LECTURE ON A MASTER MIND

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I

SWIFT once said the admirers of *Gulliver's Travels* (and we may count him among the most sincere of that party) maintained the book would last as long as the English language. The reason (he said) was that its merit depended not on particular tastes or styles of speech but rather on observations of the essential nature of all human beings (Williams, iii. 226). If other writers near his time aspired to the same immortality, if Dryden, Pope, or Hume hoped their work would be read throughout the world by men who did not make the study of literature a vocation, they too assumed that such fame would have to depend on a revelation of permanent elements in human nature. Yet they disagreed with Swift about the make-up of those elements; and Swift still has readers, while his contemporaries (nearly all of them) have only students. After surviving so long, he may claim at the age of 300 to have fulfilled his prophecy.

This phenomenon would deserve less careful notice if Swift's principles could lay claim to intellectual respectability, if he revealed much sympathy with those philosophical tendencies that connect his own age with the transformations of Western thought that followed the French Revolution—the lines through which we trace the genealogy of our own ideas of the world. But Swift is no whole-hearted spokesman for the Enlightenment. He mistook Newton's law of gravitation for just another fashionable system of nature that would pass with the vortices of Descartes (Davis, xi. 197). He said the account given of man's origin in the Book of Genesis seemed 'most agreeable . . . to probability and reason' (Davis, ix. 264). Swift thought politics the proper business of none but substantial landowners (Davis, x. 134); and he repudiated what we call religious toleration. Hume wrote an eloquent essay defending liberty of the press; nobody sees it now except scholars. But

Swift's argument for censorship of the Press remains available to everyone who reads Part II of *Gulliver's Travels*.

It begins to seem a paradox that so remote a mind should be so attractive to recent generations; and this appearance of paradox grows more seductive as we give in to one of the strong pressures on scholars and critics in our time—the zeal for defining an author in terms that fit the whole range of his collected works, however miscellaneous may be their message. Some at least of you must have heard Blake or Proust, Dickens or Dostoievsky, handled as if each page he published had meaning and value in so far as it partook of an ether clearly and provocatively extracted by an ingenious critic. You must have heard the very young writer identified with the mature genius as if what mattered in the vast range of his accomplishment had existed from start to finish like a ubiquitous essence.

Swift suffered his changes of mind, heart, and style—though he certainly hated to say so. But admirers have united with enemies to manufacture a simple article stamped with his name and consistent throughout. Even learned scholars have chosen particular strands of a long, shifting course, and joined them as if the twisted combination gave us the real man—that is, a Tory journalist who held old-fashioned opinions in religion, philosophy, and politics. This figure the scholars will praise for the biting purity of his literary style or the intensity of his moral realism. But they will also contrast Swift with his forward-looking contemporaries or with the continental movement of the Enlightenment. Our own humanitarian political ideals, the historical concept of human progress, religious toleration, the improvement of the conditions of life through science and technology—these doctrines, the scholar tells us, Swift attacked. Anti-intellectualism, the depravity of human nature, the failure of experimental philosophy, the downward spiral of history—these are some doctrines the scholar calls Swiftian.

And the scholar does not altogether mislead us, though the naked simplicity of his analysis cannot contain an imagination so restless as Swift's. I too can try to build such a frame, and say if we must lay down a single, distinctive proposition as supporting all Swift's turns of doctrine, it might be this: the belief that morality, religion, and politics are inseparable. I suppose a few intelligent men may still cling to the same axiom, and insist that a good statesman must uphold the moral law, or that a healthy nation must rest on one established church.

But those voices are barely audible in our world, and their paucity is the end of two centuries of dwindling numbers. Yet I shall argue that this relentless appeal to morality gives Swift his main advantage over his rivals. His scepticism and his comic imagination may connect him with the Enlightenment; his intolerance opposes it; his moral energy transcends it.

II

I shall not deny that on the ground of his view of the new experimental philosophy—the scientific movement of the seventeenth century—Swift looks defenceless. In his two greatest books he cheerfully ridiculed the Royal Society, established to advance all fields of natural science. He described the writing of Joseph Glanvill, one of the keenest backers of the new philosophy, as 'abominable curious virtuoso stuff' (Williams, i. 30). He called the great Robert Boyle 'a very silly writer' (Davis, v. 271). Although Bishop Berkeley was his own protégé, Swift dismissed the metaphysics of that genius as 'too speculative for me' (Williams, iv. 16).

These positions seem remote enough from Dryden's celebration of Gilbert on magnetism or of Harvey on the circulation of the blood (*To Charleton*). They are exactly contrary to Dryden's praise of the Royal Society, which elected him a fellow a couple of years after its founding (*Annus Mirabilis*, ll. 661–4). It was Dryden who let himself inform Swift's world that a poet 'should be learned in several sciences, and should have a reasonable, philosophical, and in some measure a mathematical head' (*Postscript* to *Notes and Observations on The Empress of Morocco*).

A reassuring comment on these various data might be that Dryden belonged to the generation of Swift's teachers, several of whom, in the cheerful glow of the early Restoration, embraced all the hopes of the new philosophy's heralds. By the time of Swift's manhood the visible accomplishment of the Royal Society looked pale beside the promises of such outriders. But Richard Steele, born in Dublin five years after Swift, shows none of his compatriot's disillusionment. When Steele read Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge*, so far from dismissing the doctrines as too speculative, he made it a point to turn the author into his friend, and persuaded Berkeley to write essays for Steele's new paper *The Guardian* (Winton, pp. 154–6). It remains doubtful how far he appreciated Berkeley's wish to explode the postulates of Newton and Locke. A Cambridge

University mathematician named Whiston attracted Swift's contempt for his eccentric religion and his ill-founded hope of discovering the longitude of ships at sea (Williams, ii. 70, 82). Steele became a patron of Whiston's and helped to arrange a profitable series of lectures by him on mathematical subjects (Winton, pp. 157–8). Steele's early friend Addison praised Descartes' cosmology and Robert Boyle's air pump in a Latin defence of the new philosophy (*Miscellaneous Works*, ed. Guthkelch, ii. 467–9) shortly before Swift ridiculed both in *A Tale of a Tub*. A subtler instance of minds opposed is a book now forgotten outside histories of science but sensational in its own day. This was Thomas Burnet's *Sacred History of the Earth*, an attempt to justify the Biblical story of the flood according to new principles of astronomy and geology. For years Burnet's theory was discussed by scientists as renowned as Newton and as humble as Whiston. Though Swift owned the book (English translation: see Lefanu, p. 270), he has left no mention of the controversy; but Steele praised Burnet in the *Spectator* (nos. 143, 146)—partly, I suppose, because the philosopher had been master of Charterhouse, the school where young Addison first met Steele. On Addison's part we have a Latin panegyric addressed to Burnet and treating his theory as an inspiring example of wholly admirable science (*Works*, ed. Bohn, vi. 583–5). Addison's fondness for such speculations is well known. He took an amateur's pleasure in astronomy, discussed comets in one *Spectator* (no. 101) and the plurality of inhabited worlds in another (no. 519). He knew a bit about Newton's work on the spectrum and realized that spots had been found in the sun (Smithers, p. 273). It was Addison who arranged a meeting between Berkeley and the Newtonian metaphysician Samuel Clarke to discuss phenomenology (Smithers, p. 252).

So it would seem only fair to mark Swift down as blinkered and bigoted in his treatment of the natural sciences. But before reaching a conclusion so tidy, we had better register a few shadows on our group of forward-lookers. Dryden, for example, may have been in touch with the most advanced minds of the Restoration period. He was also the victim of an ancient, pseudo-scientific fraud, astrology. The evidence is substantial, and helps explain the imagery of some of his best poems. In an often-quoted letter Dryden made an astrological prognosis of an illness troubling one of his sons (*Letters*, ed. Ward, pp. 93–4). As for Joseph Glanvill, although he became an outspoken apologist for the new experimental philosophy, he also devoted

two treatises to proving the existence of ghosts and witches. And if we examine the young manhood of Richard Steele, we find him the dupe of no less an illusion, the quack science of alchemy. In fact, Steele took one of his many steps toward financial collapse when he invested borrowed funds in schemes for turning lower metals into gold. It looks therefore as if the very open-mindedness or receptivity essential to the growth of the early scientific movement bordered on the credulity excoriated in Swift's *Digression on Madness*.

What deepens these complexities is that Swift himself went out of his way to debunk false science. It was not the Tory Dean but the first Earl of Shaftesbury, true father of Whiggism and patron of Locke, who put his faith in Dutch astrologers. Swift's *Tale of a Tub* is an arsenal of burlesques of numerology, alchemy, and astrology. Of all Swift's hoaxes the most hilarious was the mock-almanac in which he predicted the death of the star-reader John Partridge. When Swift was angry with Steele, he teased him for his experiments in alchemy and his skill as a fortune-teller (Davis, viii. 19; *Poems*, i. 182). This Swiftian scepticism has rarely been noticed as a sound philosophical position; but it represents the other side of his religious conformity and moral strength. Neither have scholars put enough weight on his mockery of crude, Epicurean atomism, of Cartesian physics, or of the older Scholastic notions of occult causes. During the early eighteenth century this critical view was eminently sound. In fact, the progress of the experimental philosophy in England depended on it. Those who reduce Swift's attitude to an ignorant, capricious dislike of our scientific forebears not only falsify my evidence, but they also ignore his respect for the generalizers of early science, Bacon and Locke. In his comic allegory *The Battle of the Books* Swift takes peculiar care to defend Bacon against an attack by Aristotle. Swift studied Bacon's great work on natural philosophy, *The Advancement of Learning*; he quoted from his *Essays* and admired him as a thinker. Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*—the primer of the Enlightenment—was in use at Swift's college from 1692 (a few years after he was graduated). That masterpiece and Locke's *Treatises of Civil Government*, I believe, decisively influenced Swift's views on the nature of thought and the elements of good government. Neither should we forget that Swift's college tutor, patron, and lifelong friend, St. George Ashe, was a professor of mathematics and a devotee of the new experimental philosophy. Not only was Ashe a contributing

member of the Royal Society, but he helped to found a similar group in Dublin and delivered a public oration glorifying the work such enthusiasts were producing. Swift in his mature years made another fellow of the Royal Society an intimate comrade. This was John Arbuthnot, the amiable doctor and mathematician to whom Pope consecrated the great *Epistle*.

If, therefore, Swift felt dark reservations concerning the value of the budding natural sciences, he also possessed reliable information about them. I do not imply that he deserves praise for his sneers, but I can say they gave him some advantages over the nineteenth-century worshippers of intellectual progress. For example, one of the achievements often praised in Swift's youth, as an advance modern learning had made over ancient philosophy, was the invention of gunpowder. In a famous passage Captain Gulliver offers to explain bombs and cannon balls to the King of Brobdingnag:

> The largest balls thus discharged, would not only destroy whole ranks of an army at once; but sink down ships with a thousand men in each, to the bottom of the sea; and when linked together by a chain, would cut through masts and rigging; divide hundreds of bodies in the middle, and lay all waste before them. We often put this powder into large hollow balls of iron, which would rip up the pavement, tear the houses to pieces, burst and throw splinters on every side, dashing out the brains of all who came near. (Davis, xi. 134, condensed.)

The often-quoted reply of the king opens again the abyss that stretches between Swift and us:

> He was amazed how so impotent and groveling an insect could entertain such inhuman ideas and appear wholly unmoved at all the scenes of desolation, which I had painted as the common effects of those destructive machines; whereof he said, some evil genius, enemy to mankind, must have been the first contriver. (Davis, xi. 134–5, condensed.)

I suggest that Swift's honest, if misguided, resistance to the new experimental philosophy left him at liberty to attack one of its enduring effects, the divorce of morality from knowledge. If he had been more in touch with the mind of Newton or Boyle, he would have shown himself a deeper thinker than he ever became. But with such sympathies, could he have judged as profoundly as he did the ambiguity of their hopes? By rooting himself in an established church, by clinging to traditional morality, he freed himself from the credulity, the optimism, the indifference to consequences that the early exploration of scientific theories required.

III

In accounting for the simple, misleading commonplaces about Swift's relation to natural philosophy, I have compared him with some of his contemporaries. To judge his political philosophy, this method is less useful because in the early eighteenth century British politicians seldom disagreed as to the essentials of their nation's much-praised constitution. To call Swift a Tory is perfectly normal, and the statement that he opposed the Whigs (at least, after he was forty-two years old) seems a self-evident corollary of that truth. If the Whigs as a party stood for one set of principles and the Tories for another, it might be an easy process to work out Swift's political creed. But when he was a child the great political divisions lay between court and country, with the country members suspicious of the royal ministers and eager to keep the king under the rule of Parliament. Of course, the Whig and Tory parties only emerged during the crisis over the Exclusion Bill, near the end of Charles II's reign—when Tories upheld the principle of legitimacy and were solidly backed by the clergy of the Church of England. As members of the Opposition, the Whigs, led by Locke's ambitious Earl of Shaftesbury, worked with the Dissenters, affirmed the authority of Parliament, and tried to narrow the limits of the king's prerogative. In these aims many country members joined them. Shaftesbury's Whigs also tended to line up with the merchants, shopkeepers, and craftsmen of London, promoting the kind of religious liberty that is good for business. Besides benefiting from their church following, the Tories leaned heavily on some aristocrats at court and upon the country gentlemen and squires whose wealth lay in hereditary estates. So it was liberty and trade for the Whigs against church and king for the Tories.

But a bloodless revolution soon confused these beginnings; and then a long, continental war shattered the original distinctions without destroying the old slogans. I must remind you of how 1688 provided a new scene for the drama of party history, with an Anglican queen, a Dutch Reformed king, and a train of Latitudinarian bishops. Under a Calvinist like William III, the episcopal clergy felt less eager to strengthen royal power, while the Whigs hastened to turn courtier, shaking off their ties with Puritan radicalism and relaxing their passion for Parliament; but Swift addressed a panegyric ode to his majesty. While Swift was in his twenties, the principles of the old country

party appeared continually in the issues that troubled the parliaments of William III. Gradually, such slogans as the danger of standing armies and the necessity of frequent elections moved with members of the country party from the Whig to the Tory camp, where Swift eventually joined them. By the time the king died, those two great parties stood for doctrines their founders would hardly have admired. But Swift's first book, published about this time, was a defence of several Whig leaders against a Tory attempt to impeach them. Then, under William's devoutly Anglican sister-in-law, the clergy rallied with the Tories to support the throne with renewed fervour. By this time the Whigs, freed from radical doctrine, were organized around electioneering peers like Wharton and Halifax. They became the party 'not of the freeholder, the yeoman, the artisan, but of aristocracy, high finance, and aggressive commercial expansion' (Plumb, p. xv). Yet their attachment to religious toleration remained definitive, and political liberty was still their watchword. The slogan of the Tories—a less coherent group—might be phrased as church, land, and government above party.

If I pause, it is not because the process stopped here—far from it—but because I have already indicated the range of slippery meanings the familiar labels could hide. Men of fixed principles found their apparent position changing as the parties evolved. Suppose I take Swift after 1714 rather than before: what does it mean to call him a Tory, especially since Tories dwindled into the humblest political consequence during the final thirty years of his life—an era when king, bishops, lords, and commons were swamped by Whigs? I shall not dwell on the notorious fact that political liberty was his favourite slogan, or that he worked continually to improve Irish commerce. Let me just consider how much of a monarchist was Dr. Swift, the denouncer of republics. All his life Swift showed small respect for crowned heads except as the executive power in a three-part constitution of commons, lords, and sovereign. Even delivering a public sermon on the 'royal martyr' Charles I, Swift did not hesitate to say that a king's education is generally worse than that of his subjects—

> by flattery, and idleness, and luxury, and those evil dispositions that early power is apt to give. It is therefore against common sense, that his private personal interest, or pleasure, should be put in the balance with the safety of millions . . . it is for their sakes, not his own, that he is entrusted with the government over them. (Davis, ix. 229.)

In a poem published anonymously, he could fly higher:

> All the vices of a court
> Do but serve to make me sport.
> Shou'd a monkey wear a crown,
> Must I tremble at his frown?
> Could I not, through all his ermine,
> Spy the strutting, chatt'ring vermin?
> Safely write a smart lampoon,
> To expose the brisk baboon?

(A total of six people were arrested and temporarily jailed for the publication of this poem—*Poems*, ii. 629.) Elsewhere about the same time Swift made a favourable comparison of republics with monarchies (Davis, xii. 278).

To assign Swift's political ideas (as distinct from his party ties) to the classification labelled Tory, however qualified, seems less helpful than confusing. But there is a crucial difference between the appeal of Swift's political doctrines and the appeal of his opinions on natural science. Essentially, he felt indifferent to the experimental philosophy, misconstruing its significance and losing any serious interest in it at an early age. Politically, however, he had an insight transcending the wall between Whig and Tory. Any government must be judged, he said, not by the rationality of its structure but by the rulers' care of the people governed. Wherever the well-being of a nation was sacrificed to the advantage of a court, to the will of a king, or to the rigid system of a political theorist, a change of leaders was called for, be that structure what it might. This sympathy with the humblest human creatures is what lives most actively in his work and what makes his voice easy to hear now above the local, temporary quarrels in which he was absorbed during three years of service to a Tory government.

For the deepest issue is always between politics and morality. Liberal idealists today face a nagging problem of ideology because the humble men in whom they wish to lodge political sovereignty possess all the vicious, materialistic desires of the class oppressing them. But Swift never had to assert that hunger ennobles, or that the bulk of the Irish people enjoyed virtues which made them worthy of governing the nation. Government was the last thing he thought them prepared for, and virtue of any sort he hardly expected from a starving, illiterate, Roman Catholic peasantry. All Swift declared was, *salus populi suprema lex*. Men dying for want of bread deserved food not because they were Tories or Whigs, constitutionally or by natural right

entitled to be fed, but because they were suffering brethren. Politics disappear from the dirges he uttered over the desolate condition of Ireland:

> But, alas, among us, where the whole nation itself is almost reduced to beggary by the disadvantages we lye under, and the hardships we are forced to bear; the laziness, ignorance, thoughtlessness, squandering temper, slavish nature, and uncleanly manner of living in the poor Popish natives, together with the cruel oppressions of their landlords, who delight to see their vassals in the dust . . . cruel, oppressing, covetous landlords, expecting that all who live under them should *make bricks without straw*, who grieve and envy when they see a tenant of their own in a whole coat, or able to afford one comfortable meal in a month, by which the spirits of the people are broken, and made for slavery . . . (Davis ix. 209, 201, two passages reversed in order.)

To Hume and the great French leaders of the Enlightenment it was to seem that the age had at last arrived when philosophical investigations, carefully pursued, might begin to discover the true laws of society and tell us what political scheme will make men live justly. To Swift this knowledge had always been available, in Jewish, classical, and Christian moral texts: the problem was why men ignored it. At the end of *Gulliver's Travels* a superb example of this apolitical attitude is the reason Gulliver gives for *not* claiming the nations he has visited as possessions of the British crown—he foresees what would happen if they were colonized, and the prophecy detaches him from either Whig imperialism or Tory clericalism:

> Ships are sent with the first opportunity; the natives driven out or destroyed, their princes tortured to discover their gold; a free license given to all acts of inhumanity and lust; the earth reeking with the blood of its inhabitants: And this execrable crew of butchers employed in so pious an expedition, is a *modern colony* sent to convert and civilize an idolatrous and barbarous people. (Davis xi. 278.)

We have moved now from politics as party lines, past politics as ideology, to politics as morality in action. And here I have a parallel to draw between Swift and his opposite numbers, the free-thinking *philosophes* whose dogmatism shocked Hume. We must respect Diderot, editor of the immense compendium which sums up the Enlightenment, when he describes himself as bursting with indignation at the spectacle of injustice; it could provoke him, said Diderot, to a delirium in which he might kill or destroy (Gay, p. 187). At least as much might be said of Swift, but there are qualifications. The *philosophes* condemned ignorance and superstition for creating the misery

they abhorred; and they stood intellectually apart from the victims of these vices. Diderot exclaimed to Hume, 'Ah, my dear philosopher! Let us weep and wail over the lot of philosophy. We preach wisdom to the deaf, and we are still far indeed from the age of reason.' (17 March 1769, in Gay, p. 20.) What such spirits denounced with furious persistence was either the church they blamed for the plight of society, or else the censorship that kept the *philosophes* from expressing their views freely. Otherwise, they tended to accept the political *status quo* and often enjoyed the favour of the great. Diderot received the patronage of the Czarina Catherine II. It was only *after* returning from Russia that he could pointedly praise the lack of misery and absence of tyranny in Holland; and he never openly attacked the czardom (Wilson, p. 1897, n. 56). It was not till 1780 that he denounced colonialism in language approaching Swift's and then only in unacknowledged insertions in another man's book (Wilson, p. 1897).

Being a career churchman, Swift was both practically and emotionally independent. His deanship of St. Patrick's Cathedral was an irrevocable lifetime preferment. Therefore, he was not chained by a civil employment or pension—as were Hume and Gibbon, Montesquieu and Malesherbes—to the political chariot of unrighteous government. Emotionally, he felt identified with an ecclesiastical institution that supported his moral principles with divine revelation. He needed no speculations about the sources of the moral law. With such security, he could regularly stand back and smile at himself in a way that the *philosophes* enjoyed as well. He immersed himself in his responsibilities as a priest; yet he humorously acknowledged the freakishness of the mind under the wig. The ironic, comic style of his moral appeal is what he shares with men of the Enlightenment, but he does not share the intellectuality that often insulated them from the plight of ignorant serfs. It is in such terms that we may describe Swift's mocking fury as ridiculing himself along with mankind. A modern scholar represents Hume as 'far too cheerful and corpulent to exhaust himself improving the world' (Gay, p. 190). Swift was neither gloomy nor underweight, but he could never keep from improving the world or from smiling at his simplicity in doing so.

IV

A feature of Swift's hatred of imperialism is its link with his religious doctrines. Once again he deserves to be called reactionary. He portrayed his own church as the nearest

approximation to be found anywhere of the pure body of primitive Christianity (Davis, ii. 79). But theology for Swift was never identical with ecclesiastical organization; and he could also separate religion from morality, even though insisting it was essential to morality in all but a handful of men. I should myself argue that precisely as the name of one's political party never reveals one's philosophy of government, so the name of one's church seldom defines one's faith; and no house of Christ has more mansions than the Church of England.

A superficial glance at what Swift published on religion, from his first poems to his last sermons, teaches us how systematically he practised intolerance. For the Roman Catholics he felt contempt; for the Presbyterians and other Protestants who rejected the order of bishops he felt hatred mixed with fear. No office of government, he thought, should be assigned to a man outside the Established Church.

Swift detested the Scots for their Calvinism and the Dutch for their tolerance. He never liked men of the Church of Ireland to go to America, because their emigration would shrink the power of his co-religionists. When French Huguenots were fleeing the persecution of Louis XIV, Swift hated to see them naturalized in England, for they added to the number of Dissenters. He showed the same xenophobia toward the German Protestant refugees of the Palatinate. 'The publick', said Swift, 'was a loser by every individual among them' (Davis, vii. 95).

A summary of Swift's views would not sound very different from the caricature that Fielding drew in Mr. Thwackum: 'When I mention religion, I mean the Christian religion; and not only the Christian religion, but the Protestant religion; and not only the Protestant religion, but the Church of England' (*Tom Jones*, III. iii). But Swift would have pressed on and rejected those members of the Church of England who worked toward a communion with their Nonconformist brethren. He considered Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity* a dangerous book (Davis, ii. 97).

If anyone should try to relax Swift's position into mere orthodoxy and suppose he spoke for his church as a whole, history will tell us he did not. A single notorious instance on the far opposite side will serve as an argument *a fortiori*. This is a book published in 1716 not by a mere priest or a dean but by Bishop Hoadly of Bangor, one of the favourite churchmen of George I.[1]

[1] *A Preservative against the Principles and Practices of the Nonjurors Both in Church and State . . .*

So far from claiming any saving virtue for his own church, Hoadly denied that God might demand as a condition of salvation that a man should belong to any particular communion. He denied that priests held any sacramental power to absolve or pardon other men. And what he affirmed as the solitary standard of true faith was mere sincerity. I need hardly recall whether the bishop was a Whig or a Tory—the Archbishop of Canterbury told Swift's archbishop, William King, he thought Hoadly's doctrines 'the most dangerous of any thing to our Establish'd Church' (letter of 23 May 1717)—but I may say the libertine flourished mightily and climbed to fatter and fatter bishoprics as with an ever-louder voice he magnified the authority of the state over the church.

If we now compare Swift with other writers, our conclusion must remain that his intolerance was old-fashioned. Dryden, brought up as a Puritan, went over to the Church of England, and in his mid-fifties was converted to Roman Catholicism; but in every stage of his career he sought opportunities to ridicule the greed, ambition, and hypocrisy of priests. Addison and Steele, while steady Anglicans, keenly sympathized with the Dissenters. Addison came near being a parson and was drawn to religious speculation all his life; but like Fielding he admired Bishop Hoadly. Steele took the Calvinist King William III as the modern exemplar of a true Christian hero. Defoe, being a Nonconformist himself, naturally pleaded for religious toleration. Pope, as a Roman Catholic, could hardly do otherwise. Whether Hume was an atheist or an agnostic may be debated. That he was no Christian is certain.

And yet even at this stage we can turn the argument completely and dramatically around. Swift's inner faith is a different article from his open churchmanship. We possess eleven of his sermons and many essays he published on ecclesiastical issues. But from his mid-thirties Swift had to fight against a reputation for scandalous impiety, because the religious satire of *A Tale of a Tub* shocked some readers in high places. Thereafter, he took meticulous care to avoid sounding unconventional in public. When we read what he scribbled privately, in pieces kept from the press until he was dead, we come upon disturbing symptoms. How are we possibly to interpret such notes as the following, published posthumously? In one, Swift calls the Nicene Creed a 'confession of faith fit for barbarians' (Davis, xiv. 35, in Latin). Elsewhere, on the possibility of a general communion among Christians of all nations, he astonishingly writes: 'To be able to communicate with all Christians we

come among, is at least to be wished and aimed at as much as we can' (Davis, ii. 105). Here also are some unsettling reflections on the second person of the Trinity:

> To remove opinions fundamental in religion is impossible, and the attempt wicked, whether those opinions be true or false. . . . So, for instance, in the famous doctrine of Christ's divinity. . . . The Christian religion, in the most early times, was proposed to the Jews and heathens, without the article of Christ's divinity. . . . Perhaps, if it were now softened by the Chinese missionaries, the conversion of those infidels would be less difficult. . . . But, in a country already Christian, to bring so fundamental a point of faith into debate, can have no consequences that are not pernicious to morals and public peace. (Davis, ix. 261–2.)

After this it may not seem strange that Swift lamented the effects of the Council of Chalcedon, which completed the definition of the nature of Christ for the orthodox: 'Eheu, quod genus mortalium in ævo illo qui tot dissentiones suscitarent de ista synodo Chalcedonense!' (Davis, xiv. 27.)

Finally, let me quote this well-known but always startling confession:

> I am not answerable to God for the doubts that arise in my own breast, since they are the consequence of that reason which he hath planted in me, if I take care to conceal those doubts from others, if I use my best endeavours to subdue them, and if they have no influence on the conduct on my life. (Davis, ix. 262.)

These minutes suggest a far more flexible outlook than is usually claimed for Swift. It would be a pedestrian error to try to harmonize them with cautious rigidity of his public pronouncements, though even in the private notes he stands at a remote distance from his admirers Voltaire and Bolingbroke. Rather, I suggest that without the shield of strict conformity, Swift's moral energy would have had less scope. It is misleading to envisage his church, the Church of Ireland, as an arrogant institution, exalting her mitred front in courts and parliaments. It was the weak establishment of a small minority among a race of Roman Catholics, in a nation where the Protestants were divided between Dissenters and Anglicans. The church was further undermined by the greed of the Anglican landlords themselves and by the ruthlessness of the government in Westminster. To Swift she appeared in a state of persecution. To support her was to defend a frail but noble person who faced a terrible and rising danger. The case of David Hume seems exactly the reverse. Though he was no *philosophe*, Hume had to live with the Kirk, an aggressive, intolerant establishment that persecuted him and his Moderate friends. To weaken the

Church of Scotland and extend liberty of thought seemed to him a noble act of defiance.

By giving his deepest loyalty to a particular church, which itself was bound to the state, Swift also freed his mind for relentless scepticism in dealing with those other aspects of human nature that excited the kind faith of the *philosophes*. He never thought social institutions corrupt natural benevolence. He never thought the abolition of priests would make us love one another. He was not, therefore, impelled to reform institutions before he worked on men. Even now, while the pitiful objects of our care lie buried in superstition or ignorance, even now we must rush them our aid. He may have expressed contempt for both actual and potential human nature; but contempt never obstructed sympathy. It is in fact this unique persistence in extending help to those who never deserved it that gives Swift his character. This was the urgency he felt, one without serenity or optimism but embodied in comic irony, the laughing despair that his name represents.

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