law's 'Serious Call to a Holy Life,' expecting to find it a dull book (as such generally are,) and perhaps to laugh at it. But I found Law quite an overmatch for me; and this was the first occasion of my thinking in earnest of religion, after I became capable of rational enquiry. 21

Following this experience at Oxford and throughout the remainder of his life, Johnson's predominant thoughts were on questions of a religious or moral nature. How very conscientious he was in fulfilling the duties of a Christian is exemplified by his frequent regrets that he has in his practices fallen short of what he ought to do, and by his constant resolves to do better. On the thirteenth of July, 1775, Johnson recorded in his Journal the plan to be followed in reverence of the Sabbath. He resolved:

20 ibid., p. 33. 21 ibid., p. 33.
1. To rise early, and in order to it, to go to
sleep early on Saturday.

2. To use some extraordinary devotion in the morn-
ing.

3. To examine the tenour of my life, and particu-
larly the last week; and to mark my advances in religion,
or recession from it.

4. To read the Scripture methodically with such
helps as are at hand.

5. To go to church twice.

6. To read books of Divinity, either speculative
or practical.

7. To instruct my family.

8. To wear off by meditation any worldly soil con-
tracted in the week. 22

The resolutions are representative of his rigid attention
to a seemingly severe moral philosophy that emphasizes self-
analysis, thereby tending to make Johnson overly critical
of his own conduct. 23

Johnson’s melancholy reflections on death are the re-
sult of his fears that he, in his corporeal life, might
neglect something which is required for ultimate salvation.
When Mrs. Knowles said to him, “The scripture tells us, ‘The
righteous shall have hope in his death,’ Johnson answered:

Yes, Madam; that is he shall not have despair.
But, consider, his hope of salvation must be founded
on the terms on which it is promised that the mediation
of our SAVIOUR shall be applied to us, namely, obedience;
and repentance. But what man can say that his obedience
has been such as he would approve of in another, or
even in himself upon close examination, or that his re-
pentance has not been such as to require being repented
of? No man can be sure that his obedience and repent-
ance will obtain salvation. 23

22 Ibid., p. 183.
23 Ibid., p. 309.
Johnson's apprehension of his own salvation was based upon
the Scripture, and therefore, to him, it was a rational fear. He says:

In general no man can be sure of his acceptance
with God; some, indeed, may have had it revealed to
them. St. Paul, who wrought miracles, may have had a
miracle wrought on himself, and may have obtained super-
natural assurance of pardon, and mercy, and beatitude;
yet St. Paul, though he expresses strong hope, also
expresses fear, lest having preached to others, he him-
selves should be a cast-away.\textsuperscript{24}

Numerous are Johnson's efforts to atone for any of his
neglected duties. He told of once refusing in his early
life to accompany his father to Uttoxeter-market; years later
he says: "I went to Uttoxeter in very bad weather, and stood
for a considerable time bareheaded in the rain, on the spot
where my father's stall used to stand. In contrition I stood
and I hope the penance was expiatory."\textsuperscript{25} A year after the
death of his wife, although there are no recorded instances
of Johnson's neglect of her, he penned the following in his
Prayers and Meditations:

\begin{quote}
O Lord, who givest the grace of repentance, and
hearest the prayers of the penitent, grant that by true
contrition I may obtain forgiveness of all the sins
committed, and of all the duties neglected, in my union
with the wife whom thou hast taken from me; for the
neglect of joint devotion, patient exhortation, and
mild instruction.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

After the death of his mother, January, 1759, Johnson felt
a deep sense of remorse for not having visited Lichfield

\textsuperscript{24}\textit{i.bid.}, p. 988. \textsuperscript{25}\textit{i.bid.}, p. 1159.
\textsuperscript{26}\textit{i.bid.}, p. 141.
for several years previous to her death. Although he had been very solicitous of her condition, often sending letters of extreme reverence, and being quite free in his financial support, Johnson wrote to Miss Porter: "If she were to live again, surely I should behave better to her,... since I cannot repair my faults to her, I hope repentance will efface them."27

Johnson was seriously impressed with a desire to live a religious life even in the vigorous days of young manhood, for he writes in his diary on his twenty-eighth birthday: "Mayest thou, O God, enable me, for JESUS CHRIST'S sake, to spend this in such a manner, that I may receive comfort from it at the hour of death, and in the day of judgment! Amen."28

> Although there are numerous examples of Johnson's pious resolutions, it must not be supposed that he was devoid of indolence in religious practices, or that he always carried out his good intentions. On one occasion he said to Boswell: "I shan't go to prayers to-night; I shall go tomorrow: Whenever I miss church on Sunday, I resolve to go another day. But I do not always do it."29 The great moralist found "a great reluctance to go to church,"30 and often his inherent indolence was at strife with his desire for religious discipline. Johnson attended the church more frequently when

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27Ibid., p. 206.  
28Ibid., p. 34.  
29Ibid., p. 877.  
30Ibid., p. 33.
there were prayers, but no sermon, for since it is easier for most people to listen to a sermon than to concentrate on prayers, he felt that his attendance then would serve as a better example. Here is the moralist teaching, not by the spoken or written word, but by the very example of his own actions. Although Johnson gave an uncommon amount of time to reflective thoughts on religion, he was well aware of the truth that most people spend very little time in attentions to matters of a religious nature. When Seward wondered that there should be people without religion, Johnson answered:

Sir, you need not wonder at this, when you consider how large a proportion of almost every man's life is passed without thinking of it. I myself was for some years totally regardless of religion. It had dropped out of my mind. It was at an early part of my life. Sickness brought it back, and I hope I have never lost it since.31

In every reference that Johnson makes to the period of his life when he ignored religion, he consistently maintains that it was not from an aversion, but merely that his mind was not employed on the matter. At the fourth meeting of Boswell and Johnson, the former related that he had at one time been led to infidelity, but since, had become satisfied with the truth of Christianity as taught by revelation. Johnson immediately shook the hand of Boswell, professed his liking for his future biographer and said "he himself had at one period been

31Ibid., p. 1051.
guilty of a temporary neglect of religion, but that it was not the result of argument, but mere absence of thought."\textsuperscript{32} From the time that Johnson was able to reason on religious matters, he accepted the orthodox beliefs of Christianity and treated with bitterness and sarcasm any attempt to undermine its principle. Speaking of those who denied the truth of Christianity, he said, "It is always easy to be on the negative side."\textsuperscript{33} Johnson often expatiated on the force of testimony, and the futility of being concerned with final causes; of why something was or was not. These objections which are beyond the comprehension of man in his present state, should not cause one to waiver in his faith. Johnson, in his conversation as in the \textit{Rambler}, held on to the concrete and maintained that "human experience, which is constantly contradicting theory, is the great test of truth."\textsuperscript{34} The experiences of a number of great men had led them from infidelity to Christianity, this within itself added to the strong evidences of religion. Johnson says:

\begin{quote}
As to the Christian Religion, Sir, besides the strong evidences which we have for it, there is a balance in its favour from the number of great men who have been convinced of its truth, after a serious consideration of the question. Grotius was an acute man, a lawyer, a man accustomed to examine evidence, and he was convinced. Grotius was not a recluse, but a man of the world, who certainly had no bias to the side of religion. Sir Isaac Newton set out an infidel, and came to be a very firm believer.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 246. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{33}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 259.  
\textsuperscript{34}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 274. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{35}\textit{Ibid.}
Johnson again stresses the weight of testimony when he says:

The Christian religion has very strong evidences. It, indeed, appears in some degree strange to reason; but in History we have undoubted facts, against which, in reasoning a priori, we have more arguments than we have for them, but then, testimony has great weight, and casts the balance. I would recommend to every man whose faith is yet unsettled, Grotius, Dr. Pearson, and Dr. Clarke.36

Johnson did not allow the treatise of Hume’s attack upon miracles to disturb his convictions. He said:

Why, Sir, the great difficulty of proving miracles should make us very cautious in believing them. But let us consider; although God has made nature to operate by certain fixed laws, yet it is not unreasonable to think that he may suspend those laws, in order to establish a system highly advantageous to mankind. Now the Christian religion is a most beneficial system, as it gives us light and certainty where we were before in darkness and doubt. The miracles which prove it are attested by men who had no interest in deceiving us; but who, on the contrary, were told that they should suffer persecution, and did actually lay down their lives in confirmation of the truth of the facts which they asserted. Indeed, for some centuries the heathens did not pretend to deny the miracles; but said they were performed by the aid of evil spirits. This is a circumstance of great weight. Then, Sir, when we take the proofs, derived from prophecies which have been so exactly fulfilled, we have most satisfactory evidence. Supposing a miracle possible, as to which, in my opinion, there can be no doubt, we have as strong evidence for the miracles in support of Christianity, as the nature of the thing admits.37

Boswell expressed a desire to have all the arguments for religion close at hand so that he might not be disturbed by any attacks upon its validity. Johnson answered:

Sir, you cannot answer all objections. You have demonstration for a First Cause: you see he must be good as well as powerful, because there is nothing to make him otherwise, and goodness of itself is preferable. Yet you have against this, what is very certain, the unhappiness of human life. This, however, gives us reason to hope for a future state of compensation, that there may be a perfect system. But of that we were not sure, till we had a positive revelation.38

Johnson's profound belief of the Great First Cause placed him above the deceit and the cobweb philosophy of his day. The theory that "Whatever is, is right," was as true to Johnson as to any other person living in the eighteenth century, but he believed it not so because of any natural order, but because God had willed it to be right.

Boswell, who was always eager to have Johnson defend the Christian beliefs, suggested that it would be advisable in the interest of morality for the eminent Doctor to "knock Hume's and Smith's heads together, and make vain and ostentatious infidelity exceedingly ridiculous."39 Though Johnson never complied with any formal attack on Hume, his conversations indicate with what little respect he regarded the man and his opinions.

Hume, and other sceptical innovators, are vain men, and will gratify themselves at any expense. Truth will not afford sufficient food to their vanity; so they have betaken themselves to error. Truth, Sir, is a cow which will yield such people no more milk, and so they are gone to milk the bull. If I could have allowed myself to gratify my vanity at the expense of truth, what fame

38Ibid., p. 322. 39Ibid., p. 691.
might I have acquired. Everything which Hume has advanced against Christianity had passed through my mind long before he wrote. Always remember this, that after a system is well settled upon positive evidence, a few partial objections ought not to shake it. The human mind is so limited, that it cannot take in all the parts of a subject, so that there may be objections raised against anything. There are objections against a plenum, and objections against a vacuum; yet one of them must certainly be true. 40

Johnson could never follow the airy theories of metaphysics; he saw no short cuts to innovation. He was possessed of a naturally enquiring mind, but he recognized that some truths are above the reach of reason. The established order, "A system built upon the discoveries of a great many minds, is always of more strength, than what is produced by the mere workings of any one mind, which of itself, can do little." 41

Boswell, not so firmly established in his religious faith as Johnson, allowed the vain conceits of single minds to perplex him. He expressed a shock at the infidelity of Hume, who when dying denied religion. Johnson answered:

Why should it shock you, Sir? Hume owned he had never read the New Testament with attention. Here then was a man who had been at no pains to enquire into the truth of religion, and had continually turned his mind the other way. It was not to be expected that the prospect of death would alter his way of thinking unless God should send an angel to set him right. 42

Boswell puzzled over Hume's admitting that "he was no more uneasy to think he should not be after his life, than

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40 Ibid., p. 268-9.
41 Ibid., p. 274.
42 Ibid., p. 716.
that he had not been before he began to exist." Johnson says: "Sir, if he really thinks so, his perceptions are disturbed; he is mad; if he does not think so, he lies. He may tell you, he holds his finger in the flame of a candle, without feeling pain, would you believe him? When he dies, he at least gives up all he has." Boswell always eager to bring Johnson out on the subject expressed the belief that Hume actually suffered no pain when thinking of annihilation. Johnson refutes this opinion:

It was not so, Sir. He had a vanity in being thought easy. It is more probable that he should assume an appearance of ease, than so very improbable a thing should be as a man not afraid of going (as, in spite of his delusive theory, he cannot be sure but he may go), into an unknown state, and not being uneasy at leaving all he knew. And yet you are to consider, that upon his own principle of annihilation he had no motive to speak the truth.

The last sentence of the above quotation expresses the basic idea of Johnson's moral philosophy. As long as Hume rejected any future life, he had no religion; therefore, there could be no motive to promote truth. His principle of annihilation would allow him to speak an untruth because there was no fear of punishment or reward for any deed. If this method of Johnson's reasoning does not suffice in its purposed rejection of falsehood, he leads his friend, Boswell, another step toward reality. Of those persons who deny any fear of

\[42\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 366.}\] \[44\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 717.}\]
death, Johnson says: "It is not true, Sir. Hold a pistol to Foote's breast, or to Hume's breast, and threaten to kill them, and you'll see how they behave."  

His own apprehensions at the thought of death made it impossible for Johnson to believe that any rational person could depart from this life unafraid. He told Boswell that he "never had a moment in which death was not terrible to him." Public death was often met with outward resolution because of the desire for praise, but he continued:

That it is impossible not to be afraid of death; and that those who at the time of dying are not afraid, are not thinking of death, but of applause, or something else, which keeps death out of their sight; so that all men are equally afraid of death when they see it; only some have a power of turning their sight away from it better than others.

When Boswell expressed the opinion that Dr. Dodd seemed composed with expectations of happiness in the future, Johnson would not allow this:

Sir, (said he,) Dr. Dodd would have given both his hands and both his legs to have lived. The better a man is, the more afraid he is of death, having a clearer view of infinite purity.

The last sentence could have been the basis of Johnson's own fears. He, being always attentive to maintain piety, had come nearer to the infinite goodness. Boswell, though not to the extent of Johnson, was also much concerned with the

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46 Ibid., p. 717.  
47 Ibid.
inevitability of death and often questioned Johnson as to the best way of fortifying himself against the dread of its approach. Provoked to passion, Johnson answered:

No, Sir, let it alone. It matters not how a man dies, but how he lives. The act of dying is not of importance, it lasts so short a time . . . A man knows it must be so, and submits. It will do him no good to whine.\textsuperscript{48}

When Boswell attempted to prolong the conversation, Johnson flew into a rage. Such was his distress in reflection upon so horrible a subject that he asked Boswell to leave, requesting that he not return the following day.

In his effort to combat his natural state of melancholy and morbid reflections on death, Johnson continually turns to the eternal and says that "there is but one solid basis of happiness; and that is, the reasonable hope of a happy futurity."\textsuperscript{49} In speculation on the future state, Johnson, as in all other religious questions, opposed anything which was not authorized by the canons of orthodoxy. Boswell recorded a humorous episode brought about by the talk of the possibility of there being a future life for brutes. Johnson objected to such talk and watched for an opportunity to give the gentleman who was advocating so foolish a theory a typical Johnsonian blow:

So, when the poor speculatist, with a serious metaphysical pensive face, addressed him, "But really, Sir, when we see a very sensible dog, we don't know

\textsuperscript{48}Ibid., p. 366. \textsuperscript{49}Ibid., p. 853.
what to think of him," Johnson, rolling with joy at the thought which beamed in his eye, turned quickly round, and replied, "True, Sir: and when we see a very foolish fellow, we don't know what to think of him." He then rose up, strided to the fire, and stood for some time laughing and exulting.50

Great was the pleasure afforded Johnson when, as in this example, he could put in place any person who abandoned established facts to deal in trite speculations.

Speaking seriously on man's condition in the future state, Johnson said, "the happiness of an unembodied spirit will consist in a consciousness of the favour of God, in the contemplation of truth, and in the possession of felicitating ideas."51 He doubted that all things would be made clear immediately after death, but was inclined to believe that Providence will be explained gradually. After Boswell had expressed the hopeful view that although there were strong references in the scripture to an eternity of punishment, probably this was speaking figuratively and that there might be hope that condemnation would not be literal. Johnson spoke with reverence, but not in decisive tone when he answered:

Sir, you are to consider the intention of punishment in a future state. We have no reason to be sure that we shall then be no longer liable to offend against God. We do not know that even the angels are quite in


51 Boswell, op. cit., p. 404.
a state of security; nay, we know that some of them have fallen. It may therefore, perhaps, be necessary, in order to preserve both man and angels in a state of rectitude, that they should have continually before them the punishment of those who have deviated from it; but we may hope that by some other means a fall from rectitude may be prevented. Some of the texts of Scripture upon this subject, are, as you observe, indeed strong; but they may admit of a mitigated interpretation. 52

The belief suggested by Dr. Adams that God is infinitely good, brought from Johnson the following remarks concerning punishment. He said:

That he is infinitely good, as far as the perfection of his nature will allow, I certainly believe; but it is necessary for good upon the whole, that individuals should be punished. As to an individual, therefore, he is not infinitely good; and as I cannot be sure that I have fulfilled the conditions on which salvation is granted, I am afraid I may be one of those who shall be damned! 53

When asked what he meant by damned, Johnson answered passionately, "Sent to Hell, Sir, and punished everlastingly." 54 Dr. Adams said that he did not believe that theory; being excluded from Heaven would be enough punishment. Johnson then said:

Well, Sir, but, if you admit any degree of punishment, there is an end of your argument for infinite goodness simply considered; for, infinite goodness would inflict no punishment whatever. There is no infinite goodness physically considered; morally there is. 55

During this conversation Johnson showed extreme agitation and when it was suggested that he had forgotten the merits

52 Ibid., p. 747. 53 Ibid., p. 1109. 54 Ibid. 55 Ibid.
of the Redeemer, he answered: "Madam, I do not forget the merits of my Redeemer; but my Redeemer has said that he will set some on his right hand and some on his left."56 Being of a melancholy temperament, Johnson at times seemed unable to endure such topics and often asked that there be no more of it. It is consoling for any person to note that although Johnson lived for the greatest part of his life in morbid fear, he did calm all apprehensions before death.

Johnson considered that when men become purely rational as he supposed to be the case in the future life, many of the present friends will no longer be pleasing because they will be seen as they actually are. All relationship is dissolved so that all persons will be regarded in their true light and for their real value. Johnson could never be certain on the passage, but thought that one must suppose the transition to be metaphorical or believe the conception of Purgatory that deceased persons do not immediately attain perfection. The idea of Purgatory as held by the Roman Catholics seemed very rational to him. He says:

Why, Sir, it is a very harmless doctrine. They are of opinion that the generality of mankind are neither so obstinately wicked as to deserve everlasting punishment, nor so good as to merit being admitted into the society of blessed spirits; and therefore that God is graciously pleased to allow a middle state, where they may be purified by certain degrees of suffering. You see, Sir, there is nothing unreasonable in this.57

56 Ibid., p. 110 57 Ibid., p. 365.
Johnson was never emphatic concerning the possibility of a middle state, but Boswell quotes from his Prayers and Meditations to prove that he did suppose such a state existed:

And, O Lord, so far as it may be lawful in me, I commend to thy fatherly goodness the soul of my departed wife; beseeching thee to grant her whatever is best in her present state, and finally to receive her to eternal happiness.58

Although Johnson thought it rational to believe in the existence of Purgatory, he did not believe in compelling others to believe this doctrine, "for it is not revealed."59 He saw nothing wrong in forming conjectures as to future happiness, but he reminded Boswell that "what philosophy suggests to us on this topic is probable; what scripture tells us is certain."60

Johnson, though inquisitive himself, realized that such questions as "Why do you and I exist? Why was this world created? Since it was to be created, why was it not created sooner?"61 could not be answered. There are other questions that need no enquiry such as that of original sin, "for whatever is the cause of human corruption, men are evidently and confessedly so corrupt, that all the laws of heaven and earth are insufficient to restrain them from crimes."62 If it were not for the belief in immortality

crimes would be rampant; no matter how a man may talk he is, whether conscious of it or not, acting under an impression of immortality. Without this impression a man "would cut a throat to fill his pockets." 63

Johnson was a staunch member of the Church of England, and possessed profound beliefs concerning him and other denominations of churches. He preferred the Catholic Church to the Presbyterian because the latter lacked the apostolical ordination; since "it was an apostolical institution, ... it is dangerous to be without it." 64 Johnson accused the Presbyterians of having no form of public worship since there was no prayer in which all could take part. Boswell said that the doctrines of the Presbyterian Church were identical with those of the Church of England; they agree on the thirty-nine articles, different points of faith and even on predestination. Johnson maintained that though the matter of predestination was mentioned in the articles it was done so with as little force as possible. To Johnson the thirty-nine articles seem to have been written rather as articles of peace, not preached against, yet not requiring full acceptance.

Boswell took the negative side on the question of common objections to the Roman Catholic Church in order to hear Johnson's opinions. Since Purgatory is reasonable,

63 Ibid., p. 531.  64 Ibid., p. 564.
Johnson saw no objection to masses for the dead; he maintained that the Catholics did not worship the saints, merely invoked them, and that confession seems a good thing because the scripture says, "confess your faults one to another." He admitted that the practice of the church fell far short of its doctrines. Boswell notes that if in a different mood or if someone had taken the other side of the question, Johnson might have reasoned differently. The following remark shows Johnson in the spirit of opposition. He says:

"In everything in which they differ from us, they are wrong." On this occasion he even objected to the invocation of saints; however, Johnson generally spoke with a great degree of respect when referring to Catholicism.

He saw no objection to a Protestant’s being converted to the Roman Catholic way of thinking. He says:

A man who is converted from Protestantism to Popery, may be sincere; he parts with nothing; he is only superadding to what he already had. But a convert from Popery to Protestantism, gives up so much of what he had held as sacred as anything that he retains; there is so much laceration of mind in such a conversion, that it can hardly be sincere and lasting.

For some individuals Johnson thought the religion of the Catholic church would serve better than the Protestant. He says:

If you join the Papists externally, they will not interrogate you strictly as to your belief in their

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65 Ibid., p. 365.  
66 Ibid., p. 861  
67 Ibid., p. 366.
tenets. No reasoning Papist believes every article of their faith. There is one side on which a good man might be persuaded to embrace it. A good man of a timorous disposition, in great doubt of his acceptance with God, and pretty credulous may be glad to be of a church where there are so many helps to get to heaven. I would be a Papist if I could. I have fear enough; but an obstinate rationality prevents me. I shall never be a Papist, unless on the near approach of death, of which I have a very great terror.68

Evidence has been shown of the sincere desire of Johnson to do everything within his power to assure himself of salvation, but his opinions are always formed after a rational consideration; thus for him the Catholic church was excluded. Upon being told that Reverend Chamberlayne had given up a lucrative position in the Church of England because of his conversion to the Catholic Church, Johnson exclaimed, "God Bless him."69 Though Johnson could not accept that faith himself, he admired any individual who acted according to his own regard for high principles.

Johnson was not so tolerant of the proselyte who left one faith for another more simple in form. This was giving up too much of what one already possessed. He says:

The heathens were easily converted, because they had nothing to give up; but we ought not, without very strong conviction indeed, to desert the religion in which we have been educated. That is the religion given you, the religion in which it may be said Providence has placed you. If you live conscientiously in that religion, you may be safe. But error is dangerous indeed, if you err when you choose a religion for yourself.70

68Ibid., p. 1103. 69Ibid., p. 1102. 70Ibid., p. 811.
Since the Bible is not clear on controversial points Johnson realized that few persons understood more than the essentials; the New Testament is "the most difficult book in the world, for which the study of a life is required."71

The success of the Methodists according to Johnson was due to their plain method of preaching. He says:

To insist against drunkenness as a crime, because it debases reason, the noblest faculty of man, would be of no service to the common people; but to tell them that they may die in a fit of drunkenness, and show them how dreadful that would be, cannot fail to make a deep impression.72

Johnson approved of the homely methods of reaching the common class of people, but he could not accept the Methodists' pretensions to inward light. He says:

If a man pretends to a principle of action of which I can know nothing, nay, not so much as that he has it, but only that he pretends to it; how can I tell what that person may be prompted to do? When a person professes to be governed by a written ascertained law, I can then know where to find him.73

Here again Johnson objects to any elusive theory of action. He accepted the scripture as the written law, held it in such high respect that he would not allow it in secular discussion, and was governed by its precepts.

Johnson was free in his criticism of the various forms of worship, but he agreed that there was very little difference in doctrine or in essential matters; the differences are of no consequence. He says: "For my part, Sir, I think

71Ibid.
72Ibid., p. 277.
73Ibid., p. 380.
all Christians, whether Papists or Protestants, agree in
the essential articles and that their differences are trivial,
and rather political than religious."74

Though Johnson remained a constant Church of England
man, it must be noted that he established friendships with
divines of other churches. Boswell names particularly,
Mr. Hutton and Mr. La Trobe of the Moravians, the English
Benedictines at Paris, the Reverend Thomas Hussey, D. D.
of the Roman Catholic Church, and though Johnson had less
love of the Presbyterians than any other sect, he had a
mutual friendship with the Reverend Dr. James Fordyce.75
It would be incorrect to suppose that because Johnson
accepted the society of individuals who communed with
churches other than his own, that he would allow universal
tolerations. Johnson’s temper neared the state of violence
when in disagreement on any of the fundamental doctrines
of the established church. Such a vital subject could
not be disputed with good humor except by persons who
"were not in earnest as to religion."76 Johnson thought
"that permitting men to preach any opinion contrary to
the doctrine of the established church, tends, in a certain
degree, to lessen the authority of the church, and conse-
sequently, to lessen the influence of religion."77 He goes

74 Ibid., p. 246.
75 Ibid., p. 1188.
76 Ibid., p. 619.
77 Ibid., p. 465.
a step further and says, "you are in a degree hurt by knowing that even one man does not believe." Unless Johnson was not only opposed to toleration, but believed that it is the duty of the state to help regulate or control opinion. He says:

Every society has a right to preserve public peace and order, and therefore has good right to prohibit the propagation of opinions which have a dangerous tendency: To say the magistrate has this right, is using an inadequate word: it is the society for which the magistrate is agent. He may be morally or theologically wrong in restraining the propagation of opinions which he thinks dangerous, but he is politically right."

When it was suggested that every man is entitled to liberty of conscience on questions of a religious nature, therefore the magistrate should have no right to intervene, Johnson continued:

Sir, I agree with you. Every man has a right to liberty of conscience, and with that the magistrate cannot interfere. People confound liberty of thinking with liberty of talking; nay, with liberty of preaching. Every man has a physical right to think as he pleases; for it cannot be discovered how he thinks. He has not a moral right, for he ought to inform himself, and think justly. But, Sir, no member of a society has a right to teach any doctrine contrary to what society holds to be true. The magistrate, I say, may be wrong in what he thinks; but while he thinks himself right, he may and ought to enforce what he thinks.

Dr. Mayo, a dissenting minister, who was listening to the conversation of Johnson suggested that if this be so, truth could never prevail. Johnson replied:

78 Ibid., p. 363.
79 Ibid., p. 461.
80 Ibid., p. 461-2.
Sir, the only method by which religious truth can be established is by martyrdom . . . there is no other way of ascertaining the truth, but by persecution on the one hand and enduring it on the other. 81

While on the subject of toleration someone ventured to ask Johnson if it would be wrong for the magistrate to tolerate those who preached against the doctrine of the Trinity. Johnson because of his own sincere belief in the doctrine, became highly offended and refused to discuss the subject in mixed company, for fear of appearing narrow-minded. In his Prayers and meditations Johnson leaves proof of his complete acceptance of this orthodox view:

O LORD, hear my prayer, for JESUS CHRIST'S sake; to whom with thee and the HOLY GHOST, three persons and one GOD, be all honour and glory, world without end, Amen. 82

Johnson admired the sermons of Dr. Clark except for the fact that he was unorthodox in his opinions concerning the doctrine of the Trinity, "as to which he is a condemned heretic; so one is aware of it." 83 Johnson especially liked Clarke's sermon because they were fuller of the propitiatory sacrifice. While on the subject of vicarious punishment he says:

Nothing could more testify the opposition between the nature of GOD and moral evil, or more amply display his justice, to men and angels, to all orders and successions of beings, than that it was necessary for

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81 Ibid., p. 462.  
82 Ibid., p. 465.  
83 Ibid., p. 775.
the highest and purest nature, even for DIVINITY itself, to pacify the demands of vengeance, by a painful death; of which the natural effect will be, that when justice is appeased, there is a proper place for the exercise of mercy; and that such propitiation shall supply, in some degree, the imperfections of our obedience and the inefficacy of our repentance: for, obedience and repentance, such as we can perform, are still necessary. 84

For salvation of the soul Johnson believed that regardless of good works, one must have faith in the sacrifice. He says:

The peculiar doctrine of Christianity is, that of an universal sacrifice, and perpetual propitiation. Other prophets only proclaimed the will and the threatenings of God. CHRIST satisfied his justice. 85

In addition to the sermons of Dr. Clarke Johnson expressed a love for the sermons of Blair, "though the dog is a Scotchman, and a Presbyterian, and every thing he should not be . . ." 86 He objected, however, to the part where Blair maintains that those who do not feel joy in religion are far from the kingdom of Heaven. He seemed to express his own frame of mind when he contends that fear rather than the love of God often promotes pious living.

It is to be expected of one possessing extreme reverence for religion, as did Johnson, that he should also respect those whose life was spent in its propagation. When he was presented to the Archbishop of York his bow was described "as such a studied elaboration of homage, such an extension

84 Ibid., p. 939.  
85 Ibid.  
86 Ibid., p. 972.
of limb, such a flexion of body, as have seldom or ever been equalled."\textsuperscript{87} He once refused to leave the room before a Doctor of Divinity, saying that he knew his rank did not permit him to do so. His respect demanded that not only from the dignitaries of the Church, but also from the lowliest person there should be exemplary behaviour. Any person who set himself apart for the saving of souls, of impressing minds with the seriousness of sin and its consequences, should maintain that dignity by decorous manners. For this reason Johnson objected to the clergy attending taverns or routs, not because of its immorality but because "when a bishop places himself in a situation where he has no distinct character, and is of no consequence, he degrades the dignity of his order."\textsuperscript{88} Any lessening of respect for the men who stood at the altar was offensive to Johnson, for it would surely lessen the respect for that which they preached.

Johnson's extreme care in choosing no passages for his Dictionary that have a tendency to harm religion or morality is evidence of his sincerest regard for the highest perfection of humanity. He could in no way tolerate the several writers who tended toward infidelity. He vented extreme disapproval of Lord Bolingbroke's works, published by David Mallet. Johnson says:

Sir, he was a scoundrel, and a coward: a scoundrel for charging a blunderbuss against religion and morality;

\textsuperscript{87}Ibid., p. 1038. \textsuperscript{88}Ibid., p. 958.
a coward because he had no resolution to fire it off himself, but left half a crown to a beggarly Scotchman, to draw the trigger after his death! 99

The only writings of Johnson which ever caused him any compunction were the Parliamentary Debates written for the Gentleman's Magazine, 1740-1742. 90 As soon as Johnson discovered that the speeches, often mere fruits of his own imagination, were being imposed upon the public as genuine, he determined to write no more; "for he would not be accessory to the propagation of falsehood." 91 He was equally as conscientious about truth in the most trivial cases. When desiring to be undisturbed in his work, he refused to permit his servant to know that he was home; for "if I accustom a servant to tell a lie for me, have I not reason to apprehend that he will tell many lies for himself." 92 Johnson did not think that all truth is of equal importance, but he feared that if small violations were permitted, larger ones would follow. To Boswell Johnson once said:

Accustom your children constantly to this; if a thing happened at one window, and they when relating it, say that it happened at another, do not let it pass, but instantly check them; you do not know where deviation from truth will end. 93

Truth is often perverted because of inattention or carelessness and Johnson once told Mrs. Thrale, "You have no

99 Ibid., p. 156. 90 Ibid., p. 84.
91 Ibid., p. 65. 92 Ibid., p. 764.
93 Ibid., p. 766.
little anxiety about truth, that you never tax your memory
with the exact thing." He prevailed upon all his friends
to be vigilant against the slightest variation of the truth.
Being very much aware of the prevalence of falsehood, John-
son, upon hearing an extraordinary fact would often say, "It
is not so. Do not tell this again." Being skeptical of the
unusual, and possessing a love of truth, Johnson was always
uncommonly inquisitive in order to discover actual facts.
He was indignant at the imposture of the Cock-lane Ghost, and
not only aided in establishing its falsity but saw that the
truth of the matter was published in the newspaper. Second
appearances was a matter which Boswell could never bring
Johnson positively to accept or reject. He was not willing
to be duped by implicit faith, for he examined rationally
every unusual incident. Johnson had a philosophical mind,
and a rational respect for testimony that made him accept
what was authentically proved. There was difference in
imagineing that one had communicated with a spirit and in
having its appearance established.

But if a form should appear, and a voice should tell
me that a particular man had died at a particular place,
and a particular hour, a fact which I had no apprehension
of, nor any means of knowing, and this fact, with all
its circumstances, should afterwards be unquestionably
proved, I should, in that case be persuaded that I had
supernatural intelligence imparted to me.

94 Ibid., p. 379.  
95 Ibid., p. 346.
Second sight, and other miraculous events "have happened so often, that mankind have agreed to think them not fortuitous." Witches must have existed, for "you have not only the general report and belief, but you have many voluntary solemn confessions." His own opinion seems to have been held in suspension.

It is wonderful that five thousand years have now elapsed since the creation of the world, and still it is undecided whether or not there has ever been an instance of the spirit of any person appearing after death. All argument is against it; but all belief is for it. Johnson could more easily accept stories of the supernatural than the incredible narrations told by the circum-navigators concerning their unusual experiences on remote islands. He once said, "Sir, I never before knew how much I was respected by these gentlemen; they told me none of these things." The fashionable subject of man in the pure state of nature did not in any way appeal to Johnson. It was foolish and absurd to argue for any superiority of the savage life. In the presence of Johnson someone quoted with an air of felicity:

Here am I, free and unrestrained, amidst the rude magnificence of Nature, with this Indian woman by my side, and this gun with which I can procure food when I want it: what more can be desired for human happiness?  

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96 Ibid., p. 306.  
97 Ibid., p. 415.  
98 Ibid., p. 767; Rasselas, Chapter XXXI.  
100 Ibid., p. 447.
Such a declaration could not help but bring out strong objection, and Boswell was not surprised to hear his illustrious friend answer:

Do not allow yourself, Sir, to be imposed upon by such gross absurdity. It is sad stuff; it is brutish. If a bull could speak, he might as well exclaim, Here am I with this cow and this grass; what being can enjoy better felicity? 101

Johnson again denies the superior happiness of the savage life:

Sir, there can be nothing more false. The savages have no bodily advantages beyond those of civilized men. They have no better health; and as to care or mental uneasiness, they are not above it, but below it, like bears. No, Sir; you are not to talk such paradox; let me have no more on’t. It cannot entertain, far less can it instruct. 102

After a gentleman had expressed a desire to go to one of the islands and see man in the state of nature, Johnson replied:

What could you learn, Sir? What can savages tell, but what they themselves have seen? Of the past, or the invisible, they can tell nothing. The inhabitants of Otaheite and New Zealand are not in a state of pure nature; for it is plain they broke off from some other people. Had they grown out of the ground, you might have judged of a state of pure nature. Fabulous people may talk of a mythology being amongst them; but it must be invention. They have once had a religion, which has been gradually debased. And what account of the religion can you suppose to be learnt from savages? Only consider, Sir, our own state; our religion is in a book; we have an order of men whose duty it is to teach it, we have one day in the week set apart for it, and this is in general pretty well observed; Yet ask the first gross men you meet, and hear what they can tell of their religion. 103

101 Ibid. 102 Ibid., p. 548. 103 Ibid., p. 540.
Johnson rejected primitivism with its sentimentalism that stressed the instincts, emotions, and fine sensibilities rather than man's reason. He would allow nothing for natural instinct, but felt that man had to have some foundation, some principle that would promote benevolence.

Not being a sentimentalist, it was natural that the democratic ideas of Rousseau, that fortune and rank are inconsequential, should appear to Johnson as extremely foolish.

If man were savage, living in the woods by himself, this might be true; but in civilised society we all depend upon each other, and our happiness is very much owing to the good opinion of mankind. Now, Sir, in civilised society, external advantages make us more respected. A man with a good coat upon his back meets with a better reception than he who has a bad one. Sir, you may analyse this, and say what is there in it? But that will avail you nothing, for it is a part of a general system. Pound St. Paul's church into atoms, and consider any single atom; it is, to be sure, good for nothing; but, put all these atoms together, and you have St. Paul's church. So it is with human felicity, which is made up of many ingredients, each of which may be shewn to be very insignificant. In civilised society personal merit will not serve you so much as money will. Sir, you may make the experiment. Go into the street, and give one man a lecture on morality, and another a shilling, and see which will respect you most. If you wish only to support nature, Sir William Petty fixes your allowance at three pounds a year; but as times are much altered, let us call it six pounds. This sum will fill your belly, shelter you from the weather, and even get you a strong lasting coat, supposing it to be made of good bull's hide. Now, Sir, all beyond this is artificial, and is desired in order to obtain a greater degree of respect from our fellow-creatures. And, Sir, if six hundred pounds a year procure a man more consequence, and, of course, more happiness than six pounds a year, the same proportion will hold as to six thousand, and so on, as far as opulence can be carried. Perhaps he who has a large fortune may not be so happy as he who has a small one; but that must proceed from other causes than from
his having the large fortune: for, quod erat demonstrandum, he who is rich in a civilised society, must be happier than he who is poor; as riches, if properly used . . . must be productive of the highest advantages. Money, to be sure, of itself is of no use; for its only use is to part with it. Rousseau, and all those who deal in paradoxes, are led away by a childish desire to novelty.104

In addition to gaining respect from society, man with the proper use of money aids those in poverty.

You cannot spend money in luxury without doing good to the poor. Nay, you do more good to them by spending it in luxury, you make them exert industry, whereas by giving it, you keep them idle.106

Johnson's arguments for wealth constantly refer to the power it affords an individual to alleviate misery in others, but he reiterates that it is better to benefit society by spending rather than by giving.

You are much surer that you are doing good when you pay money to those who work, as the recompense of their labour, than when you give money merely in charity.106

Concerning the primitive life and the advantages of wealth Johnson was ever the realist and his practical wisdom never gave way to the airy theories of the day. His benevolence to the poor was not a tearful sentimentalism; "a decent provision for the poor is the true test of civilization,"107 but he did not advocate supporting the poor by doling out material good. Let even the poor be diligent in their efforts and rise to the task of supporting themselves.

104 Ibid., p. 266.
105 Ibid., p. 307.
106 Ibid., p. 644.
107 Ibid., p. 383.
His letters to Boswell are filled with the advice to practice frugality, live within his means, and never become burdened with debt.

Poverty takes away so many means of doing good, and produces so much inability to resist evil, both natural and moral, that it is by all virtuous means to be avoided. Consider a man whose fortune is very narrow; whatever be his rank by birth, or whatever his reputation by intellectual excellence, what can he do or what evil can he prevent? That he cannot help the needy is evident; he has nothing to spare. But, perhaps, his advice or admonition may be useful. His poverty will destroy his influence; many more can find that he is poor, than that he is wise; and few will reverence the understanding that is of so little advantage to its owner. I say nothing of the personal wretchedness of a debtor, which however, has passed into a proverb. Of riches it is not necessary to write the praise. Let it, however, be remembered, that he who has money to spare, has it always in his power to benefit others; and of such power a good man must always be desirous.

One never finds Johnson saying anything in favor of poverty; he came to consider it an evil to be avoided. "Resolve not to be poor; whatever you have, spend less. Poverty is a great enemy to human happiness; it certainly destroys liberty, and it makes some virtues impracticable, and others extremely difficult."

Johnson could claim merit for his constant defense of luxury and his deep respect for rank because of his own mean financial state and obscure abstraction. He was careful to note that his defense was not for any selfish motive, for "no man (said he) who ever lived by literature, has lived

108 Ibid., p. 1010.
109 Ibid., p. 1014.
more independently than I have done."\textsuperscript{110} That he was humbly submissive to the dignitaries of the church has been noted, but his deference did not stop there, for he would "no more deprive a nobleman of his respect than of his money."\textsuperscript{111} But correspondingly Johnson recognized obligations on the other side, too, for he "would behave to a nobleman as I should expect he would behave to me, were I a nobleman and he Sam. Johnson."\textsuperscript{112}

There can be no way of establishing rank by professions for each person would claim his service to society to be the greatest. "Thus, Sir, there would be a perpetual struggle for precedence, were there no fixed invariable rules for the distinction of rank, which creates no jealousy, as it is allowed to be accidental."\textsuperscript{113} Any deviation from rank "should be punished so as to deter others from the same perversion."\textsuperscript{114} Believing that it is one's duty to maintain subordination, Johnson attempted to suppress any vulgar criticism of the manners of the great. "High people . . . are the best; take a hundred ladies of quality, you'll find them better wives, better mothers, more willing to sacrifice their own pleasures to their children than a hundred other women."\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{110}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 374. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{111}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 270. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{112}\textit{Ibid.}. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{113}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 271. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{114}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 514. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{115}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 846.
Johnson, being a staunch believer in subordination as affording the greatest happiness to all, often regretted that reverence for rank had been greatly relaxed during his lifetime. In government the ideas of the patriots and democratic tendencies were threatening the authority of the crown to such an extent that Johnson considered the Whigs "as a mere party distinction under Walpole and the Pelhams, ... no better than the politicks of stock jobbers and the religion of infidels." At the time of the Revolution the Whigs had some principle and what was done then was necessary for "it was become impossible for him (King James the second) to reign any longer in this country." The Revolution was justifiable, "but it broke our constitution," and "the want of an inherent right in the King occasions all this disturbance." When Goldsmith was attempting to argue with Johnson over the well known maxim of the British Constitution that the "King can do no wrong," Johnson answered:

Sir, you are to consider, that in our constitution, according to its true principles, the King is head, he is supreme; he is above everything, and there is no power by which he can be tried. Therefore, it is, Sir, that we hold the King can do no wrong; that whatever may happen to be wrong in government may not be above our reach, by being ascribed to Majesty. Redress is always to be had against oppression, by punishing the immediate agents. The King, though he should command, cannot force a Judge to condemn a man unjustly; therefore it is the

116 Ibid., p. 374.  
117 Ibid., p. 261.  
118 Ibid., p. 1022.
the Judge whom we prosecute and punish. Political institutions are formed upon the consideration of what will most frequently tend to the good of the whole, although now and then exceptions may occur. Thus it is better in general that a nation should have a supreme legislative power, although it may at times be abused. And then, Sir, there is this consideration, that if the abuse be enormous, Nature will rise up, and claiming her original rights, overturn a corrupt political system.119

Boswell was happy to record the last sentence of the preceding quotation because it refutes any opinion that Johnson advocated a tyrannical form of government. It is an admission of his own high spirit of personal freedom. He was at all times opposed to those persons who made a pretension of being patriots while sounding the cry for liberty as a means of securing their own selfish interests, or because of a restless spirit, that Boswell observes is always a negation to any government of authority. Johnson scorned the tendency of laxity in government; "the administration is feeble and timid, and cannot act with that authority and resolution which is necessary."120

The Reverend Doctor Maxwell gave Boswell the following opinion that aptly summarizes Johnson's political views:

In politics he was deemed a Tory, but certainly was not so in the obnoxious or party sense of the term: for while he asserted the legal and salutary prerogatives of the crown, he no less respected the constitutional liberties of the people.

119 Ibid., p. 257.
120 Ibid., p. 530.
He detested the idea of governing by parliamentary corruption, and asserted most strenuously, that a prince steadily and conspicuously pursuing the interests of his people, could not fail of parliamentary concurrence. A prince of ability, he contended, must and should be the directing soul and spirit of his own administration; in short, his own minister, and not the mere head of a party; and then, and not till then, would the royal dignity be sincerely respected.\footnote{Ibid., p. 374.}

Johnson was far from being a Tory in the strict party sense of the term; he could never follow his party right or wrong. To do so "is so remote from native virtue, from scholastick virtue, that a good man must have undergone a great change before he can reconcile himself to such a doctrine."\footnote{Ibid., p. 444.} Boswell has recorded many cryptic remarks directed against the Whigs, but more often than not they are retorts to some derogatory comments aimed at Johnson’s own party. His Toryism seemingly cooled when the spirit of opposition lessened. At one time Johnson retorted "I have always said, the first Whig was the Devil,"\footnote{Ibid., p. 823.} but in his explanation to Boswell of the two parties he gave the following unbiased opinion:

\begin{quote}
A wise Tory and a wise Whig, I believe, will agree. Their principles are the same, though their modes of thinking are different. A high Tory makes government unintelligible: it is lost in the clouds. A violent Whig makes it impracticable: he is for allowing so much liberty to every man, that there is not power enough to govern any man. The prejudice of the Tory is for establishment; the prejudice of the Whig is for innovation.
\end{quote}
A Tory does not wish to give more real power to Government; but that Government should have more reverence. Then they differ as to the church. The Tory is not for giving more legal power to the Clergy, but wishes they should have a considerable influence, founded on the opinion of mankind: the Whig is for limiting and watching them with a narrow jealousy.\textsuperscript{124}

If Johnson has appeared overly strict in his moral, religious, and political code, it was from a sincere desire for the improvement of all humanity. His severity was a genuine effort to combat the laxity of disorganization of his age. His profound belief in the canons of orthodoxy is parallel with his monarchial principles, both of which he never suffered to be questioned. He was jealous of his own personal independence but reverently submissive to authority. His moral code was practical. Common sense and a strict adherence to truth made him a realist. "He stood by the old formulas; . . . but in all formulas that he could stand by, there needed to be a most genuine substance."\textsuperscript{125} His was not an easy life, but one may conclude with Carlyle that he lived it according to his own sound convictions of truth, lived it heroically to the very end.

\textsuperscript{124}ibid., p. 984. \textsuperscript{125}Carlyle, op. cit., p. 401.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Samuel Johnson, a devout Christian member of the Church of England and a Tory with all the prejudices characteristic of that party, lived in an age that was for a number of reasons upsetting every idea for which he stood. Science had Newton for its spokesman, and his new interpretation of nature threw a different light on man, his relation to the cosmos, and latterly on the relationship of individuals one to another. The universe was the perfect creation of God. It was characterized by law, order, and harmony; its laws were fixed and immutable. Since the handiwork of Omnipotence was revealed in an orderly and rational universe, it was supposed that the Creator was a rational being. Nature evidenced a Supreme Power, and if man is to live rationally, he must live according to the laws of nature which are God's laws. Thus, as a result of science, natural religion began to replace traditional Christianity. Nearly all eighteenth century intellectuals agreed "that there was a religion of nature capable of purely rational demonstration."\(^1\) Basically natural religion consisted of "acknowledgment of God's

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existence, duty towards Him and our neighbor, necessity for repentance, future state of rewards and punishments. Beyond these fundamentals there was a dividing point in the consensus of opinion. The orthodox held that revelation is necessary for even natural religion. The Deists, who carried rationalism to its extremity, refuted the need of revelation and believed that after the creation, God's only connection with the universe was to superintend its operation.

Such were the changes at the hands of Newton and science. Locke, accepting the theories of Newton, was equally successful in promoting changes in the opinions concerning human nature. He maintained that experience alone is the only path to knowledge. He asserted the supremacy of reason in directing all action of virtue and morality. His science of human nature attacked the established order of society and religion in the light of what seemed reasonable and rational.

Deism led the eighteenth century into a skepticism that eventually destroyed the precepts of natural religion. Hume was representative of the skeptics as "he did, indeed, destroy all traditional certainties: matter, the soul, God, Nature, causation, miracles." He showed the limitations of reason and stressed instead the perception of the senses.

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3 Ibid., p. 110.
The skeptics denied future life and for a moral code depended upon common sense.

Primitivism resulted from the conception that nature is God's "own codex." Man is by nature good as God intended that he should be. Since man's natural impulses are good, the imperfections are not natural to him but have been effected by perversions of society. "Never, before, in modern times, had the praise of the simple life been sounded quite so eloquently, and with so moving an air of conviction, as by Rousseau."  

Sentimentalism is closely associated with primitivism, for Shaftesbury, its foremost proponent, stressed the innate goodness of man. Sentimentalism, however, maintained that at birth man possessed qualities both good and bad; the good qualities could be cultivated not by reason but rather by a free play of man's fine sensibilities. Man's sensitivity to natural and moral beauty would be sufficient incentive to virtue.

The question of good and evil, settled by the Christian doctrine of the fall, was not in harmony with the new conception of God and nature. The gradation of species, called the chain of being, held that the imperfections of man were due to his relative distance from the finite. Whatever

apparent evil there may be in the system is due merely to
the fact that one cannot have a complete chain at all without
having a gradation from the most excellent to the least ex-
cellent forms of life."

The changed conception of nature and man which directly
affected moral and religious thought was accompanied by a
growing freedom in social, political, and economic fields.
Geographical discoveries stimulated a growth in trade and
commerce that developed a wealthy middle class who displaced
the prestige of the aristocracy and weakened the authority
of the monarchy. All these changes were contrary to the pro-
found desires of Johnson, who desired authority and more au-
thority for both church and state; his conversation was always
an assertion of his strong beliefs.

Johnson's quick wit, command of language, and erudition
made him the supreme conversationalist of the day. He enjoyed
having his talk cut and was equally apt at standing his own,
whether in philosophical discourse or small table talk. Few
attempted to contest with him, for his adversary needed bold-
ness and a great degree of self-command to combat his methods
of argument. The richness of his illustrations often won
him victory. Other of his methods included a flat denial or
a resort to sophistry.

Having a sincere reverence for the Church of England, Johnson refused to tolerate any controversy as to the truth of revealed religion. Any dissent in religion was to him presumptuous and foolish; it was cant that must be squelched at every opportunity. To him it was reasonable that God had suspended the laws of nature to produce miracles in order to reveal His spiritual force to man. Johnson did not think that the goodness of God could be deduced from any harmony or perfect order of the universe. He knew too well that there was, regardless of the reason, more pain than pleasure in man's existence. God was good because there was no reason for His being otherwise. He was infinitely good in relation to all mankind, but the nature of things required that individuals be punished in order to deter all mankind from sin; therefore, in relation to each individual, Johnson doubted the infinite goodness of Omnipotence. His reasoning was far afield from the arguments of Rousseau that man was by nature good, and that therefore, his Creator must be good. Johnson reasoned that sorrows and pains are not because of God's wrath, but because of His mercy. It is His plan of salvation that man stand the test of temptations. If man lives rationally according to the Scripture, which is the Divine Law, his reward is everlasting, but failure to fulfill the duties required means eternal punishment.
Since Johnson placed great stress upon the propitiatory sacrifice, his prayers are always propitiatory. He was never certain that he had complied with all the requirements for a Christian life; therefore, his religion was not a joyous part of his life. Religion was his code of conduct; to destroy Christianity and still expect man to live morally was to him an absurdity. Every person, consciously or not, acts from an impression of immortality. If there were no future life in which happiness and virtue were equated, there could be no rational reason to practice virtue. On every question of a religious nature Johnson constantly maintained the truth of the orthodox beliefs.

Venerating the clergy and the Church of England, Johnson would allow no criticism of either. He did, however, prefer the plain preaching of Methodists to the erudite preaching of the established clergy that often did not reach the common man.

Not only was Johnson a Tory in his desire for respect to the Church and clergy, but his prejudice for the traditional was also characteristic of all his opinions. His mind was not of a subtle or speculative nature; therefore, he was suspicious of any new opinions as being too original to be true. His contempt for the anti-traditional is apparent in his method of refuting Berkely, Hume, Monboddo, and Rousseau; it is even more strikingly apparent in his complete
neglect of Gibbon. Johnson, however, was reluctant to say any phenomenon was impossible unless it implied some obvious metaphysical impossibility. He was even willing to consider belief in ghosts since man had traditionally believed in the appearance of departed spirits.

Johnson would allow nothing for the innate goodness of man or the preference for primitive life. He refused to believe that Rousseau was arguing seriously and saw no reason in Monboddo's speculations. It was foolish to suppose that what man had not known was better than that which he had experienced. Only gross men preferring animal pleasure could ever be happy living in the rude state of nature. Before the primitive man is tampered by society and religious principles, his life is brutish. There is no accumulation of knowledge in primitive life, and since, according to Johnson, man's capacity for happiness is equated with his knowledge and reason, what a foolish notion to suppose that the absence of society and institutions would insure greater happiness.

Not believing in man's natural goodness and consequently distrusting the masses, it is natural that Johnson despised the trends toward republicanism and believed, as did all Tories, in an authoritative form of government. What had happened to the Stuarts at the Revolution was necessary but still a misfortune, for it had weakened the Constitution and destroyed
the influence of the Crown. Jacobitism to Johnson became but a sentimentality, and the best chance for a strong monarchy lay in the support of George III. Johnson's Toryism demanded that there be some supreme power to enforce political and social arrangements. It was the duty of each person to accept his own place in the organization of society. Subordination insured the greatest happiness for all, since it was created by chance and there was no cause for jealousy. Political responsibility should be in the hands of one man. It was obvious to Johnson that any form of government will fall into the hands of corrupt men, but society, if long mistreated, will use its right to revolt.

From the preceding discussion it is obvious that Johnson's strict moral philosophy was based upon his profound conviction of the absolute truths of Christianity and upon his humble submission to the Divine Will of God. His complete acceptance of the Christian doctrine of the fall and subsequent redemption of man settled for him the question of good and evil; therefore, his attitude was contemptuous toward the idea of man's innate goodness that was the basic contention of primitivism and sentimentalism. According to Johnson, virtuous action is the result of no natural impulse, nor is it the result of fine sensibilities that are capable of determining between right and wrong. Man's reason, not his senses, gives him the liberty of choice that is essential
to moral responsibility. Reason alone is not enough to assure virtuous action. Reason must be based upon some established principle; otherwise, man will always act from a purely selfish motive. Religion furnishes that principle, which, when supplemented by man's ability to reason, furnishes the only rational incentive to morality by promising rewards for virtue and punishment for vice. Johnson's bigotry has often been the cause of much criticism, but it must be noted that even his bigotry is a testimony of his sincerity and genuineness. Being human, Johnson was not free from imperfections, but few persons have ever paid stricter attention to religion and morality or done more to raise the moral sentiments of his fellow man than the noble and pious Samuel Johnson.
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