Samuel Johnson's Sermons: Consolations for the Vacuity of Life

Thomas George Kass
Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/2627

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.
Copyright © 1988 Thomas George Kass
SAMUEL JOHNSON'S SERMONS:
CONSOLATIONS FOR THE VACUITY OF LIFE

by
Thomas George Kass, C.S.V.

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate
School of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
December
1988
(c) 1988, Thomas George Kass
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is a pleasure to thank those who helped me in the research and writing of this dissertation. I am indebted to Professor David Loewenstein for his scholarly precision. I am indebted to Professor Douglas White for his careful reading of my chapters in draft form; his perceptive suggestions for revision prevented the stylistic deficiencies which otherwise would have impaired the persuasiveness of the argument. My major debt of thanks goes to the Director of this dissertation, Professor Thomas Kaminski, for his sound guidance and sensible advice at all stages of the writing. Without Professor Kaminski's availability and encouragement, this dissertation would remain a figment of my idle fancy. I owe those consolations for the vacuity in my life, which have issued from this inquiry, to Professor Thomas Kaminski.

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to the librarians at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University and the Newberry Library in Chicago for their gracious and courteous assistance.

He received his elementary education at St. Ferdinand School in Chicago. His secondary education was completed in 1964 at St. Patrick High School, Chicago. In July, 1964, he entered the Religious Congregation of the Clerics of St. Viator.

Fr. Kass received the degree Bachelor of Arts in English on February 2, 1969, from Loyola University of Chicago. As an undergraduate, Fr. Kass pursued the Honors Program in English.

In September, 1968, he was granted early admission to the graduate program in English at the University of Chicago. Fr. Kass received the degree Master of Arts in English on August 29, 1969, from the University of Chicago.

He taught English at Griffin High School, Springfield, Illinois, from 1969 to 1973. In addition, during these same years, he taught composition at Lincolnland College on a part-time basis.
In September, 1973, he entered Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, where he pursued graduate studies in theology. Fr. Kass received the degree Master of Divinity on May 27, 1976, from Catholic Theological Union; he was ordained a Catholic priest on January 8, 1977.


He collaborated with Nancy C. Dodge in writing Thumpy's Story: A Story of Love and Grief Shared (Springfield: Prairie Lark Press, 1984). Moreover, Fr. Kass' syllabus and lesson plans for his course in English composition were published in A Teacher's Guide to Advanced Placement Courses in English Language and Composition (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1985), 90-98.

In August, 1984, Fr. Kass entered the Ph.D. program in English at Loyola University of Chicago and was awarded a teaching assistantship. On May 2, 1988, he was awarded membership in the National Jesuit Honor Society, Alpha Sigma Nu. In addition, he was awarded the Catherine A. Jarrott Lectureship in English for 1988-89.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: EXPERIENCE: THE CRUCIBLE FOR RELIGION IN JOHNSON'S SERMONS</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: JOHNSON'S SERMONS AND THE NATURE OF MAN</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: JOHNSON'S SERMONS AND THE CONSOLATION OF SALVATION</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR: JOHNSON'S SERMONS AND ENGLISH SERMON STYLE</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE

EXPERIENCE: THE CRUCIBLE FOR RELIGION IN JOHNSON'S SERMONS

I

Even the most cursory reading of Samuel Johnson's writing makes it clear that he was intensely interested in religious and moral issues. Walter Jackson Bate has constructed an extremely lucid analysis of the complex interrelationship between the religious and secular aspects of Samuel Johnson's definition of--and exhortations to--right conduct in the Rambler essays.¹ Bate's analysis is an essential point of departure for this dissertation which focuses on the complexity of that same relationship within Johnson's Sermons. This dissertation will explore the sophisticated interrelationship in the Sermons between the religious and the secular aspects of Johnson's exhortation to right thinking and living as basic for an appreciation of the solace he offers us for the vacuity of life.

Yet, the question remains to be asked: Why a study of Johnson's Sermons? While the study of the religious views and moral philosophy of Johnson has been a subject of great interest for more than two hundred years, few scholars have turned their attention to the Sermons. Since nearly all of Johnson's writing reflects his interest in religion, it would seem logical and worthwhile to consider in some detail the single context, apart from his Prayers and Meditations, which contains his religious views in their most concentrated form.

Johnson believed that the question of what one must do to be saved--"the important question which it becomes every human being to study from the first hour of reason to the last" (Sermon 28, 302)--could be seriously considered only if men could recognize without self-delusion some essential characteristics of their nature: the dangerous sallies of the imagination, the insatiable desires of the will, and man's limited use of reason. I have no doubt that these principles expressed by Johnson in his Sermons can be found in his other works. I make no claim for the uniqueness of the Sermons. Yet, after having said this, I must state that I do find the Sermons different from Johnson's other works because throughout the Sermons he portrays the utter pervasiveness of the vacuity of life. Indeed, the idea that human life is in a special sense "vacuous" may be seen as the starting point
of Samuel Johnson's thought on the diverse aspects of human nature which he treats in the *Sermons*. His basic metaphor for human experience is the empty receptacle which cannot tolerate its own emptiness; it is used in the *Sermons* to describe that very problem which most vexed him—the problem of reconciling the misery and wickedness of the temporal state with the Christian hope of redemption and eternal happiness.

In the *Sermons*, we find no dethroned monarchs, no Abyssinian princes searching the world for the perfect way of life, no famous poets disappointed of a pension. The world of the *Sermons* is largely the world of shopkeepers and merchants; it is a world of middle-class persons with modest ambitions and humble hopes. Johnson shows us that sorrow is sorrow regardless of the social or intellectual sphere it operates in; every man needs sympathy from time to time, needs his hopes encouraged. Most importantly, the *Sermons* demonstrate that religion is efficacious in this world, and that even these ordinary shopkeepers can aspire to salvation and can attain it with as much toil as their superiors.

Johnson's *Sermons* demand an absorbed and reflective reading in which the reader at every point compares his or her own way of living with the life described in the sermon text. Thus, a sermon like *Sermon 12*, on the folly of vanity, will have failed in its effect for someone who
regards it as the sort of thing that happens only to other people. The sermon begins to work only when the reader enters and engages it, associating its analysis with some half-forgotten private experiences and realizing, perhaps with surprise, his or her own susceptibility. Walter Jackson Bate says that "it does not minimize Johnson's criticism or indeed his writing on human experience itself to say that his ultimate greatness lies in the example they provide" (Achievement, 233). Johnson pursues his readers beyond the page, back into the pragmatism of daily life:

If we cast our eyes over the earth, and extend our observations through the system of human beings, what shall we find but scenes of misery and innumerable varieties of calamity and distress, the pains of sickness, the wounds of casualty, the gripings of hunger, and the cold of nakedness; wretches wandering without an habitation, exposed to the contempt of the proud, and the insults of the cruel, goaded forward, by the stings of poverty, to dishonest acts, which perhaps relieve their present misery, only to draw some more dreadful distress upon them. And what are we taught, by all these different states of unhappiness? what, but the necessity of that virtue by which they are relieved; by which the orphan may be supplied with a father, and the widow with a defender; by which nakedness may be clothed, and sickness set free from adventitious pains; the stranger solaced in his wanderings, and the hungry restored to vigour and to ease? (Sermon 19, 207).

The Sermons are not merely relevant for Sundays; rather, Johnson follows the reader into the street, the marketplace, and the coffeehouse as he puts religion to
the test of addressing the practical realities of Monday and Tuesday.

Indeed, Johnson's Sermons fulfill his own description of the didactic function of an author:

The task of an author is, either to teach what is not known, or to recommend known truths, by his manner of adorning them; either to let new light in upon the mind, and open new scenes to the prospect, or to vary the dress and situation of common objects, so as to give them fresh grace and more powerful attractions, to spread such flowers over the regions through which the intellect has already made its progress, as may tempt it to return, and take a second view of things hastily passed over, or negligently regarded.

Either of these labours is very difficult, because, that they may not be fruitless, men must not only be persuaded of their errors, but reconciled to their guide; they must not only confess their ignorance, but, what is still less pleasing, must allow that he from whom they are to learn is more knowing than themselves (Rambler 3, 14-15).

Johnson helps us locate each of the vices he treats in the Sermons somewhere in ourselves. Just how he does this is not immediately clear; the present dissertation will explore some of the strategies Johnson employs for achieving this response from the auditors of his Sermons. For example, he does not confess his own failings in any overt way, nor does he lure us in with many anecdotes or vivid pictures of evil; rather, the Sermons show us with terrible clarity the logic of our personal involvement in sin, tracing its origin in man's nature to its pragmatic
consequences in daily life and never allowing us to feel superior.

Since Johnson's psychological insights into human nature play such an important role in understanding his pragmatic approach to religion in the Sermons, some clarification of the term psychology is in order. In the seventeenth century, the word referred to a study of the doctrine of the soul or the science of spirits. However, by the 1730's, it had taken on its modern sense, being applied to mental processes rather than to a study of spirits.² Kathleen Grange says that

from about 1690 to 1800, psychology was considered to be an account of the intellectual operations of the mind, as in Locke's study of "ideas" in the Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690) or in Charles Bonnet's study of the soul and its faculties in his Essai de psychologie (1754).³

Even more importantly, however, Grange adds that for some thinkers the word psychology included only intellectual operations---"memory, imagination, judgment, reason, and attention"---and was not a study of the emotions which fell under the term moral philosophy (444). While Johnson does not use the word psychology, preferring instead the

² See the term psychology as defined in the Oxford English Dictionary.

phrase, "anatomy of the mind" (Adventurer 95, 427), his understanding of man's nature clearly includes both emotion and intellect. Indeed, in his Preface to Shakespeare, Johnson unites the concepts which Grange artificially distinguishes as psychology and moral philosophy when he describes a science which attempts to analyze the mind, to trace the passions to their sources, to unfold the seminal principles of vice and virtue, or sound the depths of the heart for the motives of action (88).5

The complexity and extensiveness of this description is real and not rhetorical; pursuing an almost Lockean methodology, Johnson included the whole scope of man's attributes in his writings. "The anatomy of the mind, as that of the body," Johnson wrote, "must perpetually exhibit the same appearances" (Adventurer 95, 427) because in spite of the temporary effects of unique events or the arbitrary behavior resulting from accidental customs, "human nature is always the same" (Adventurer 99, 431). Such uniformity permits Johnson to describe human nature--
a profile of man's basic mental constitution together with the underlying motivations for his actions—and when explained appropriately, it also allows ordinary man to understand his temperament, his desires, and his potential for choice and action. Indeed, Johnson says the precept, *know thyself*, is

a dictate, which, in the whole extent of its meaning, may be said to comprise all the speculation requisite to a moral agent. For what more can be necessary to the regulation of life, than the knowledge of our original, our end, our duties, and our relation to other beings? (Rambler 24, 131).

Since, then, "every error in human conduct must arise from ignorance of ourselves," one obligation of Johnson as a sermon writer was to remind his audience about the limitations of human nature. He saw that the actual battleground where the fight against evil and unhappiness takes place was largely a psychological one—in the sense of the term discussed earlier, encompassing both emotion and intellect—a battle over self-inflicted pains and self-created frustrations. As we shall see from an examination of his *Sermons*, the whole realm of Johnson's understanding of human nature included not only man's intellectual and emotional faculties but, as an adjunct, man's spiritual aspirations as well. Indeed, no attentive

6 Johnson frequently points to the psychological basis for unhappiness. See, for example, *Sermons* 1 and 12; *Rambler* 66, 68, 72, and 98.
reader of Johnson has ever doubted the truth of Boswell's assertion that "the history of his mind as to religion is an important article" (Life, I, 67). However, Johnson's modern, almost "existential," understanding of the nature of man in the Sermons, in contrast to the positions reflected by the English homiletic tradition, has not been much considered by contemporary scholars. Moreover, an examination of the pragmatic orientation of the Sermons has been hindered by two marked phenomena in Johnsonian criticism: (1) an inability to separate biographical interest in Johnson from an investigation into his work; (2) a narrow or specialized focus which tends to distort Johnson's assertions regarding the integration he found in human nature. Each of these hindrances bears looking at because, by doing so, we can better discover what specifically remains to be done.

Samuel Johnson has been viewed chiefly as a biographical subject by many critics. Seen by some as unquestionably representative of eighteenth-century England, Johnson has been labeled as the perpetrator or the victim of the shortsightedness and the defects of his age. The contrast between the public and the private Johnson has been generally noted and frequently disparaged as evidence of simplicity rather than complexity. The fact that Boswell defends Johnson against the charge of writing on behalf of a faction and in return for a pension
indicates the fondness with which opponents deliver and even acquaintances adopt *ad hominem* arguments.

The first difficulty, then, in Johnsonian criticism has resulted from an incomplete distinction between "psychologizing by Johnson" and "psychologizing of him." Leopold Damrosch, Jr. has remarked that "the world has never been willing to take Johnson's works apart from their writer," and this has been especially true when the investigation has touched upon psychological matters. Johnson's character and his life--his melancholy, his fears, and his habits--are so interesting in light of modern psychoanalysis that almost any discussion of his writings about human nature quickly focuses upon the author rather than upon the ideas he is presenting.

The phenomenon of shifting the emphasis away from the writings to the author and thus subordinating his philosophy to his biography has taken several different forms. The oldest and most extreme version is that of some writers, many of whom were psychiatrists, who drew upon Johnsonian materials with the goal of diagnosing Johnson's "condition" or "problem" according to the theories of modern psychiatry. Johnson's works were


consulted not in an effort to understand them critically or aesthetically, but for clues by which Johnson himself might be used "as a case history."^9

In his discussion of the apathetic fallacy, historian David Hackett Fischer points out the logical absurdity of insisting upon a psychogenetic basis for other people's ideologies because such a position regards "rational men as if they were not rational," involves "metahistorical doctrines which transcend empiricism" (and are therefore neither provable nor disprovable), and consists of little

more than "motivational special pleading." Furthermore, the ever-present implication that Johnson's ideas are the product of his "problem" verges upon the psychogenetic fallacy; it seeks to subvert an idea by criticizing its origin. For example, Walter B. C. Watkins traces Johnson's understanding of human nature to "a projection of his own personality" (49) and says that Johnson has spun "his own bitter mental experience into the web of wisdom" (59). Rasselas has been seen as autobiographical, with Rasselas, Imlac, and the mad astronomer representing three different aspects of Johnson. The ending of the Vision of Theodore has been called "an eloquent evocation of his [Johnson's] own condition" (Damrosch, 63). Arieh Sachs has argued that "the central assumptions of Johnson's thought gain added depth and force when viewed in terms of Johnson's particular being, in terms, that is, of his biography." Such a shift of attention as this is certainly not unreasonable, but Sachs goes much further,


saying that "the experience of a desperately neurotic man was turned into a generalized scheme of morals and religion which could claim universal validity" (14). Such an assertion, coming early in the book, tends to reduce the integrity of Johnson's ideas, no matter how seriously and judiciously those ideas are examined.

Some of these evaluations do help us to understand Johnson better, and insofar as they touch upon recognizable aspects of his character--such as his melancholy and fear of death--they have value. Yet, to be told that Johnson had an Oedipus complex, for example, leaves us nearly as ignorant as we were before, and a good deal more uncomfortable, because we know the diagnosis was made not from a clinical analysis of the person, but from a selection of anecdotes about him examined two hundred years after he died.

The psychoanalytically-oriented scholars' assertion that Johnson's mental condition gave rise to his thoughts suggests the less speculative critical methodology employed in this dissertation; namely, that Johnson's writings help us to gain at least a general insight into his character. Tracing the results of this hypothesis has yielded productive Johnsonian scholarship over the past twenty-five years.14 The orientation of these critics has

14 For example, see: John Wain, Samuel Johnson: A Biography (New York: Viking Press, 1974); Peter Quennell, Samuel Johnson: His Friends and Enemies (New York:
been extremely useful because it has contributed some credible information about Johnson, and when Johnson drew upon or generalized from his own life, as he often did, this has been helpfully pointed out. Nevertheless, the tendency often has been to lose track of the philosophy through intense scrutiny of its psychological origins. It is essentially unfair to an author to ascribe his views to personal problems or to his need to believe because we then tend to cease taking those ideas seriously. Johnson wrote expressly about this problem:

Those whom the appearance of virtue, or the evidence of genius, have tempted to a nearer knowledge of the writer in whose performances they may be found, have indeed had frequent reason to repent their curiosity; the bubble that sparkled before them has become common water at the touch; the phantom of perfection has vanished when they wished to press it to their bosom (Rambler 14, 74).

Even more significant than this reason is that which Johnson cites in response to the charge of hypocrisy on the part of writers who cannot live as well as they write:

it may be prudent for a writer, who apprehends that he shall not enforce his own maxims by his domestic character, to conceal his name that he may not injure them (Rambler 14, 78).

The coup de grace to all efforts which insisted upon a psychogenetic basis for an individual's ideology was delivered by William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. James termed any attempt to judge an idea on the basis of the author's life "the genetic fallacy." He argued that such a practice was altogether illegitimate and observed that some very sound discoveries in human history were made by individuals whose sanity was sometimes in question. Moreover, James asserted that if an individual attempted to discredit another's religious beliefs on the grounds that they were simply projections of insecurities and fears, he would respond that a lack of belief could be likewise related to hostility toward authority figures.¹⁵

As we shall see, Johnson dramatically anticipated William James' position on "the genetic fallacy." Indeed, Johnson took great pains to keep his own life apart and away from his published works. For example, Walter Jackson Bate, the critical editor of the Yale edition of Johnson's *Rambler* essays, notes that

as he prepared to begin the *Rambler*, he deeply wished the purity and soundness of the work to be free from the prejudices the reader might bring to it if he knew the author (Vol. III, xxv).

Many of his works, like the Rambler, Idler, Adventurer, and Rasselas, were published anonymously; he wrote the sermons for others to preach and publish under their own names.

Indeed, it is important to remember that Samuel Johnson never delivered a sermon. He wrote approximately forty sermons of which twenty-eight are extant. Of these twenty-eight, only two were published in Johnson's lifetime, twenty-five appeared posthumously, and "The Convict's Address to His Unhappy Brethren" appeared in

16 The chief collection of Samuel Johnson's Sermons is known as the Taylor collection. The Reverend John Taylor, a lifelong friend of Johnson's, died in 1788; he left a number of sermons among his personal effects. Johnson wrote one of these sermons for the funeral of his own wife; it was published in 1788 as an octavo pamphlet of eighteen pages, by the Reverend Samuel Hayes [See, A Sermon Written by the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D. for the Funeral of his Wife. Published by the Reverend Samuel Hayes, A.M. Usher of Westminster School. London: printed for T. Cadell, in the Strand, 1788].

In May, 1788, thirteen sermons from the Taylor collection were published in an octavo volume of 285 pages. [See, Sermons on Different Subjects, Left for Publication by John Taylor, LL.D., Late Prebendary of Westminster, Rector of Bosworth, Leicestershire, and Minister of St. Margaret's, Westminster. Published by the Reverend Samuel Hayes, A.M. Usher of Westminster School. London: Printed for T. Cadell, in the Strand, 1788]. In July, 1789, a second octavo volume of 239 pages and containing twelve additional sermons, including the one written by Johnson for the funeral of his wife, was also published by Samuel Hayes. [See, Sermons on Different Subjects, Left for Publication by John Taylor, LL.D., Late Prebendary of Westminster, Rector of Bosworth, Leicestershire, and Minister of St. Margaret's, Westminster. Volume the Second. Published by the Reverend Samuel Hayes, A.M. Late Senior Usher of Westminster School. To which is added, "A Sermon Written by Samuel Johnson, LL.D. for the Funeral of his Wife." London: Printed for T. Cadell, in the Strand, 1789].
print for the first time in the Yale edition of Johnson's sermons.

The first sermon published in Johnson's lifetime was written in 1745 for the Reverend Henry Hervey Aston, a close friend, who delivered it before the Sons of the Clergy;\(^{17}\) the other published sermon was written in 1777 for the Reverend William Dodd, a clergyman awaiting the death sentence to be carried out against him for forgery, who preached it before his fellow prisoners at Newgate.\(^{18}\) The Aston sermon was attributed to Johnson by L. F. Powell,\(^{19}\) and we have Johnson's own acknowledgement of the authorship of the Dodd sermon (Life, III, 141-142.).

There can be no denying that a knowledge of the life of an author, as well as some acquaintance with his age and his contemporaries, can be useful in understanding his work. However, a problem with the psychogenetic approach

\(^{17}\) The Aston sermon was published as an octavo pamphlet of twenty-eight pages. See, Aston, Henry Hervey. A Sermon Preached at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, Before the Sons of the Clergy, On Thursday the Second of May, 1745, Being the Day of their Annual Feast. By the Honourable and Reverend Henry Hervey Aston, A.M. Rector of Shotteley in the County of Suffolk. London: Printed for J. Brindley, Bookseller to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, at the Feathers in New-Bond-Street; and sold by M. Cooper, in Paternoster-Row, 1745.

\(^{18}\) The Dodd sermon was published as an octavo pamphlet of twenty-four pages. See, Dodd, William. The Convict's Address to His Unhappy Brethren. Delivered in the Chapel of Newgate, on Friday, June 6, 1777. London: printed for G. Kearsly, at No. 46, in Fleet-Street, 1777.

to ideology is that it often tends to ignore the empirical evidence suggested by the work itself. The contention of this dissertation is that Johnson's ideas, as found in his sermons, must be taken on their own merits and judged accordingly. They are neither to be accepted reverently because of the greatness of their author nor are they to be dismissed because of the suggested pathology of his personality. As we will demonstrate, Johnson's major contribution in his sermons lies in his layman's approach to matters of ultimate concern and that pragmatic approach must be judged on its own merits.

A second difficulty in Johnsonian criticism has resulted from the particular focus of many investigators—a focus which often omits or minimizes one of the key elements in Johnsonian thought. Johnson's understanding of human nature, as reflected in his sermons, embraces a psychological, ethical, and spiritual body of knowledge; none of these elements can be justly separated from the others if the goal is to describe accurately and coherently his view of man. For example, Richard B. Schwartz maintains that "scientific investigation [for Johnson] was conducted within a religious context;"20 Damrosch argues that religion for Johnson is linked firmly to the rational (76); and Jean Hagstrum demonstrates that

---

faith for Johnson was "not mysticism or inward light but acceptance of testimony and even sense evidence upon the highest possible authority."\(^{21}\)

Johnson's observations on the nature of man reflect his conviction that human beings are in the process of integrating powerful forces within their personalities. By not recognizing this dynamic or process aspect within Johnsonian thought, scholars have sometimes fallen into errors of emphasis or interpretation, even in otherwise excellent and extremely useful studies. For example, one early tendency of such critics was to deny either the existence or the sincerity of Johnson's religious concerns. Leslie Stephen stresses the "worldliness" of many eighteenth-century writers, including Johnson, saying that they "seemed to close their eyes as resolutely as possible to all thoughts of eternity, infinity, heaven, and hell."\(^{22}\) Stephen argues that this orientation caused them to become "practical moralists" (367) who "turn their backs upon the infinite and abandon the effort at a solution" to the "inscrutable enigma of life" (370). It is not surprising, then, that Stephen sees Johnson as a


moralist preaching only social doctrines such as "work and don't whine" (376).

In his study of Samuel Johnson, Joseph Wood Krutch also refuses to take Johnson's faith seriously, either in terms of Johnson's own profession of it, or as part of the solution to the vacuity of life. For example, Krutch says that in *Rasselas* Johnson uses a fairly mechanical formula without much genuine substance to it:

> Again and again when he is faced with the necessity either of consoling others or of facing some sorrow of his own, the steps are the same. First, the consolations of religion. Then, to others or to himself, the advice: Seek the palliatives for those ills which are susceptible of no radical remedy. That the man as well as the child can be pleased with a rattle and tickled with a straw is indeed one of nature's most kindly laws.

Bertrand Bronson views Johnson's religion as a last resort to which he was driven "by the desperate character of the quest for happiness" (41) and as a self-imposed "straight-jacket" which Johnson needed to control himself (170).

In more recent years, scholars have become increasingly aware of the importance that a variety of religious concerns have in Johnson's writing. Yet,


24 For example, Johnson's stylistic indebtedness to churchmen has been examined in completely different ways by two critics. Katherine C. Balderston, "Dr. Johnson's Use of William Law in the Dictionary," *Philological Quarterly*, XXIX (1960), 379-388, explores the implications
these studies of Johnson's religious concerns have turned their attention almost exclusively to the doctrinal arena and have omitted analyzing Johnson's understanding of man's struggle to integrate the psychological, ethical and spiritual dimensions of his nature. Robert Voitle corrects many of the mistakes of the earlier scholars whose views we have sketched. Voitle denies Krutch's views that Johnson uses religion only as a club to enforce social conformity25 and he vigorously disagrees with the assertion that Johnson did not believe in the possibility that man could reform (32).

In Samuel Johnson: A Layman's Religion, Maurice Quinlan examines the broad aspects of Johnson's doctrinal affiliation with the church establishment and the leading theologians of the day. The book analyzes in detail certain key religious doctrines such as the Atonement and Repentance.26 Quinlan firmly establishes the fact that Johnson was a devout Christian, and that such themes as

---


meditating upon death and the need for charitable acts resulted from a considered belief of his Christian duty (52-53; 136). Other critics have focused on one major aspect of Johnson's religion, such as Johnson's well-documented fear of death. Moreover, isolated facets of Johnson's religion have come under critical scrutiny. For example, Bate analyzes Johnson's religious scruples in terms of neurotic compulsion (Achievement, 158-159) and Watkins attributes Johnson's sporadic church attendance to his emotional ebullience (Perilous Balance, 57).

In The Religious Thought of Samuel Johnson, Chester Chapin laments that Bate and Voitle discuss Johnson's ethical theory apart from his religious views. Specifically, Chapin deserves much credit for pointing out the extraordinary implications of Johnson's assertion that "all theory is against freedom of the will; all experience for it" for understanding the religious basis for his exhortations to right conduct (115-117). However, some discussion of Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding in this connection would have been appropriate since on

27 For the theory of fear as obsession, see Krutch, 548; also see Ernest C. Mossner, The Forgotten Hume (New York, 1943), 193. For the theory of fear as part of orthodox Christian belief, see Jean Hagstrum, "On Dr. Johnson's Fear of Death," A Journal of English Literary History, 14 (1947), 308-319.

many other critical issues Johnson's opinions very closely correspond to those of Locke. The present dissertation draws the parallel between Locke's discussion of free will and Johnson's treatment of it in his Sermons and argues that the Essay provides a significant alternative to either acceptance of Hobbesian determinism or simple rejection of "all theory." An examination of Locke's position on the liberty of man's will provides a more complete picture of the intellectual background for Johnson's thought on the subject. Furthermore, an analysis of Johnson's treatment of the liberty of the will in his Sermons offers a corrective to the charge of Chapin, Bate, and Voitle that Johnson's writings demonstrate as pessimistic a view of human nature as anyone ever presented.

Richard Schwartz takes an even darker view of Johnson's thought when he implies that personal reformation or the amelioration of evil in this life is nearly futile; he says that "Johnson sees the problem [of pain] as insoluble and, finally a mystery" and that Johnson becomes merely "a cataloguer or illustrator of evil" (60). Schwartz does acknowledge Johnson's recognition that "the prevalence of evil in human society is often the product of human imagination" (49) and that

"Our task is to gain what ground we can with Reason and Religion as our guides" (59). These latter assertions of Schwartz are examined in this dissertation in light of the additional evidence provided by Johnson's *Sermons*. The present study demonstrates Johnson's pragmatic awareness that the greater part, though not all, of suffering here on earth is caused by man's self-delusive nature. Johnson argues in his *Sermons* that this suffering can be ameliorated by moral action which produces a life that can be better enjoyed.

In one of the best books treating Johnson's understanding of human nature, Walter Jackson Bate has written extensively on human desire, imagination, and reason as these concepts function in Johnson's understanding of the nature of man. In *The Achievement of Samuel Johnson*, Bate very perceptively distinguishes between the mechanism of desire and the eventual objects fixed upon (69); this is a central idea in Johnson which few other critics have noted. Bate astutely observes the unity of vigor and order in Johnson's style and demonstrates that in Johnson's personal religion there exists the needed personal freedom and emotional satisfaction compatible with the equally needed centrality and control of religious orthodoxy. Moreover, Bate has delineated a large portion of Johnson's understanding of the processes
by which man's desire and imagination struggle to be integrated with man's reason:

the "hunger of imagination" . . . and the "stability of truth" . . . form the twin poles between which Johnson's practical insights into human life and destiny move back and forth (Achievement, 134).

Bate's position, however, omits much of Johnson's awareness that religion can effectively address the tension between the chimeras created by man's imagination, the insatiable desires of his will, and man's limited use of reason. Moreover, Bate almost completely neglects the evidence provided by Johnson's Sermons which suggests that Johnson's observations on the nature of man have a clear foundation in religious tradition. The present dissertation will explore these gaps left by Bate's investigation. This study of the Sermons reveals Johnson's astute awareness that religion provides pragmatically satisfying answers for those precise problems caused by man's self-delusive nature.

The only book-length study of Johnson's Sermons available to date is James Gray's Johnson's Sermons: A Study. Gray discusses the composition and the printing of Johnson's Sermons, placing special emphasis on Johnson's long-standing friendship with the Reverend John

Taylor of Ashbourne for whom twenty-five of the twenty-eight extant Sermons were written. The central part of Gray's study is an examination of the influence of the theology of William Law, the first important influence on Johnson's adult religious life, and of Samuel Clarke, whose Sermons Johnson considered the best in the language "bating a little heresy," on Johnson's Sermons. Gray traces Johnson's attitudes and beliefs on death, suffering, happiness, repentance, the Atonement and the Incarnation, rewards and punishments, and the hope for an afterlife to their possible sources in influential English divines. He argues that Johnson's treatment of these subjects in his Sermons suggests that he sought a systematic creed that could be contained within the bounds of human reason and credulity. Gray's conclusion is that it is nearly impossible to separate the religious and secular aspects of Johnson's admonitions to moral conduct without seriously distorting his achievement in the Sermons.

The present dissertation may accurately be classified, with Gray's study, as an argument for the integrated nature of Johnson's exhortations to right thinking and living. However, there is an important difference between Gray's study and mine. Gray deals primarily with the establishment of the argument; this dissertation implicitly accepts that argument and uses it
as a point of departure for its analysis of Johnson's Sermons.

Gray's analysis of William Law emphasizes the contemptus mundi theme and stresses the value of a spiritual regimen and a concern with "the somber realities of death and the last judgment" (122). However, the present dissertation argues that Gray's discussion of Law carries the contemptus mundi theme further than Johnson himself did in his Sermons. Indeed, the Sermons support the view that for Johnson religion provided the solace man needs for the vacuity he experiences in this life. Religion provides consolations in this world as well as promising the reward of eternal salvation. Whatever the tension between man's self-delusive nature and the demands of moral behavior, Johnson's Sermons suggest that man not eschew this life but rather engage it as the responsible way of struggling for salvation.

Gray does not explore the implications of the important tension in Johnson's Sermons between reason and revelation, a tension which has significant bearing on the relevance and credibility of revelation for man's salvation. The present dissertation demonstrates that the Sermons accentuate Johnson's belief that not even Scriptural revelation is exempt from the critical scrutiny of pragmatic experience. Because he viewed reason as man's most celestial faculty, Johnson devoted a major portion of
his effort as a sermonist to the delineation of those conditions under which reason could play its proper role in guiding man's ethical conduct in this life and preparing him for the next. Johnson did not, however, believe that human affairs could be conducted wholly by the light of reason. Unless reason is supplemented by religion, the dangers of man's self-delusive nature could not be avoided. The Sermons recognize that in many circumstances man's reason is powerless or insufficient; nevertheless, they demonstrate that human conduct can be far more rational than it usually is and the Sermons explain how man can make the fullest use of his capacities for rational behavior.

Gray's study provides useful parallels in content between Johnson's Sermons and the English homiletic tradition. This dissertation extends Gray's discussion of homiletic sources and models for Johnson's Sermons to an examination of Johnson's stylistic modifications of that tradition. His Sermons contain significant deviations in form from those characteristics which he found so praiseworthy in the works of many English divines. All Johnson's modifications suggest his belief that man's faith is forged more from the realities of secular life and less from conventional ascetic ideals.
II

Johnson is usually viewed as a moralist of a deeply conservative--even reactionary--bias because he is usually classified as a Christian moralist. Such an assessment is an oversimplification because Johnson is clearly a moralist who is also Christian. It is too easy to pigeonhole him by automatically placing him within a certain tradition and then viewing him as a participant within that static philosophical system. Johnson wrote in a period when man's conception of himself and his world was on the threshold of major change. There was a palpable shift from viewing the human mind as a static entity to a stance which saw it as a complex of processes.31 Within that framework, the Christian moralist tradition, which encompasses religious, sociological, and psychological thought, was primarily a static conceptualization. However, even in Johnson's time it was beginning to weaken, and the transformation itself is most tellingly reflected in the fact that rather than seeking identity and purpose through the established institutions--political, social, ecclesial--man began to seek his identity and purpose within himself.

Until that vantage point had been solidly attained, rationalist philosophers, in their search for order in the

universe, postulated general conceptions of human nature which tended to be static, closed systems of thought, "abstractions achieved by emphasizing permanent entities and neglecting their changing relationships" (Whyte, 48). The essential difference between the static concept of the unchanging nature of the human mind and Johnson's concept is that the former perceives human nature as a grouping of singular, unconnected attributes, motives, and responses, which are fixed in a hierarchical arrangement; Johnson perceives human nature to be an integrated process of instinctual forces, emotions, and responses that are in flux within the individual.

In his Sermons, Johnson depicts the mind not as a hierarchy of separate faculties of reason, imagination, desires, and instincts, but as a more complex development of the instincts to "elemental" feelings of "hope and fear, love and hatred, desire and aversion" (Sermons 10, 12, 14, 15, 18; Rambler 49). The various faculties of the mind, in Johnsonian psychology, are thus intimately connected. Moreover, whereas Johnson says that the passions, the desires, and the imagination are not to be extirpated but to be integrated into the whole personality (Sermon 18, 193-4; Rambler 66), the static conceptualization of man's nature sees the imagination, desires and passions often in conflict with reason.
In the Christian moralist tradition, the static philosophy of man's mental faculties and of the nature of self-knowledge reflects a feeling of self-distrust. Man's paradoxical position is that, while he is a higher being than the animals because he possesses reason, he is also weak and limited because of the eruption of his passions. With his reason constantly in conflict with his passions, desires, and imagination, man cannot trust the impulses of his instincts, nor can he even trust his physical senses. The major character ideal of Christianity is that of the ascetic, whose emphasis on the eradication of sinful impulses is a synecdoche for the extirpation of all man's desires, fantasies, and passions.

In this tradition, the individual Christian looks outward for help in attaining the ideal, for control of his passions, to the norms and commandments of established religion. His orientation and identification is to reflect the greater glory of God by living as closely as possible to Christ-like perfection, according to "right reason" rather than the treacherous instincts and passions that originally took man out of his happy state. Thus, William Law, whose Serious Call is a representative


expression of Christian orientation and identification, both because of its clarity in presenting the issues and because of its influence in the eighteenth century, says:

If it is our glory and happiness to have a rational nature, that is endued with wisdom and reason, that is capable of imitating the Divine nature, then it must be our glory and happiness to improve our reason and wisdom, to act up to the excellency of our rational nature, and to imitate God in all our actions to the utmost of our power (47).

The attitude expressed in this passage informs Law's whole treatise on the Christian way of life.

The central ethic of the Christian is, therefore, "to love our neighbor as ourselves, to love all mankind as God has loved them" (Law, 53). This particular doctrine is a major mode of inculcating selflessness in the individual and so orienting him outward for the greater purpose of reflecting the glory of God. This ethic together with the admonition know thyself directs the individual to knowledge of his primary relationship to God, and through God, to love of his fellow man. Through the rejection of self—the ascetic ideal—the individual is led to love his fellow man.

Where does Johnson stand with respect to these concepts? When we consider how Johnson's psychology informs his morality, we find that he adheres to the conventional tenets of the Christian moral tradition. However, we also discover that Johnson transforms the
motivation for right conduct from the Christian ascetic ideal of self-denial to a motivation based on pragmatic and secular self-interest. Throughout his Sermons, Johnson does not rule out love of virtue for its own sake as a desirable goal, but he makes clear that his precepts are not intended chiefly for those who already love virtue for its own sake. The Sermons are designed instead for those who are struggling to practice virtue and need to have their self-interest enlisted on its side. Moreover, Johnson considers enlightened self-interest a very different matter from selfishness and a perfectly valid foundation for moral conduct. This is a view he shared with others, including Locke. Locke, for example, not only regarded the rational pursuit of happiness as praiseworthy but as obligatory--a pursuit that men have no right to neglect.

Johnson asks the conventional moral questions in his Sermons: how are we to be saved? what solace or hope is there for man as he experiences the emptiness of life? However, his answers are always framed by his unconventional and experiential understanding of the nature of man. Through the efforts of human beings to integrate their reason with their imagination and desire, through realistic perceptions about the self and about relationships with others, through not postulating Christ as a character ideal to be realistically attempted, Johnson
suggests that man can hope, not only for the conventional reward of eternal life, but also for solace from the vacuity of this life.

Indeed, the Sermons are nothing if they are not a study of the ways in which religion addresses the problem of human vacuity. The centrality of the perception that life is vacuous to Johnsonian thought went unnoticed by Boswell; it was left to Mrs. Thrale to note that

the vacuity of Life had at some early period of his life perhaps so struck upon the Mind of Mr. Johnson, that it became by repeated impressions his favourite hypothesis, & the general Tenor of his reasonings commonly ended in that: The Things therefore which other philosophers attribute to various and contradictory Causes appeared to him uniform enough; all was done to fill up the time upon his Principle. One Man for example was profligate, followed the Girls or the Gaming Table,—why Life must be filled up Madam, & the man was capable of nothing less Sensual.34

To understand Johnson's meaning of vacuity is to understand the way in which his observations on the nature of man within the Sermons are guided by the implicit polarities of eternity and temporality, reason and imagination, desire and fulfillment.35


35 In the Dictionary, Johnson defines vacuity as "(1) emptiness; state of being unfilled; (2) space unfilled; space unoccupied; (3) inanity; want of reality." Significantly, all six examples Johnson uses for these
The whole mind becomes a gloomy vacuity, without any image or form of pleasure, a chaos of confused wishes, directed to no particular end, or to that which, while we wish, we cannot hope to obtain (Sermon 25, 267).

Johnson sees human activity as a futile attempt to fill an inner void, as an incessant and hopeless search for "novelty" and "diversity" with which to feed the hunger of human nature:

If the most active and industrious of mankind was able, at the close of life, to recollect distinctly his past moments, and distribute them, in a regular account, according to the manner in which they have been spent, it is scarcely to be imagined how few would be marked out to the mind, by any permanent or visible effects, how small a proportion his real action would bear to his seeming possibilities of action, how may chasms he would find of wide and continued vacuity, and how many interstitial spaces unfilled, even in the most tumultuous hurries of business, and the most eager vehemence of pursuit (Rambler 8, 41).

The contradiction between the infinite desires of human nature for fulfillment and the insufficiency of the temporal ends with which human nature becomes obsessed suggest that the answers provided by religion could resolve this contradiction and help man cope with the vacuity of life.

three definitions refer to either the physical, emotional or spiritual emptiness of human nature. Indeed, his quotation from Rogers is illustrative of Johnson's use of vacuity in his Sermons: "God, who alone can answer all our longings, and fill every vacuity of our soul, should entirely possess our heart."
In every Sermon, Johnson notes that it is the preponderance of vacuity in our lives which moves us to seek the consolation and encouragement provided by religion. However, even in his call for a life of spiritual perspective—man's ability to contrast this transitory life with the sure prospect of eternal happiness—Johnson does not expect man to respond in any transcendental way. He tells us in his Sermons that such a spiritual perspective on life provides the pragmatic motivation we need to integrate the chimeras of the imagination and the insatiable desires of the will with the stability of our reason.
JOHNSON'S SERMONS AND THE NATURE OF MAN

I

Long before the philosophical inquiries of William James, Alfred North Whitehead, or John Dewey, Samuel Johnson asked similar probing questions of religion—"Does it work? Is it practical?" Indeed, whether he was reading poetry or drama, philosophy or theology, Johnson was impatient with anything that lacked common sense or that did not conform to human experience. Furthermore, he did not regard his own approach to religion as unique or as somehow set apart by either mental acuity or careful cultivation.

The object of the pages which follow is to demonstrate that Johnson was above all a pragmatist in writing his Sermons; he tested all ideas, even orthodox theological doctrines, against the reality of human experience. He had little interest in the abstract or the metaphysical. When Johnson asked, "Is it true?" what he really meant was, "Will it work?" It is a commonplace that every homilist is speaking essentially to himself and
this appears to be true of Johnson throughout his Sermons. The Sermons are so meaningful precisely because they are so practical, so helpful to those looking for suggestions and hints as to how to wrestle with the pains of life. Johnson sought and succeeded in putting that kind of common sense content into his homilies. Most Johnsonian critics are concerned with showing the affinities between his Sermons and the ideas of Hobbes, Mandeville, Locke or Hume, and Johnson was, of course, a child of his age. However, few critics have sufficiently appreciated the pragmatic nature of his Sermons in which Johnson uses human experience as a test and judge for religion's consolations for the vacuity of life.

Modern critics of Samuel Johnson's moral thought often label his view of man as "pessimistic" and seek parallels for it in the writings of Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Mandeville. Walter Jackson Bate finds Johnson's views among the most pessimistic to be encountered in Western thought (Samuel Johnson, 298; 492). Robert Voitle discovers in Johnson's gloomy view of human nature possible justification for some readers' regarding him as a Calvinist. Voitle also points to the strong parallels between Johnson and Mandeville, especially in the latter's notorious Fable of the Bees, where the evil that men do is seen as springing from an innate depravity (Samuel Johnson
the Moralist, 131, 154). Paul Alkon stresses Johnson's dependence upon and agreement with Hobbes in seeing human life in the state of nature as "solitary, poor, nasty, and brutish" and in believing unselfish action to be alien to human beings (Samuel Johnson and Moral Discipline, 41).

It cannot be denied that Johnson's conception of human nature is a somber one, especially when compared to the more optimistic view of man so conspicuous in the works of such popular writers as Fielding and Sterne. Moreover, since in the latter half of the eighteenth century it had become increasingly fashionable in some circles to refer to man as naturally benevolent, it is not surprising that even some of Johnson's contemporaries thought his pronouncements severe. Boswell relates that Lady Macleod, upon hearing Johnson deny natural goodness

1 Johnson's observations on the weakness, corruption, and limitations of human nature were widely recorded. According to Frances Reynolds, the sister of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Dr. Johnson's "general and common" assertion was "that Man was by Nature much more inclined to evil than to good" (II, 256), in Samuel Johnson, Johnsonian Miscellanies, ed. George Birkbeck Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897). In her Anecdotes, Mrs. Thrale mentions the "fixity" of Johnson's opinions on "the natural depravity of mankind and the remains of original sin" (115-116). Readers of Boswell's Tour to the Hebrides will recollect Johnson's sharp response to Lady Macleod, who asked whether man was naturally good--"No, Madam, no more than a wolf" (V, 211), in James Boswell, The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D., ed. George Birkbeck Hill, rev. and enl. by L. F. Powell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934-1950). Hereafter, cited in the text as Life.
to man, "started, . . . saying in a low voice, 'This is worse than Swift'" (Life, V, 211).

As Bate, Voitle, and Alkon suggest, several of Samuel Johnson's statements do bring to mind the opinions of Hobbes and Mandeville. Nearly a century before Johnson made his observations on the nature of man, Thomas Hobbes drew an image of human nature that was far from idyllic. Hobbes invited the readers of his Leviathan to discover, based on their own observations of man, whether the unflattering things he said of human nature were not inescapably true. The elements within man that make for hostility, spite, and malice are no secret:

All the world knows that such is the nature of man, that dissenting in questions which concern their power, or profit, or pre-eminence of wit, they slander and curse each other. . . . For such is the nature of men that howsoever they may acknowledge many others to be more witty or more eloquent or more learned, yet they will hardly believe there be many so wise as themselves; for they see their own wit at hand and other men's at a distance.²

Hobbes believed that the testimony of actions is much more reliable than that of words in assessing the extent of human depravity:

For every man looks that his companion should value him at the same rate he sets upon himself; and upon all signs of contempt or undervaluing [he] naturally endeavors . . . to extort a greater value from his contemners by damage and from others by example. So that in the nature of man we find three principal causes of quarrel: first, competition; secondly, difference; thirdly, glory. . . . We see even in well-governed states, where there are laws and punishments appointed for offenders, yet particular men travel not without their sword by their side for their defenses; neither sleep they without shutting not only their doors against their fellow subjects, but also their trunks and coffers for fear of domestics. Can men give a clearer testimony of the distrust they have of each other, and all of all? (Leviathan, II, 15; 319-21).

Whether Hobbes portrays man in a state of nature or "advanced" to a state of civil society, his observations on the human condition are as insightful as Johnson's own perceptions of human life. For example, Johnson describes man as being first

. . . wild and unsocial, living each man to himself, taking from the weak, and losing to the strong. In their first coalitions of society, much of this original savageness is retained. Of general happiness, the product of general confidence, there is yet no thought. Men continue to prosecute their own advantages by the nearest way; and the utmost severity of the civil law is necessary to restrain individuals from plundering each other. The restraints then necessary, are restraints from plunder, from acts of publick violence, and undisguised oppression. The ferocity of our ancestors, as of all other nations, produced not fraud, but rapine. They had not yet learned to cheat, and attempted only to rob. As manners grow more polished, with the knowledge of good, men attain
likewise dexterity in evil. Open rapine becomes less frequent, and violence gives way to cunning. Those who before invaded pastures and stormed houses, now begin to enrich themselves by unequal contracts and fraudulent intromissions. I am afraid the increase of commerce and the incessant struggle for riches which commerce excites, gives us no prospect of an end speedily to be expected of artifice and fraud (Life, II, 198-9).

The laws and customs of civilization only force the relentless human current for power and domination into other channels; human beings remain essentially the same--frail, limited, corrupt and prone to evil.

Following Hobbes' imperative for a clear-sighted view of man, Mandeville's avowed purpose in The Fable of the Bees is to show man what he is:

Most Writers are always teaching Men what they should be, and hardly ever trouble their Heads with telling them what they really are (Fable, I, 39).\(^3\)

To Mandeville, man is simply "the most perfect of animals" (Fable, I, 44). In The Fable of the Bees, society is shown as a bee-hive. This hive is prosperous and great as long as pride, selfishness, corruption, luxury, hypocrisy, fraud, injustice, and every conceivable vice are freely practiced. One day, however, Jove "rid the bawling Hive

---

of greed." The result of Jove's purge was that trade and the professions languished, unemployment and depopulation set in, and the few surviving bees deserted their hive for a hollow tree. The moral regarding civilization, as Mandeville draws it, is:

Then leave complaints: fools only strive
To make great an honest hive.
To enjoy the world's conveniencies,
Be famed in war, yet live in ease,
Without great vices is a vain
Utopia seated in the Brain.
Fraud, luxury, and pride must live,
While we the benefits receive:
Hunger's a dreadful plague, no doubt,
Yet who digests or thrives without?
Bare Virtue can't make nations live
In Splendor (Fable, I, 37).

Mandeville maintains that people generally profess to value real virtue, but they never practice it, and if they did, everything they really value, judging by their behavior, would vanish. Consequently, they are faced with an impossible choice, either real virtue and poverty or vices and prosperity:

... they, that would revive
A Golden Age, must be as free,
For Acorns, as for Honesty (Fable, I, 37).

The foundation for Mandeville's scheme of values is his view of human nature:

I believe man (besides Skin, Flesh, Bones, etc., that are obvious to the Eye) to be a compound of
various Passions, that all of them, as they are provoked and come uppermost, govern him by turns, whether he will or not (Fable, I, 39).

Based on this view of human nature, Mandeville contends that virtue ought to be defined as self-denial:

It being the Interest then of the very worst of them, more than any, to preach up Publick-spiritedness that they might reap the Fruits of the Labour and Self-denial of others, and at the same time indulge their own Appetites with less disturbance, they agreed with the rest, to call everything, which, without regard to the Publick, Man should commit to gratify any of his Appetites, VICE; if in that Action there cou'd be observed the least prospect, that it might either be Injurious to any of the Society, or ever render himself less serviceable to others: And to give the Name of VIRTUE to every Performance, by which Man, contrary to the impulse of Nature, should endeavour the benefit of others, or the Conquest of his own Passions out of a Rational Ambition of being good (Fable, I, 48-9).

Virtue however is a very fashionable word, and some of the most luxurious are extremely fond of the amiable sound; tho' they mean nothing by it, but a great veneration for whatever is courtly or sublime, and an equal aversion to everything, that is vulgar or unbecoming. They seem to imagine that it chiefly consists in strict compliance to all the Laws of Honour that have any regard to the Respect that is due to themselves. . . . It is counted ridiculous for Men to commit Violence upon themselves, or to maintain, that Virtue requires Self-denial; all Court Philosophers are agreed, that nothing can be lovely or desireable, that is mortifying or uneasy (Fable, II, 12).

Mandeville's whole speculation in The Fable of the Bees turns on this definition of virtue which implies a
contradiction within human nature. Given the nature of man—a compound of passions which are forever struggling to control him, with the strongest always winning out—selfless behavior, the practice of virtue, is not only impractical but impossible:

If it be urg'd . . . there might be such People [the truly virtuous]; I answer that it is as possible that Cats, instead of killing Rats and Mice, should feed them, and go about the House to suckle and nurse their young ones; or that a Kite should call the Hens to their Meat, as the Cock does, and sit brooding over their Chickens instead of devouring 'em; but if they should all do so, they would cease to be Cats and Kites; it is inconsistent with their Natures, and the Species of Creatures which now we mean, when we name Cats and Kites, would be extinct as soon as that could come to pass (Fable, I, 134).

The worldliness, the hypocrisy, the backsliding are not, then, accidental—they are the necessary consequences of human nature.

Like Mandeville, whom he had read with some appreciation, Johnson rejects any possibility of disinterested human goodness.⁴ To say otherwise is to suggest,

---

⁴ According to Mrs. Thrale, Johnson was "indeed a most acute observer" of the consequences of man's limited, corrupt, and frail nature; he "used to say sometimes, half in jest, half in earnest, that they were the remains of his old tutor Mandeville's instructions. As a book, however, he took care always loudly to condemn the Fable of the Bees, but not without adding, 'that it was the work of a thinking man'" (Anecdotes, 115-116).
absurdly, that Samuel Johnson held, in effect, a Pelagian understanding of man. Rather, he told Mrs. Thrale:

I hope I have not lost my Sensibility of Wrong, but I hope likewise that I have seen sufficient of the World to prevent my expecting to find any Action whose Motives, & all its Parts are good.\(^5\)

Moreover, throughout his **Sermons**, Johnson consistently describes the nature of man as weak, limited, corrupt, and subject to temptation. For example, when he explores the destructive effects of hardness of heart on the practice of religion in **Sermon 3**, he observes that

The continual occurrence of temptation, and that imbecility of nature, which every man sees in others, and has experienced in himself, seems to have made many doubtful of the possibility of salvation (32).\(^6\)

---


Johnson portrays human nature in similar terms when he examines the vexatious problem of conceit in Sermon 8 and the consequences of human ignorance in Sermon 16:

What can any man see either within or without himself, that does not afford him some reason to remark his own ignorance, imbecillity, and meanness? (Sermon 8, 94).

Such is the weakness of human nature, that every particular state, or condition, lies open to particular temptations (Sermon 16, 171).

However, when he deals with the more odious sins of human pride in Sermon 6 and spiritual indolence in Sermon 7, Johnson's assessment of human nature becomes more severe; he uses the concept of depravity to describe man and, when he warns against the dangers of pride, he suggests the possibility of original corruption.

Pride is a corruption that seems almost originally ingrafted in our nature; it exerts itself in our first years, and, without continual endeavours to suppress it, influences our last (Sermon 6, 66).

Such is the present weakness and corruption of human nature, that sincerity, real sincerity, is rarely to be found (Sermon 7, 80).

But as startlingly severe as it may have appeared to Mrs. Thrale and Lady Macleod, and as extraordinarily pessimistic as it appears to Bate, Voitle, and Alkon, Samuel Johnson's view of human nature was neither
identical with that of Mandeville or Hobbes nor something invented by him _de novo_. Johnson was solidly within the long tradition of Christian orthodoxy, at one with the Apostle Paul, with Tertullian and Augustine, with Luther and Calvin, a fact that many Johnsonian critics are inclined to overlook. That Mrs. Thrale and Lady MacLeod should have been surprised is simply a commentary on the Anglicanism of the day, which was inclined toward a mild form of the Pelagian heresy. The anthropology, or doctrine of man, behind this Enlightenment version of Anglican doctrine popular in the eighteenth century and with which Johnson took sharp issue was mildly optimistic; it eschewed the severe pessimism of Augustine and the Reformers. Johnson owed his dissent, finally, neither to Mandeville and Hobbes on the one hand, nor to his familiarity with the gloomier Christian doctrine of early ages, but to his own experience of human nature. Johnson simply did not find man to be the sweetly reasonable creature seen by some of his contemporaries. He did not view man pessimistically but realistically.

The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion appended to _The Book of Common Prayer_ include a strong Calvinist [one could equally say Augustinian] view of human corruption:

> Original sin . . . is the fruit and corruption of every man that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone
from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil (Article IX of The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion).

That statement, together with many similar ones throughout the Articles, was produced by the Church of England at a time when the Calvinist influence was at its peak and it has embarrassed the more "Catholic" Anglicans for centuries. However, there is no evidence that Samuel Johnson paid any heed to doctrinal debates among theologians. He gave scant attention to the origin of human corruption; it was the effect which concerned Johnson—the reality of which he could observe all about him.

Yet Johnson's genuine piety saved him from merely surrendering to the bestial in man—to exalting pure force which characterized the views of Hobbes and Mandeville. Johnson's treatment is altogether different:

Religion informs us that misery and sin were produced together. The depravation of human will was followed by a disorder of the harmony of nature; and by that providence which often places antidotes in the neighborhood of poisons, vice was checked by misery, lest it should swell to universal and unlimited dominion (Idler 89, 275).

Here is no exaltation of selfishness or the ruthless exercise of power as true virtue, no Mandevillean argument to "make the worse appear the better cause." Johnson recognizes evil as evil, not something to be glorified and
cultivated but to be viewed with horror. What Johnson admired in Mandeville was his keenness of observation, his recognition of the ubiquity of human depravity. However, Johnson emphatically rejected Mandeville's contention that selfishness was the natural state of man which ought to be cultivated at the expense of bogus altruism.

The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries found strong interest in intellectual circles in the definition of man, in the extent of human depravity and its effects on man's behavior. For example, Archbishop John Tillotson, whose sermons were perhaps the most formative of eighteenth-century religious thought, defined human nature and the extent of man's depravity in these terms:

So that the degeneracy of human nature is universally acknowledged, and God acquitted from being the cause of it: but, however, the posterity of Adam do all partake of the weakness contracted by his fall, and so still labour under the miseries and inconveniences of it. But then this degeneracy is not total. For though our faculties be much weakened and disordered, yet they are not destroyed, nor

7 Leslie Stephen maintains that "Tillotson [was] the writer of the seventeenth-century who was most generally read and admired in the eighteenth" [History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, 3rd. ed. (New York: Peter Smith, 1949), I, 77]. L. E. Elliot-Binns asserts that "just as philosophy during most of the eighteenth-century was dominated by the influence of Locke, so orthodox theology was especially dominated by Archbishop Tillotson" [The Early Evangelicals (London: Methuen, 1953), 90].
wholly perverted. Our natural judgment and conscience doth still dictate to us what is good, and what we ought to do; and the impressions of the natural law, as to the great lines of our duty, are still legible upon our hearts. . . . Our judgment still dictates the very same things which the law of God doth enjoin.⁸

The existence and effects of original sin were not widely disputed even by the Deists. However, they argued that if the ravages of the Fall have not, as Tillotson declared, obliterated our moral sense or our recognition of duty, then there seems little need for divine revelation to enlighten wayward humanity. Human reason retains a sufficient quantity of justitia originalis, original righteousness, to find the path to virtue and human fulfillment. On the other hand, the Calvinists and Augustinians insisted that human depravity had rendered man nonposse non peccare, as Augustine put it, unable not to sin. Therefore, man was incapable of finding the way to salvation without divine assistance and revelation.⁹

Johnson's observations on the nature of man, as manifested in his Sermons, reflect a via media position between the Calvinists and the Deists. Johnson could not agree with the latter that human reason was sufficient to


lead man to a useful set of ethical beliefs. For Johnson, reason was an aid to right conduct; he never believed that human nature would automatically and positively respond to the good. On the other hand, Johnson recognized that man's reason was not to be despised after the manner of Luther and Calvin but to be embraced as a help for man in his search for happiness.

What rendered Johnson's view shocking to his friends was its difference from the prevalent optimism which seemed to dominate the age. There was great faith in the ability of human reason to conquer all obstacles and to solve all problems in human life. For most English intellectuals of the eighteenth century, including most of the Churchmen, total depravity was not the popular doctrine. Nor, for Johnson, was human depravity total because that notion would eradicate man's capacity for virtuous action. Yet, Johnson's own experience had taught him that most men were far more rascally and undependable than the prevailing optimism chose to acknowledge. It was on the basis of that experience that he insisted on his more pessimistic view of human nature, not on the grounds of fidelity to theological orthodoxy.

The Apostle Paul provides the classic text for that theologically orthodox view of man:
As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way to peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes . . . . For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3: 9-23).

This view is echoed by St. Augustine when he vividly describes the great depths into which man is sunk:

From the time when our nature sinned in paradise . . . we have all become one lump of clay, a lump of sin (massa peccati). Since, then, by sinning we have forfeited our merit and God's mercy is withdrawn from us so that we sinners are owed nothing but eternal damnation, it is pointless for a man from this lump to reply to God and say: "why did you make me like this?"10

Each member of the human race is sinful because he possesses a tainted nature, just as every pot made from a lump of poor quality clay will be inherently defective.

Johnson neither accepted human depravity as inevitable, requiring political adaptation, nor did he advocate a monolithic Leviathan to regulate brutish men. Johnson's concern in the Sermons was religious rather than

political; he sought to assist men in attaining salvation in the next life by helping them enjoy the fruits of redemption in this life. Hobbes, on the other hand, eschewed moral judgments and contented himself with what he regarded as a realistic political philosophy. Mandeville scorned conventional morality as wholly alien to human nature and, as Johnson observed, took:

the narrowest system of morality, monastic morality, which holds pleasure itself to be a vice, such as eating salt with our fish, because it makes it taste better; and he reckons wealth as a public benefit, which is by no means always true. Pleasure of itself is not vice (Life, III, 292-293).

Mandeville and Hobbes were concerned with demonstrating that human nature is such that it must be held in check by a strong government. Religion was viewed as a tool of government—a sort of opiate with which to keep mankind subservient to the monarch. There are, to be sure, certain parallels between Johnson's Sermons and the ideas of Mandeville and Hobbes. However, it appears that Bate, Voitle and Alkon sometimes fall into the logical error of post hoc ergo propter hoc. The frame of reference for the corruption and limitations of human nature is shared by Hobbes and Mandeville with the Christian tradition; moreover, it is not simply the frame of reference which determines the nature of the system but the further
extension of the argument. To be sure, both systems of argument tend toward an authoritative structure; however, the one represented by Hobbes and Mandeville leads toward governmental control and the other represented by Johnson leads toward man's salvation. Johnson had ample alternatives within the classic religious tradition from which he extended the arguments found within his Sermons.

Martin Luther, for example, developed his theological thought within the Order of the Augustinian Friars; it is not surprising, then, that he claimed to derive many of his leading ideas from his patron. Like Augustine he painted a dark picture of the effect of original sin on the human race. In his famous treatise The Bondage of the Will, he argued that every man possesses a "corruption of nature . . . the secret, root-sin . . . which bears the fruit of evil works and words."¹¹ This secret sin is not an act or series of acts but a state in which man finds himself in relation to God, neighbor and self—a state of estrangement which leads to radical selfishness and an effort to find life's meaning in self-sufficiency. Individual sinful acts are merely symptoms of this basic state of mankind.

Following Luther's teaching on original sin, John Calvin explained how the consequences of the Fall not only deprived man of the good that was in his nature, but have made us a source of continual sinning:

that perversity is never idle within us, but continually engenders new fruits; namely, those workings of the flesh that we have just described; just as a burning furnace ceaselessly throws up flames and sparks, and as a spring spouts its water. Wherefore those who have defined original sin as a lack of the original justice which ought to be in man, although in these words they have comprehended all the substance, still they have not sufficiently expressed the force of it. For our nature is not merely empty and destitute, but it is so fecund of every kind of evil that it cannot be inactive. ¹²

Even one of the more liberal of the eighteenth century divines, Samuel Clark, urged his congregation to consider themselves creatures:

who are born in sin, and conceived in iniquity; who are brought forth in ignorance, and grow up in a multiplicity of errors; whose understandings are dark, wills biassed, passions strong, affections corrupted, appetites inordinate, inclinations irregular. ¹³


¹³ Sermon CXLVI, "Christians Ought to Endeavor to Attain Perfection," 282.
Within his *Sermons*, however, Johnson resorts to the extreme language of St. Paul, St. Augustine and the Reformers *only* when speaking of the heinous sin of pride—the source of all man's other imperfections. Although Johnson recognizes the weaknesses and limitations of man's nature, he is still not prepared to surrender all hope for the human race. Johnson *never* joins his more pessimistic theological predecessors in accepting the totality of human depravity nor in denying the freedom of the human will.

The evidence, therefore, raises serious questions as to the validity of W. Jackson Bate's contention that "we could extract from Johnson's writings as pessimistic a view of the human condition as anyone ever presented" (298). While pessimism is certainly a salient feature of the Johnsonian view of man, it is no more than what Louis Landa, in his edition of *Gulliver's Travels*, termed "the pessimism at the heart of Christianity" (xxii).

**II**

G. K. Chesterton referred to original sin as the only doctrine of Christianity which could be empirically verified.\(^\text{14}\) Though it is doubtful that Johnson would have

agreed that original sin is the only such doctrine, he clearly does believe that the evidence for its truth is widely manifest. Johnson never appeals to either revelation or tradition to support his affirmations of human frailty and natural depravity. If he makes any appeal at all, it is an appeal to human experience. For example, at the beginning of his sermon on marriage, Johnson says that society is necessary to the happiness of human nature, that the gloom of solitude, and the stillness of retirement, however they may flatter at a distance, with pleasing views of independence and serenity, neither extinguish the passions, nor enlighten the understanding, that discontent will intrude upon privacy, and temptations follow us to the desert, every one may be easily convinced, either by his own experience, or that of others (Sermon 1, 3).

In Sermon 15, Johnson bases his reflections on the shortness of life upon the firm foundation of experience:

Nothing but daily experience could make it credible, that we should see the daily descent into the grave of those whom we love or fear, admire or detest; that we should see one generation past, and another passing, see possessions daily changing their owners, and the world, at very short intervals, altering its appearance . . . wherever we turn our eyes, [we] find misfortune and distress, and have our ears daily filled with the lamentations of misery . . . to make us remember that life is miserable (160).

Moreover, when Johnson treats such diverse subjects as fraud in Sermon 18 and charity in Sermon 19, he grounds his arguments on human experience:
The desire of happiness is inseparable from a rational being, acquainted, by experience, with the various gradations of pain and pleasure (Sermon 18, 194).

If we cast our eyes over the earth, and extend our observations through the system of human beings, what shall we find but scenes of misery and innumerable varieties of calamity and distress, the pains of sickness, the wounds of casualty, the gripings of hunger, and the cold of nakedness . . . (Sermon 19, 207).

Johnson's understanding of original sin is based, not on theological speculation, but on the solid foundation of experiential reality. As he dictated to Boswell in 1781:

With respect to original sin, the inquiry is not necessary; 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 (Life, IV, 123-124).

In Rambler 175, Johnson again suggests that corruption is so apparent in human experience that it cannot be ignored; he portrays man's nature in terms which are similar to those we noted earlier in his sermon on marriage [Sermon 1].

The depravity of mankind is so easily discoverable, that nothing but the desert or the cell can exclude it from notice. The knowledge of crimes intrudes uncalled and undesired. They whom their abstraction from common occurrences hinders from seeing iniquity, will quickly have their attention awakened by feeling it. Even he who ventures not into the world, may learn its corruption in his closet. For what are the
treatises of morality, but persuasives to the practices of duties, for which no arguments would be necessary, but that we have continually been tempted to violate or neglect them? What are all the records of history, but narratives of successive villainies, of treasons and usurpations, massacres and wars? (Rambler 175, 160).  

A Christian, then, need not receive his belief about the fallen nature of man from second-hand sources. He should be able to infer it from his own empirical observations: "for what can any man see, either within or without himself, that does not afford him some reason to remark his own ignorance, imbecillity, and meanness?" (Sermon 8, 94).

There are certain topics, however, traditionally associated with the doctrine of original sin, which cannot be verified experientially. Concerning these topics, Johnson, not surprisingly, has almost nothing to say. Consequently, though we are to consider his belief in the universal, innate depravity of man a version of the traditional Christian doctrine, we must also be aware that it is a relatively spare and attenuated version, containing only the barest essence of the doctrine as expounded by St. Augustine and as understood by the Reformation church.

About the cause of human depravity, for instance, Johnson's only statement seems curiously disinterested. He says only that original sin is "the propensity to evil, which no doubt was occasioned by the Fall" (Life, V, 88). Furthermore, he expresses no opinion at all about the other subjects commonly included in expositions of the doctrine—nothing about the transmission of Adam's sin through generation, nothing about the nature of concupiscence, nothing about the inheritance of Adam's guilt as well as his corruption, nothing about the extent of human depravity, whether partial or total. What reasons exist for his reticence we cannot say with absolute certainty, though he most probably relegated these questions to the realm of idle speculation.¹⁶

¹⁶ Johnson may be following a tradition in English theology which expressed strong reservations toward those aspects of the doctrine of original sin which stressed feelings of self-pity and guilt more than the corrective moral activities necessitated by man's condition. For example, Boswell notes:

Dr. Ogden, in his second sermon "On the Articles of the Christian Faith," with admirable acuteness thus addresses the opposers of that Doctrine, which accounts for confusion, sin, and misery, which we find in this life: "It would be severe in God, you think, to degrade us to such a sad state as this, for the offence of our first parents; but you can allow him to place us in it without any inducement. Are our calamities lessened for not being ascribed to Adam? If your condition be unhappy, is it not still unhappy, whatever was the occasion? with the aggravation of this reflection, that if it was as good as it was at first designed, there seems
only conclusion we may safely draw is that the doctrine of original sin for Johnson is not a set of complex theological hypotheses, but an obvious and very simple fact of daily life: "men are evidently and confessedly so corrupt, that all the laws of heaven and earth are insufficient to restrain them from crimes" (Life, IV, 123-124).

In addition to its indebtedness to experience and its heavy reliance on concrete example rather than abstract theory, Johnson's view of human nature is also distinguished from the Augustinian conception of original sin by its lack of interest in any dimensions of the fallen state of man that are not moral. It is clear from Sermon 5, for example, that the Johnsonian version of the doctrine of original sin represents not so much a religious as an ethical conception of the human predicament:

... when [God] created man, he created him for happiness; happiness indeed dependant upon his own choice, and to be preserved by his own conduct ... Reason and experience assure us that they [physical and moral evil] continue for the most part so closely united, that, to avoid misery, we must avoid sin, and that while it is in our power to be virtuous, it is in our power to be happy (Sermon 5, 55).

to be somewhat the less reason to look for its amendment" (Life, IV, 123; note 3).
Johnson does not share the preoccupation of many eighteenth century divines with a deep sense of man's alienation or estrangement--the "Dark Night of the Soul." He shows little concern for probing the mystery of how evil entered the world, a world created and governed by a God of love and righteousness. He is not troubled by a need to probe deeply into the nature of man to find ontological explanations for the evil propensity so obvious in the human species. Johnson appears to have attached no other meaning to sin than that given in his Dictionary: "an act against the laws of God, a violation of the laws of religion." For Johnson, original sin is simply the inherent propensity to commit these "act[s] against the laws of God." Salvation, accordingly, is not obtained merely by looking to God for forgiveness and reconciliation but rather by an active striving to overcome one's sinfulness, using both one's own reason and the aids provided by religion. Johnson's religion is more visceral than contemplative or devotional. Chester Chapin makes the point more forcefully when he observes that Johnson's considered opinion . . . is that most men are neither greatly good nor greatly wicked. Johnson believes, as Miss Boothby [an Evangelical friend who adhered to the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity] does not, that most men, by an effort of will or 'reasoning' may become, if not virtuous, at least more virtuous than they
are . . . And so, for Johnson, the natural man is not utterly helpless, utterly depraved.\textsuperscript{17}

It is this divergence from the classical Protestant tradition that no doubt prompted Jean Hagstrum to assert that Johnson "seems not to have accepted fully or perhaps even to have understood the doctrine of original sin or total depravity in its extremer forms."\textsuperscript{18}

III

Samuel Johnson's reticence to speculate on the causes and the extent of natural depravity allowed him to confine his homiletic writing to the entirely appropriate subject of man's present condition. The vacuity of life is a favorite observation of Johnson on man's present circumstances; his basic metaphor for human experience is the empty receptacle which cannot tolerate its own emptiness.\textsuperscript{19} In the funeral sermon for his wife, Johnson used

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{17} The Religious Thought of Samuel Johnson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968), 62.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{19} Arieh Sachs, in Passionate Intelligence: Imagination and Reason in the Work of Samuel Johnson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967), perceptively notes the fundamental position which the vacuity of life held in Johnson's writings. Sachs observes that
\end{flushright}

where the vacuity of life is not the explicit theme of his writings or conversation, it is
this metaphor to describe the effects which the death of a loved one has on even "the best minds":

the whole mind becomes a gloomy vacuity, without any image or form of pleasure, a chaos of confused wishes, directed to no particular end, or to that which, while we wish, we cannot hope to obtain (Sermon 25, 267).

The mind is powerfully dissatisfied with emptiness, but its endeavors for filling itself cannot be successful precisely because human nature is inherently frail and imperfect as a result of original sin. When he analyzes man's insatiable desire for happiness in Sermon 14, Johnson's underlying assumption is, once again, this sense of the vacuity of life:

that almost every man is disappointed in his search after happiness is apparent from the clamorous complaints which are always to be heard; from the restless discontent, which is hourly to be observed, and from the incessant pursuit of new objects, which employ almost every moment of every man's life. For a desire of change is a sufficient proof, that we are dissatisfied with our present state. . . . It will easily appear, that men fail to gain what they so much desire, because they seek it where it is not to be found, because they suffer themselves to be dazzled by specious appearances, resign themselves up to the direction of

present as the underlying assumption and constantly shows up in the imagery. All human activity is seen as a futile attempt to fill an aching inner void, an incessant and hopeless search for 'novelty' and 'diversity' with which to feed the hunger of the mind (5).
their passions, and, when one pursuit has failed of affording them that satisfaction which they expected from it, apply themselves with the same ardour to another equally unprofitable, and waste their lives in successive delusions . . . and in attempts to grasp a bubble, which . . . is neither solid nor lasting (Sermon 14, 149-150).

The fact is that nothing ensures discontent as certainly as the active pursuit of contentment. Courting merriment will leave one mirthless; the search for happiness will always end in unhappiness. Yet all men, Johnson asserts in Sermon 14, seek happiness and, when they think that they have found it, are only too willing to conceal from themselves their dissatisfaction with their hard-won "joy."

The Johnsonian axiom that the human condition can be defined by the vacuity of its experiences suggests that life in his view is basically stagnant, but Johnson always coupled this observation with an insistent stress on the activity of the human will. His understanding of this human dilemma is extremely close to the classical religious view of concupiscence which sees human nature hungering insatiably for money, power, fame or sexual pleasure. None of them satisfy completely. They only make man more aware of his emptiness and lack of fulfillment. However, Johnson always coupled his observations about the vacuity of the human condition with
an insistent emphasis on the **activity** of the human will.\textsuperscript{20}

He believed that this faculty could best be described as an innate hunger inextricably fixed in man's nature; its constant seeking of objects for satisfaction could never be satisfied. Moreover, he viewed this desire as really a spiritual hunger, only accidentally and unsatisfactorily seeking vacuous earthly satisfactions. These facts explain why Johnson's solution is to redirect and regulate the desire of the will rather than try to eliminate it. In Johnson's view, the will can be completely satisfied only when it is redirected to seek God. Since his notion of man's will is much closer to the traditional concept of this faculty than to that of many of his contemporaries, it would be good to examine some of these parallels.

According to a tradition that has its roots in both Biblical and classical thinking, man is seen as a creature dissatisfied with his immediate circumstances; he remains so regardless of what he does to change or improve his condition. Man's nature is desirous but insatiable: "all the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full, for

\textsuperscript{20} The paradox of the vacuity of human experience and the insatiable activity of the will provides a fundamental tension which inspires much of Johnson's secular and religious writings. For example, it is discussed in *Rambler* 2, 11-14, 6, 31-35, 8, 41, 16, 86-91, 41, 221, 66, 351-353, 85, 85-87, 114, 243-247, 127, 315, 152, 44, 207, 310; it is implicit in *The Vision of Theodore*, *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, and *Rasselas*; and it is made explicit in all of his *Sermons*. 
the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing" (Ecclesiastes 1: 7-8). The wise Solomon wrote that the eyes of man are as insatiable as the fires of hell (Proverbs 27: 20). The problem is not entirely man's inability to fulfill his wishes, even though this is a crucial issue in understanding and regulating behavior, because "the desires of mankind are much more numerous than their attainments" (Rambler 104, 191; and Rasselas, XLIV).

However, an even more serious problem--more serious because of the futility implied in human endeavor--is that achieved desires or realized goals do not bring happiness or contentment:

He that succeeds in his first attempts is animated to new designs; new designs produce new anxieties and new opposition; and though the second attempt should be equally happy, it will be found, as soon as the transports of novelty have ceased, as soon as custom made elevation familiar, that peace is yet to sought, and that new measures must be taken for the attainment of that tranquillity, for which it is the nature of man to languish, and the want of which, is ill supplied by hurry and confusion, by pomp and variety (Sermon 14, 152).

This is an important point because its consequence is that the happiness of an individual is not promoted by increasing acquisitions or fulfilling desires. In his Sermons, Johnson concentrated his efforts on the desire--the power of the will--itself, rather than on its objects. For
example, *Sermon 12* echoes the wisdom of the preacher in *Ecclesiastes:*

all human actions terminate in vanity, and all human hopes will end in vexation, is a position, from which nature with-holds our credulity, and which our fondness for the present life, and worldly enjoyments, disposes us to doubt; however forcibly it may be urged upon us, by reason or experience. . . . Everyone wants something to happiness, and when he had gained what he first wanted, he wants something else; he wears out life in efforts and pursuits, and perhaps dies, regretting that he must leave the world, when he is about to enjoy it. . . . So great is our interest . . . to believe ourselves able to procure our own happiness, that ex­perience never convinces us of our impotence--. . . . But surely we may be content to credit the general voice of mankind . . . that if happiness had been to be found, some would have found it, and that it is vain to search longer for what all have missed (*Sermon 12*, 127).

*Sermon 12* reflects the Johnsonian axiom that human nature is defined by the vacuity and boredom which results from the incompatibility between the will's infinite desires and the futile quality of the experience available to it in this elusive temporality of life [*cf. Rasselas*]. The expectation of any kind of permanent contentment or happiness, then, is mocked by life itself: whether we strive for power, fame, wealth, wisdom, social achieve­ment, perfection, or even attention, we do so only to be happy and at peace with ourselves. Yet the chasm between expectation and result, promise and performance, hope and reality, can never be bridged by human endeavor. It is
man's refusal to confess this fact that leads to his ultimate frustration.

Aristotle described the soul as the center of desire. He recognized that this desire was not necessarily for things—for the satisfaction of physical wants by physical objects—but rather that the need was for satisfaction itself [for pleasure, for happiness]. Aristotle maintained that this need was made inevitable because of the construction of the soul:

If [the soul] has sensation, it must also have imagination and appetite; for, where sensation is, there is also pain and pleasure, and where these are there must also be desire. . . . For appetite consists of desire, inclination, and wish. . . . and that which has sensation knows pleasure and pain, the pleasant and the painful, and that which knows these has also desire; for desire is an appetite for what is pleasant.21

Rasselas' conclusion about his discontent hints at this idea, as the prince suggests to himself either that man has some non-animal sense not gratified by the Happy Valley or that "he has some desires distinct from sense which must be satisfied before he can be happy" [emphasis

In Sermons 3, 6, 12, 14, 15, 16, and 18, Johnson explores this notion of "desires distinct from sense" as he describes man's futile pursuit after perfect peace. And yet, though man recognizes the impossibility of achieving perfect peace in any task he undertakes, he strives for it anyway, and he never fails to be bitterly disappointed when he falls short of this unrealistic goal:

He that succeeds in his first attempts is animated to new designs; new designs produce new anxieties and new opposition; and though the second attempt should be equally happy, it will be found, as soon as the transports of novelty have ceased, as soon as custom has made elevation familiar, that peace is yet to be sought, and that new measures must be taken for the attainment of that tranquillity, for which it is the nature of man to languish (Sermon 14, 152).

Perfect peace is clearly beyond the reach of imperfect man; hence, Johnson urges man to redirect this desire by placing complete trust only in God's perfect will. Moreover, in his admonitions against such dangers to the practice of religion as hardness of heart in Sermon 3 and vanity in Sermon 12, Johnson again appeals to this concept of "desires distinct from sense." He insists that man can begin the process of self-reformation by fixing his desire solely on heaven:

He is happy that carries about with him in the world the temper of the cloister... who can manage the business of life, with such indifference, as may shut out from his heart all incitements to fraud or injustice; who can partake the pleasures of sense with temperance... and, among all the vicissitudes of good and evil, have his heart fixed only where true joys are to be found (Sermon 3, 33-34).

When the present state of man is considered, when an estimate is made of his hopes, his pleasures, and his possessions; when his hopes appear to be deceitful, his labours ineffectual, his pleasures unsatisfactory, and his possessions fugitive, it is natural to wish for an abiding city, for a state more constant and permanent, of which the objects may be more proportioned to our wishes, and the enjoyments to our capacities (Sermon 12, 135).

Johnson would have come across a similar idea to the notion of "desires distinct from sense" in Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, a book he admired and quoted often. Burton also recognized that desire seemed to rise as a character independent of the needs or physical objects that it sought, and that it was thus capable of wide extension and rapid switching from one more or less arbitrary object to another without producing any kind of satisfaction or happiness. Burton saw in desire an almost manic quality and he knew how little calculation or deliberation was required to set it intensely onto an object. The resulting pain of unfulfillment Burton called melancholy;
A true saying it is, 'Desire hath no rest,' is infinite in itself, endless, and as one calls it, 'a perpetual rack, or horse mill . . .' 'It extends itself to everything,' as Guianerios will have it, 'that is superfluously sought after'; or to any 'fervent desire,' as Fernelius interprets it; be it in what kind soever, it tortures if immoderate, and is (according to Plater and others) an especial cause of melancholy. . . . Austin confessed, that he was torn a-pieces with his manifold desires: and so doth Bernard complain that he could not rest from them a minute, an hour: 'this I would have, and that, and then I desire to be such and such' (II.i.3.11).

The intensity of desire and the severity of the melancholy resulting from the frustrating lack of satisfaction even when each thing desired is obtained are two important aspects of Burton's discussion which Johnson shared.

In his Dictionary, Johnson had carefully defined desire as "wish; eagerness to obtain or enjoy," implying perhaps that the eagerness to enjoy might exist initially apart from an eagerness to enjoy some thing. Desire as a verb is defined as "to wish" (rather than "to wish for"), and under wish Johnson discriminates between the faculty and the object in defining the noun in definition one as "Longing desire" and in definition two as "Thing desired."
The example he gives from Dryden under desire shows at least that desire is somewhat detached from expected gratification: "Desire's the vast extent of human mind; / It mounts above, and leaves poor hope behind." Johnson also cites an example of the use of desire from Locke's
Essay Concerning Human Understanding: "Desire is the uneasiness a man finds in himself upon the absence of any thing." This example shows the beginning of a movement away from tradition and toward a connection of desire to objects, making desire a result of other operations triggered by sensory stimuli. Locke's view, however, is much more complicated than this brief quotation reveals.23

Elsewhere in the Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Locke defines desire as "an uneasiness of the mind for want of some absent good" (II.xxi,31). His choice of the term uneasiness—a term which by itself crosses the barrier between the physical and the psychological—allows him to move toward a near merging of the sensuous and the intellectual in the fulfillment of desire, because pain and pleasure are at once both physical and psychic:

All pain of the body, of what sort soever, and disquiet of the mind, is uneasiness: and with this is always joined desire, equal to the pain or uneasiness felt; and is scarce distinguishable from it. For desire being nothing but an uneasiness in the want of any good, in reference to any pain felt, ease is that absent good; and till that ease be attained, we may call it

23 The similarity between Johnson's views and Locke's philosophy has been examined in several studies. For example, see: Jean Hagstrum, Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism, Chapter I; Donald Greene, The Politics of Samuel Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 76-80, 244-46; Paul Alkon, Samuel Johnson and Moral Discipline, Chapter III and especially pages 90-100; Wilbur Samuel Howell, "John Locke and the New Rhetoric," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 53 (1967), 319-333.
desire. . . . Besides this desire of ease from pain, there is another of absent positive good. . . . As much as we desire any absent good, so much are we in pain for it. . . . But so much as there is anywhere of desire, so much is of uneasiness (II.xxi.31).

The easing of mental or physical pains (which is to say, the fulfillment of desires) results in "pleasure" which Locke traces to "happiness," when the pleasure is "produced in us by the operation of certain objects, either on our minds or our bodies . . ." (II.xxi.43). That is, the ultimate source of desire and the eventual recipient of its actions is a purely psychological state: happiness.

If it be further asked,--What is it moves desire? I answer,--happiness, and that alone. Happiness and misery are the names of two extremes, the utmost bounds whereof we know not. . . . but of some degrees of both we have very lively impressions; made by several instances of delight and joy on the one side, and torment and sorrow on the other; which, for shortness' sake, I shall comprehend under the names of pleasure and pain; there being pleasure and pain of the mind as well as the body. . . . Or, to speak truly, they are all of the mind; though some have their rise in the mind from thought, others in the body from certain modifications of motion [emphasis mine] (II.xxi.42).

Happiness, "the utmost pleasure we are capable of" (II.xxi.43), keeps us desiring even when previous desires have been obtained. Seged, lord of Ethiopia, seems to enact this idea when he dreams of and pursues ten days of perfect happiness (Rambler 204 and 205), even though he
describes himself in terms which would seem to represent
the culmination of all the hopes and ambitions of a ruler
(\textit{Rambler} 204, 296). He does this, Locke would say,
because there are "infinite degrees of happiness which are
not in our possession" (II.xxi.45) and because the
unregulated mind will always suffer when it allows itself
to desire an unlimited amount of some satisfaction before
it will be content. This explains in part why possession
of a thing desired is often followed by disgust (\textit{Rambler}
207; \textit{Sermons} 6, 12, 14, 15, 16, and 18).

But the desires for security, peace or happiness did
not provide Johnson with a completely satisfactory
explanation for the insatiable craving of man's will
because he knew that total fulfillment in this life was
impossible. The explanation that appeared to fit was one
that transcended the physical and even the psychological
realms of human existence. The Biblical tradition had
long recognized that human desire was really a spiritual
hunger:

\begin{quote}
As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my
soul for thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God (Psalm 42: 1-2).
\end{quote}

Man's desire is really the soul's hunger for union with
its Creator; it is displaced when it fixes upon earthly
objects:
The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. . . . Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me (Psalm 23: 1-4).

The Lord drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. . . . Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods! (Psalm 40: 2-4).

Following this tradition, Johnson's Sermons acknowledge the spiritual benefits that can accrue to man when his desire is properly regulated and directed:

... it is natural to wish for an abiding city, for a state more constant and permanent, of which the objects may be more proportioned to our wishes, and the enjoyments to our capacities (Sermon 12, 135).

The man who has accustomed himself to consider that he is always in the presence of the Supreme Being . . . easily withstands those temptations which find a ready passage into the mind not guarded and secured by this awful sense of the Divine Presence (Sermon 16, 174).

The knowledge that man's nature has a "capacity which our present state is not able to fill" permits Johnson not only to conclude that there is a "better mode of existence, which shall furnish employment for the whole soul, and where pleasure shall be adequate to our powers of fruition" (Idler 37, 117, and Sermons 3, 33; 6, 63; 12,
but it keeps him from exhibiting a naive surprise at the incorrigible restlessness of human nature. He declares that there is nothing unusual in the claim that "all our gratifications are volatile, vagrant, and easily dissipated." Such a fact needed no proof, because all admitted it in their own behavior:

It is, indeed, not necessary to shew by many instances what all mankind confess, by an incessant call for variety, and restless pursuit of enjoyments, which they value only because unpossessed (Rambler 78, 46).

Man, in his present state . . . has his mind perpetually employed, in defence, or in acquisition, in securing that which he has, or attaining that which, he believes, he either does, or shall, want.

He that desires happiness must necessarily desire the means of happiness, must wish to appropriate, and accumulate, whatever may satisfy his desires. It is not sufficient to be without want. He will try to place himself beyond the fear of want; and endeavour to provide future gratifications for future wishes, and lay up in store future provisions for future necessities (Sermon 18, 194).

Johnson is careful to teach that desire exists apart from the things eventually desired. This innate power of the human will exists autonomously—hungering for anything and everything insatiably—and it will fix upon almost any object. Consequently, the objects it is directed toward can often be the result of choice or calculation. This conclusion is important and remarkable because Johnson was quite unusual in recognizing that the thing desired is not
the real stimulus for desire and that the objects of desire could be controlled to a large degree by man's free will. The implications of this position for moral activity are very great—man can make choices about both his wants and his pursuits, and with proper knowledge and sufficient power, can change the objects of his desire and pursuit from bad ones to good or from less good to better. He is not chained by destiny to evil, misery, or failure; he has the capacity to escape from his vacuous existence.

Johnson's astute focus on the process of desiring itself allowed him to steadfastly defend the liberty of man's will. On hearing the freedom of man's will being questioned on one occasion, Johnson exclaimed: "All theory is against the freedom of the will; all experience for it!" (Life, III, 291). For Johnson, if theory and experience conflict, it is theory which must give way; the fact that men act as though they are free agents is a sufficient answer to all theoretical objections. In particular, Johnson found troublesome the conclusions concerning free will which had been popularized through

This perceptive distinction within Johnsonian thought was noted by Bate (The Achievement of Samuel Johnson, 68-69).
the preaching and writing of Luther, Calvin, and their followers. For example, in The Bondage of the Will, Luther and Calvin, by denying the freedom of the will, put man under a necessity of sinning; man was thus deprived of moral responsibility for his actions. Johnson was not the first to attack the pernicious effect of such a theory on Christianity. As early as 1655, Jeremy Taylor, in Unum Necessarium, attacked the Calvinist position as a destruction of all laws. It takes away reward and punishment, and we have nothing whereby we can serve God. And precepts of holiness might as well be preached to a wolf as to a man, if man were naturally and inevitably wicked. There would be no use of reason or of discourse, no deliberation or counsel; and it were impossible for the wit of man to make sense of thousands of places of Scripture which speak to us if we could hear and obey, or could refuse [In Anglicanism: The Thought and Practice of the Church of England, Illustrated from the Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century, ed. Paul E. More and Frank L. Cross (1935; rpt. London: S.P.C.K., 1962), 650].

Samuel Clarke also argued that man was sufficiently free to be morally responsible for his actions. For example, in Sermon 13, Clarke wrote that God has not made us necessarily wicked; he had made us, subject and liable to temptation, but not of necessity slaves to sin. That we are capable of corrupting ourselves, is indeed the consequence of that nature which God has given us; but all actual corruptions, are the effects of our free choice [Sermons on Several Subjects, VII, 234-235].

Like Jeremy Taylor and Samuel Clarke, there is no idea more characteristic of Johnson's religious position than the notion that man is morally responsible for his behavior. Johnson's exposure to the writings of Calvin, Taylor, and Clarke can be demonstrated from Christie's
Luther had insisted that human depravity is so extensive as to exclude any notion of free will:

So, if we believe that Satan is the prince of this world, ever ensnaring and opposing the Kingdom of Christ with all his strength, and that he does not let his prisoners go unless he is driven out by the power of the Divine Spirit, it is again apparent that there can be no free will [emphasis mine] (203).

John Calvin follows Luther in stressing that man, while in his separated state, can do nothing to overcome his inherited sinfulness; man is helpless, utterly corrupt, and in bondage to sin. In his Institutes of the Christian Religion, Calvin argues that

Since the Fall, it is certain that man has had no free will to do good. . . . Man is now destitute of free will and miserably subjected to every evil. . . . [Man] is a slave to sin, the meaning of which is that his spirit is so wholly alienated from the righteousness of God that he neither knows, desires, nor undertakes anything that is not wicked, perverse, iniquitous and defiled [emphasis mine] (II.ii.5-6).

Johnson vigorously objected to such ideas: "In examining what part of our present misery is to be imputed to God," he says, "we must carefully distinguish that

sale catalogue for Johnson's personal library. For example, the works of Calvin are listed as entries 115 and 118; the works of Jeremy Taylor are listed as entries 213, 351, and 477; and the works of Samuel Clarke are listed as entries 242 and 251. [Christie, A Catalogue of the Valuable Library of Books, of the late learned Samuel Johnson (London: Mr. Christie, 1785).}
which is actually appointed by him, from that which is only permitted, or that which is the consequence of something done by ourselves," without his direction (Sermon 5, 56). Based on his experience of human nature, Johnson argued further in Sermon 5 that self-improvement is possible for man only because freedom of the will does exist. Johnson's consistent opposition to the concept of determinism is perhaps best summarized in his response to the idea of a ruling passion. In the Life of Pope, he calls Pope's presentation of the doctrine "pernicious as well as false" because it at once preached submission to irrational behavioral forces and the indulgence of appetite:

... its tendency is to produce the belief of a kind of moral predestination, or overruling principle which cannot be resisted: he that admits it, is prepared to comply with every desire that caprice or opportunity shall excite, and to flatter himself that he submits only to the lawful dominion of Nature, in obeying the resistless authority of his ruling Passion (Life of Pope, 357).

Johnson's belief in free will was based in part on his recognition that men often project the blame for their problems onto other people or circumstances, refusing to see the cause in their own natures. For example, Johnson says of Cowley, who thought that travelling would alleviate his unhappiness, that "he never suspected that
the cause of his unhappiness was within, that his own passions were not sufficiently regulated" (Rambler 6, 35). Because of pride, "the general source of our infelicity" (Sermon 5, 57), we refuse to blame ourselves for our discontent--"Vanity inclines us to find faults anywhere rather than in ourselves" (Idler 70, 218)--because "we are all naturally credulous in our own favour" (Adventurer 74, 219). The word naturally here is the key. Humans are proud by their very nature and, apart from the light and power of religion, they will refuse to see themselves as their own main problem. We are "unwilling to believe anything to our own disadvantage" (Adventurer 108, 448) Johnson notes, and frequently we are "unwilling to be taught" (Rambler 2, 14) anything new. "Advice has no force to suppress . . . vanity" (Rambler 155, 61-62), so that reason by itself cannot cast off the daring desires and behaviors which lead to unhappiness.

Free will, then, is the basis for Johnson's belief in the possibility of moral and physical improvement for man's present state. In Sermon 5, for example, Johnson argues that men are reasoning creatures and not automatons:

If we examine all the afflictions of mind, body, and estate . . . we shall find God not otherwise accessory to them, than as he works no miracles to prevent them, as he suffers men to be masters of themselves, and restrains them only by
coercions applied to their reason. If God should, by a particular exertion of his omnipotence, hinder murder or oppression, no man could then be a murderer or an oppressor, because he would be withheld from it by an irresistible power; but then that power, which prevented crimes, would destroy virtue; for virtue is the consequence of choice. Men would be no longer rational, or would be rational to no purpose, because their actions would not be the result of free-will, determined by moral motives; but the settled and predestined motions of a machine impelled by necessity [emphasis mine] (Sermon 5, 56).

God created man for happiness, "happiness indeed dependant upon his [man's] own choice, and to be preserved by his own conduct" (Sermon 5, 55). Man need not submit helplessly to fate "like a machine impelled by necessity" (Sermon 5, 56).

Furthermore, Boswell records several conversations in which Johnson defends man's free will. For example, speaking on the question of atheism, when the supposition of an eternal necessity without design, without a governing mind, was discussed, Johnson counters the idea with the "all-powerful intelligence" which creates men having freedom of choice. Thus, Johnson again rejects the notion of human nature being a "machine impelled by necessity" (Sermon 5, 56) in this discussion with Boswell (Life, V, 47-48).

On a later occasion, Boswell again returned to the topic of free will, and was finally won over by Johnson.
Here, Johnson clearly states the position for Boswell which he had previously outlined in Sermon 5:

Moral evil is occasioned by free will, which implies choice between good and evil. With all the evil that there is, there is no man but would rather be a free agent than a mere machine without evil; and what is best for each individual may be best for the whole. If a man would rather be the machine, I cannot argue with him. He is a different being from me (Life, V, 117).26

Johnson, then, stoutly asserted the freedom of man's will in his Sermons, his secular writing,27 and his conversations. According to Miss Reynolds,

There was nothing Dr. Johnson used to say of which he was so certain as of the freedom of his will, and no man, I believe, was ever more attentive to preserve its rectitude . . . in conformity with his religious tenets respecting original sin (Johnsonian Miscellanies, II, 256).

By considering the will as a fundamental principle of human nature, Samuel Johnson departed from much current psychological theory, which included the desire or hunger of the will as just one of a list of passions, either

26 Boswell records several other occasions when Johnson spoke in defense of man's free will. Perhaps the most famous remark is: "Sir, we know our will is free, and there's an end on't" (Life, II, 82).

27 See Rambler 43, 234-235; Rambler 113, 239; and Idler 11, 37-39, for additional evidence of Johnson's belief that freedom of the will implies that man exercise personal responsibility for his moral improvement.
direct (arising immediately from objects or sensations) or
derivative (arising from other passions in conjunction
with objects and sensations). Locke had listed love,
hatred, desire, joy, sorrow, hope, fear, despair, anger,
and envy as the passions (Essay, II.xx.1-13), while Hume's
list included desire, aversion, grief, joy, hope, fear,
despair, and security.28 Such rankings certainly take the
focus off desire as the single passion in need of careful
attention and regulation, and they leave singular
Johnson's view that "to subdue passion, and regulate
desire, is the great task of man, as a moral agent"
(Sermon 18, 193).

Johnson's view, then, is that the power of man's will
to desire is a very powerful faculty existing apart from
outer stimuli; it cannot be suppressed, but it can be
regulated by a conscious selection of objects (Rambler 49,
266). Since its essence is a spiritual hunger, it cannot
be satisfied by any quantitative worldly acquisition:
gratifying appetites only increases their demands (Rambler
38, 208), "our desires always increase with our posses-
sions" (Adventurer 67, 387), and we "create wants as fast
as they are satisfied" (Adventurer 119, 462). The power
of the human will can be satisfied only when it is

28 David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L. A.
properly directed to "wish for an abiding city, for a state more constant and permanent, of which the objects may be more proportioned to our wishes, and the enjoyments to our capacities" (Sermon 12, 135). Meanwhile, the task of the sermon writer is not only to remind man of this, so that man will cease the endless and futile pursuit of every idle wish and irrational craving, but also to instruct men, as personally responsible moral agents, regarding their duty to direct and regulate desire to its proper end. It is notable that Johnson's pragmatic view of human desire is different from that of many of the theorists we have examined both in its nature and importance. Johnson was not content to rest his observations on the nature of man with no more than a theory of the will; he wanted to apply his ideas to the improvement of the human condition--to reduce the miseries caused by man's erroneous desires and pursuits, and to warn men of the dangers of expecting their innate faculties to lead them to perfect happiness in their present state.

IV

In Johnson's understanding of human motivation, the powers of the will and the imagination are viewed as complementary drives. The imagination is often the
dangerously creative and delusive faculty of human nature which invents objects or goals, real or unreal, possible or impossible, for the power of the will--man's desire--to fix upon. Imagination in Johnsonian thought is ultimately that power in man which blinds him to the limitations of his nature. When unregulated it is the cause of much of man's unhappiness, extending his desires far beyond his ability to obtain them, always promising happiness but always disappointing the fulfillment. However, the imagination is not inherently "bad"; it is capable, with the right direction, of benefiting man by acting creatively rather than destructively. Thus, it follows that, as with man's will, Johnson does not propose to suppress or eliminate the imagination; he seeks rather to regulate and redirect it.

Some difficulty arises in attempting to define the imagination for Johnson because he uses the term in several different and not always interrelated senses--showing, to begin with, the complexity of the concept, and to some extent, perhaps, the imprecision of identifying similar processes with one name. Raymond D. Havens gives six senses in which Johnson uses the word imagination, ranging from the source of literary creation to an agent which not only distorts the real world, but which can produce non-existent things for the mind to dwell on and
wish to be real. Havens calls the imagination in this latter sense a "power of conceiving what is unusual, what is outside his experience, and perhaps improbable or impossible" (245). While the kind of imagination we are concerned with derives from this idea, it is not just the "power of conceiving" something new, unusual, or unreal that gave Johnson his great distrust of the imagination, but the power that faculty has to impose itself and its creations upon the mind in the guise of truth or reality, and the power to disturb man's faculty of the will. Thus, even though Johnson does believe that it has a certain, though relatively small, constructive role, so often harmful are the workings of an uncontrolled or over-indulged imagination that he almost always focuses on its negative powers.

Johnson had reason to fear the imagination--a fear born of his own experience. As he left Oxford, he fell into a state of terrible depression against which all his efforts at rational analysis and self-management seemed futile. He wallowed in guilt and self reproach; he doubted his own sanity and entertained thoughts of suicide:

---

It may at first seem ironic that Johnson, who was to figure in literary history as the supreme exponent and symbol of practical common sense, of unremitting grip on concrete reality, should have begun his adult life in fear for his sanity (Bate, *Samuel Johnson*, 116).

However, it was precisely his long and harrowing battle with his own demonic imagination which turned him toward the real world and away from those shadows which lured him towards self-destruction. So, although Johnson found creative potential in the imagination, he also feared it and never departed from his firm belief that it must be held in control.

Johnson's *Dictionary* definitions and examples are especially revealing here because they almost all show or imply some uneasiness about or some suspect feeling toward the imaginative faculty. He defines *imagination* as "fancy; the power of forming ideal pictures; the power of representing things absent to one's self or others." One function of the imagination, then, is creating things which do not exist—"ideal pictures." Johnson's first example, taken from Bacon, is a morally neutral one:

```
Imagination I understand to be the representation of an individual thought. Imagination is of three kinds: joined with belief of that which is past; and of things present, or as if they were present: for I comprehend in this imagination feigned and at pleasure, as if one should imagine such a man to be in the vestments of a pope, or to have wings.
```
The next example he offers, this time from Pope, is much more disturbing because of imagination's power to alter or destroy the memory of the real: "Where beams of warm imagination play, / The memory's soft figures melt away."

A second definition Johnson gives is "conception; image in the mind; idea," and the examples, like this one from King Lear, imply a less-than-trustworthy faculty:

Better were I distract,  
So should my thoughts be sever'd from my griefs;  
And woes, by wrong imaginations, lose  
The knowledge of themselves.

The final definition is even more sinister: "contrivance; scheme," and the example is from Lamentations 3: 60: "Thou hast seen all their vengeance and all their imaginations against me."

As with the faculty of man's will, the belief that the imagination posed certain hazards to rational man goes back to antiquity. Since the classical view of the imagination is quite similar to Johnson's understanding in several respects, it is worth examining these parallels briefly as a means of clarification. Donald F. Bond has made clear that the imagination was distrusted in classical thought because of its attractive and disturbing
Both the Platonic and Stoic philosophers were suspicious of the imagination, the Platonic philosophers because of "its deceptive qualities and its inability to attain to abstract truth" and the Stoics because it had "the power of stirring up the passions to revolt" (58).

Marcus Aurelius, for example, repeatedly insists on controlling imagination by a careful and continuous examination of its products. He writes:

Never allow yourself to be swept off your feet when an impulse stirs, see first that it will meet the claims of justice; when an impression forms, assure yourself first of its certainty. . . . Do away with all fancies. Cease to be passion's puppet. . . . Learn to recognize every experience for what it is. . . . Erasing all fancies, keep on saying to yourself . . . 'it lies with me to perceive all things in their true light, and to deal with each of them as it merits.'

One of the most significant pre-eighteenth-century accounts of the imagination comes in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. In the section of this work on "The Force of Imagination," Burton discusses the conditions which can arise in those whose reasons are not capable of regulating the imagination. Of such people he says, "How many

---


chimeras, antics, golden mountains, and castles in the air do they build unto themselves" (I.ii.3.2). Some are led into "all vices" by a "false and corrupt imagination," many suffer from hysterical and psychosomatic complaints as well as real diseases through imagination's power, and sometimes the imagination can cause even death itself. Burton's picture is extremely disturbing:

So that I may certainly conclude this strong conceit or imagination is astrum hominis [man's guiding star], and the rudder of this our ship, which reason should steer, but, overborne by phantasy, cannot manage, and so suffers itself and this whole vessel of ours to be overruled, and often overturned (I.ii.3.2).

Throughout his Sermons, Samuel Johnson recognized two principal characteristics of the imagination which reflect his appreciation and development of this classical heritage. The first was that our self-deception is not entirely a product of a powerful imagination overthrowing the will. We are overpowered only part of the time; often we willingly deceive ourselves, and encourage extensive delusions because they are so pleasing. Imlac discusses this at length in the chapter of Rasselas on the "Dangerous Prevalence of Imagination," where he says that a man will begin by indulging the power of fiction, grow to amuse "his desires with impossible enjoyments," and finally confirm the reign of imagination (Chapter XLIV).
Johnson emphasizes the willing credulity men allow to their imaginations; the imposition of imagination upon us is a welcome and desired one, not always one forced against our will. He summarizes this position in Sermon 15 when he observes that the imagination allows man to withdraw from it [his present troubled and dangerous state] to a fancied futurity, in which whatever is crooked is to be made straight; in which temptations are to be rejected, and passions to be conquered; in which wisdom and piety are to regulate the day; in which every hour shall have its proper duty. The morning shall awake beneficence, and the evening still the soul in gratitude and devotion. Purposes like these are often formed, and often forgotten. When remorse and solitude press hard upon the mind, they afford a temporary refuge, which, like other shelters from a storm, is forsaken, when the calm returns (Sermon 15, 163).

The second characteristic of the imagination emphasized by Johnson was that it is not simply a theoretical faculty to be defined and studied by philosophers, but that it had actual and important effects upon the daily life of average men, and that when it took over the mind, tyrannizing over the will, very serious results were inevitable. The philosophical definition of imagination to which Johnson assented, that it was the power of forming ideas or images by recalling or combining remembered sense impressions (Idler 44), was fairly common in the century, and can be traced back to Locke and
Hobbes. Hobbes had written, in the *Leviathan*, that "imagination ... is nothing else but sense decaying or weakened, by the absence of the object" (I, 27). But as we have seen from Johnson's own definitions of the term in the *Dictionary*, the meanings more closely related to what we might call **practical** or **observable** effects are more significant for understanding the nature of man and his actions than are the purely speculative, theoretical, ones. Johnson consistently described the imagination in terms of its practical effects:

> Imagination, a licentious and vagrant faculty, unsusceptible of limitations, and impatient of restraint, has always endeavoured to baffle the logician, to perplex the confines of distinction, and burst the inclosures of regularity (*Rambler* 125, 300).

> The mind, long vitiated with trifles, and entertained with wild and unnatural combinations of ideas, becomes in a short time unable to support the fatigue of reasoning; it is disgusted with a long succession of solemn images, and retires from serious meditation, and tiresome labour, to gayer fancies. ... Thus he soon grows indifferent to truth or falsehood,

---


33 This point is also made by Alkon in *Samuel Johnson and Moral Discipline* (69-75). Alkon notes that Johnson sees the imagination "as the handmaid of illusion, impossibility, and evil" (73) not because of any inherent quality in its theoretical construction, but because of the results it produces. Again, we see that the **practical** finds more significance in Johnsonian thought than the speculative.
and almost incapable of discerning one from the other. . . . There are others who deride religion for the sake of displaying their own imaginations, of following the fashion of a corrupt and licentious age, or gaining the friendship of the great, or the applause of the gay (Sermon 20, 221-222; 225).

The real danger of the imagination is the power it possesses to persuade, to seem real or true, by actively mimicking reality. "Because imaginations persist in us and resemble sensations," Aristotle had said, "living creatures frequently act in accordance with them" (On the Soul, 429a). Men do so "because the mind is temporarily clouded over by emotion, or disease, or sleep" (428a). Johnson believed that the imagination forcefully and creatively presented its images to the mind for acceptance. So the harm of the imagination is to present as real or possible things unreal or impossible and thereby to propose feelings (such as happiness) or successes (such as possession of some object) both in nature and degree incapable of being realized or enjoyed. Yet, because of the power of the imagination, these proposed feelings or successes appeal so strongly as things both possible and necessary, that they oppress the entire conscious mind and will in anticipation. For this reason, Johnson went far beyond an attitude of critical amusement toward anyone who "shuns fancied ills or chases airy good" (Vanity of Human
wishes, I. 10). He connected this shift from illusion to delusion to a species of insanity:

There is no man whose imagination does not sometimes predominate over his reason, who can regulate his attention wholly by his will, and whose ideas will come and go at his command. No man will be found in whose mind airy notions do not sometimes tyrannise, and force him to hope or fear beyond the limits of sober probability. All power of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity (Rasselas, Chapter XLIV, 405-406).

When Johnson cautions against temptations to the sin of "charging God foolishly" in Sermon 16, he observes this same dangerous progression from illusion to delusion whenever man attempts to escape the vacuity of existence:

It is frequently observed in common life, that some favourite notion or inclination, long indulged, takes such an entire possession of a man's mind, and so engrosses his faculties, as to mingle thoughts perhaps he is not himself conscious of with almost all his conceptions, and influence his whole behavior. It will often operate on occasions with which it could scarcely be imagined to have any connection, and will discover itself, however it may lie concealed, either in trifling incidents, or important occurrences, when it is least expected or foreseen. It gives a particular direction to every sentiment and action, and carries a man forward, as by a kind of resistless impulse, or insuperable destiny (Sermon 16, 173).

In its tyranny over man's will, the imagination can produce three principal effects. The first is to alienate completely the imager from reality and to place him in a dream world where all events take place purely by wishing.
In this case the imagination paralyzes the thinker by making reality irrelevant to his supposed accomplishments, and thereby prevents any actions from being undertaken. Johnson describes this indulgence as daydreaming merely for the pleasure of it, without any real intent to act:

These gay sallies of imagination . . . are of no farther use to mankind than to divert, and can have no higher place in our esteem than any other art that terminates in mere amusement (Sermon 20, 221).

This daydreaming does bring a degree of happiness or at least amusement, but there is a danger not only of seeking such idleness because of the ease with which it grants pleasure, but of allowing the imagination to habitually predominate over the reason:

All sin that is committed by Christians, is committed either through an absolute forgetfulness of God, for the time in which the inordinate passion, of whatever kind it be, predomnates and prevails; or because, if the ideas of God and religion were present to our minds, they were not strong enough to overcome and suppress the desires excited by some pleasing, or the apprehensions raised by some terrible, object. . . . All mental images influence our conduct with more or less force, as they are more or less strongly impressed upon the mind; and they are impressed more strongly, as they are more frequently recollected or renewed (Sermon 9, 101).

The second effect of the imagination's tyranny over the will is its power to impose upon man, in order to
flatter the ego and assuage the conscience, the idea that no self-improving action is needed because he is already superior to others. "Men please themselves with imagining that they have made a deeper search, or wider survey, than others" (Rambler 2, 9). Because of the natural workings of pride in the learned, scholars are especially subject to this self-indulgence:

A man of learning has such frequent opportunities of comparing himself [to those engaged in manual occupations]; and is so strongly incited, by that comparison, to indulge the contemplation of his own superiority; that it is not to be considered as wonderful, that vanity creeps in upon him; that he does not willingly withdraw his imagination from objects that so much flatter his passions, that he pursues the train of thought, from one reflection to another, places himself and others, in every situation, in which he can appear with advantage in his own eyes; rises to comparisons with still higher characters, and still retains the habit of giving himself the preference; and in all disputable cases turns the balance in his own favour, by super-adding, from his own conceit, that wisdom, which by nature he does not possess, or by industry he has not acquired (Sermon 8, 88) [See Rasselas, Chapter XL].

Here we see the debilitating effect of imagination acting upon pride; the connection between pride and this kind of imagination is clarified in those "men who have flattered themselves into this opinion of their own abilities":

He that overvalues himself will undervalue others, and he that undervalues others will oppress them. To this fancied superiority it is owing, that tyrants have squandered the lives of
millions, and looked unconcerned on the miseries of war (Sermon 6, 68).

The danger of this self-delusion goes beyond its resulting pride and the contempt of others. The deceived imager often exhibits the damning tendency to believe that his life will be long and that his day of judgement will be distant:

Of self-deceit, in the great business of our lives, there are various modes. The far greater part of mankind deceive themselves, by willing negligence, by refusing to think on their state, lest such thoughts should trouble their quiet, or interrupt their pursuits. . . . Their mode of self-deception which prevails most in the world, and by which the greatest number of souls is at last betrayed to destruction, is the art, which we are all too apt to practise, of putting far from us the evil day, of setting the hour of death, and the day of account, at a great distance (Sermon 10, 110-11).

. . . nothing is more dangerous than spiritual pride. The man that esteems himself a saint will be in danger of relaxing his circumspection, of stopping in his progress of virtue, and, if once he stops, of falling back into those infirmities from which his imaginary exemption made him presumptuous and supine (Sermon 16, 175).

But whether idleness results from pleasing ourselves that we need not labor or from an inability to fix upon a project, this deficiency created by the imagination clearly needs to be remedied. Moreover, Johnson believed that "the great business of our lives" (Sermon 10, 110) was more than self-knowledge; rather, "the business of
life is to work out our salvation; and the days are few, in which provision must be made for eternity" (Sermon 15, 161).

The third effect produced by the imagination in its oppression of the will is to generate pointless desires and subsequent discontent whether or not those desires are satisfied. As we have seen, man has an innate desire to seek satisfaction. The imagination functions as a kind of goad to the faculty of the will, spurring it on to focus on successive goals by promising inflated rewards from reduced efforts. To change metaphors, we could say that the imagination amplifies the proposed pleasure fixed upon by the will. Johnson admonished man to place his trust in God as the only source of complete happiness; yet he acknowledged that it was man's nature to seek various kinds of temporal satisfaction. The young, for example,

instead of founding happiness on the solid basis of reason and reflection, they [the young] raise an airy fabrick of momentary satisfaction, which is perpetually decaying, and perpetually to be repaired. They please themselves, not with thinking justly, but with avoiding to think at all, with a suspense of all the operations of their intellectual faculties, which defends them from remembrance of the past, or anticipation of the future. They lull themselves in an enervate, and cowardly dissipation, and, instead of being happy, are only indolent [emphasis mine] (Sermon 14, 150).
The great danger of the imagination, then, lies in its capacity to create artificial or non-existent needs, goals, and wants—so rapidly and continuously that man cannot obtain them: "It is impossible to supply wants as fast as an idle imagination may be able to form them" (Rambler 126, 319). Man is therefore inevitably in want of satisfaction. Locke had pointed out that physical desires caused men significant "uneasiness" by themselves, but that when the desires of the imagination were added, there was no time for a man to pursue real good:

If, besides accidental harms, we add the fantastical uneasiness (as itch after honour, power or riches, etc.) which acquired habits by fashion, example, and education, have settled in us, and a thousand other irregular desires, which custom has made natural to us, we shall find that a very little part of our life is so vacant from these uneasinesses, as to leave us free to the attraction of remoter absent good. We are seldom at ease, and free enough from the solicitation of our natural or adopted desires, but a constant succession of uneasinesses out of that stock which natural wants or acquired habits have heaped up, take the will in their turns; and no sooner is one action dispatched, which by such a determination of the will we are set upon, but another uneasiness is ready to set us on work. (Locke, Essay, II.xxi.46).

What Locke ascribed to the "acquired habits" that fashion and custom might dictate, William Law, in A Serious Call To A Devout and Holy Life, connected to wilful human culpability. Law asserted that man had imagined himself into unhappiness through his own fault by increasing his
desires beyond the easily satisfiable requirements of nature. Man, he said, was "born with few wants, and into a large world very capable of supplying them." But man will not be content with nature:

Though God, and nature, and reason, make human life thus free from wants and so full of happiness; yet our passions, in rebellion against God, against nature and reason, create a new world of evils, and fill human life with imaginary wants, and vain disquiets (A Serious Call, 118).

In Sermon 12, Johnson seems to balance Locke and Law while at the same time going on to imply rather darkly that our imaginations will prevent us from ever being completely happy. "Works of absolute necessity are few and simple," he says, but we create further needs:

As we extend our pleasures, we multiply our wants. The pain of hunger is easily appeased, but to surmount the disgust of appetite vitiated by indulgence, all the arts of luxury are required, and all are often vain. When to the enjoyments of sense, are superadded the delights of fancy, we form a scheme of happiness that never can be complete, for we can always imagine more than we possess (Sermon 12, 132).

The hunger of the imagination is a striving to create artificially both pleasures and satisfactions beyond those of the real world, sometimes only elusively, but often delusively. The kingdom of imagination is the unreal and the untrue, where the future may be arranged and
rearranged, the present may be falsely perceived, and the past may be erroneously remembered. The imager believes he can find happiness by allowing the imagination to focus away from empirical truth and thereby escape the need to deal with life's bitterness and vexations; but Johnson believed that by doing so happiness and productivity would be prevented. He knew from his own experience during the years after he left Oxford, when he struggled with self-doubt and self-rejection, just how destructive the imagination could be.

This personal struggle explains in large measure why Johnson's general view of the imagination is so negative. He often spoke of its "dangerous prevalence" and refers to it as a "licentious and vagrant faculty." But what of the constructive role mentioned earlier? Among the uses or positive aspects Johnson ascribed to the faculty was, as many critics have pointed out rather extensively, its role in artistic creation, especially the composition of poetry. More than this, however, Johnson believed that the imagination does have uses in the lives of ordinary

---

man. Like man's desire, it is a faculty to be "regulated rather than extinguished" (Rambler 49, 266), not simply because extinguishing it would be impossible, but because it has a certain positive potential: "Since the mind is always of itself shrinking from disagreeable images, it is sometimes necessary to recall them" (Sermon 15, 160).

Imagination, according to Johnson, can make us kinder and more understanding toward others, as we think what pains they may have; the feelings of sympathy and shared joy are in fact "produced by an act of the imagination" as we put ourselves fancifully into the circumstances of those we see happy or sad and consider how we would feel (Rambler 60, 318). Imagination is an aid to religion by helping to make "the future predominate over the present" (Rambler 7, 37-9), so that we will forego expedient but harmful pleasures in the hope of an ultimate reward later on, and so that we will be willing to undergo hardships for the sake of future blessings (Rambler 178, 174). In the funeral sermon for his wife, Johnson echoes these ideas from his Rambler essays as he reminds the congregation that there are some who refuse to engage their imagination productively in the service of religion:

There were, doubtless, at all times, as there are now, many . . . [who] had no regard to distant events, but withheld their imagination from sallying out into futurity, or catching any
terror that might interrupt their quiet (Sermon 25, 262).

Finally, imagination, through hope, makes life happier. Hope elevates and makes delightful the life of a man and is "necessary in every condition" (Rambler 67, 354). Reasonably grounded or not, hope is "necessary to the production of every thing great or excellent" (Rambler 2, 12), for "where there is no hope, there can be no endeavour" (Rambler 110, 221). Our wants or desires—the specific objects of pursuit upon which we have finally fixed—become objects of anticipation, and because we believe that their attainment will bring happiness, we derive some happiness from the hope itself. Consequently, the imagination, if properly directed and regulated, will allow a man to meditate on God until the divine presence becomes a fixation of spiritual strength:

The man who has accustomed himself to consider that he is always in the presence of the Supreme Being . . . easily withstands those temptations which find a ready passage into the mind not guarded and secured by this awful sense of the Divine Presence.

He is not enticed by ill examples, because the purity of God always occurs to his imagination; he is not betrayed to security by solitude, because he never considers himself as alone (Sermon 16, 174).

In Johnson's view, the benefits of the imagination are relatively small when measured against its capacity to
damage. Johnson had a strong dialectical view of the imagination. He knew the contributions his imagination made to his capacity to empathize with his fellow men as they wrestled with the limitations of their nature. At the same time, he knew the power of the imagination to drag him into the depths of self-delusion and despair. So, the imagination for Johnson required eternal vigilance and stern discipline:

> Men are very seldom disappointed, except when their desires are immoderate, or when they suffer their passions to overpower their reason, and dwell upon delightful scenes of future honours, power, or riches, till they mistake probabilities for certainties, or wild wishes for rational expectations (Sermon 5, 58).

Reason is the lawful sovereign of the imagination, designed to control and direct imagination's operations. To resign oneself to the tyranny of the imagination is to cast reason aside and to give up the necessarily painful efforts at self-regulation and improvement.

Throughout the Sermons, Johnson exhorts us to keep going forward despite fears and anxieties; yet he was keenly aware that the world of the imagination is often a self-centered one which can lead to madness or despair. He strongly believed that the present state of man owed to the future state an active striving for improvement and not a stagnant self-indulgence. Johnson steadfastly
upheld man's obligations and ultimate accountability to God. Yet he recognized the dangerous propensity of human nature to eschew this responsibility and to prefer "the gay sallies of the imagination" (Sermon 20, 221) or to "indulge any desire that happens to arise, with very little resistance or compunction" (Sermon 10, 111) in a futile attempt to fill the vacuity of existence. Johnson was never content to rest his observations on the nature of man with theories on the consequences of original sin, speculations about man's fallen and weak condition, or with hypotheses concerning the operations of the will and the imagination. He wanted his ideas to be useful for the practical improvement of man's present lot--to alleviate the miseries caused by man's delusive imagination and insatiable will, and to warn man of the dangers of expecting his innate faculties to lead him to perfect happiness in this life. In the following chapter we will see how Johnson, basing his argument on the observations concerning the nature of man we have here developed, persuades the auditors of his Sermons to examine the reasonableness of religion's consolations for the vacuity of life.
CHAPTER THREE

JOHNSON'S SERMONS AND THE
CONSOLATION OF SALVATION

I

Modern scholars have often noted that Johnson viewed reason as superior to imagination.¹ Behind him was a long tradition, ranging from classical figures like Boethius² to contemporaries such as Isaac Watts, who wrote "let calm and sedate reason govern and determine our opinions . . . Fancy is the inferior faculty and ought to obey."³

Johnson believed that reason should discipline and direct

¹ See, for example, Robert Voitle, Samuel Johnson the Moralist (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 23 ff; Sachs, Passionate Intelligence, xiv and 69-70; Alkon, Samuel Johnson and Moral Discipline, 65-80; Sheridan Baker, "Rasselas: Psychological Irony and Romance," Philological Quarterly, 45 (Jan. 1966), 253.

² For Boethius, human reason is classified as inferior to divine thought but as above imagination and wit [See, The Consolation of Philosophy, trans. Richard Green (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1962), Book V, Prose 2, 103-104]. Boswell mentions Johnson's unqualified recommendation of and personal fondness for Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy because it demonstrated the use of man's reason as a source and method for the defense of free will (Life, I, 139 and Sale Catalogue, entry 295).

³ Isaac Watts, Logick, or the Right Use of Reason in the Enquiry after Truth (London: n.p., 1755), 186.
human imagination which tends to lead one astray into delusions and falsehood. He says that

we can only, in whatsoever state we may be placed, secure ourselves from disquiet and from misery, by a resolute attention to truth and reason (Sermon 1, 13).

This chapter will seek to show that Johnson was not the doctrinaire rationalist that he has sometimes been made to appear. Reason was not for him sufficient to encompass the whole range of human experience. Some eighteenth century philosophers were dualists who maintained a strict division between reason and emotion, and between the mind and its objects in the external world. They were wrestling with what William Temple, late Archbishop of Canterbury, once called "the Cartesian faux-pas." Because of Johnson's common sense approach to life, this problem was simply too abstract to trouble him greatly. In a celebrated gesture, he refuted Berkeley's solipsism with a kick of the stone. Johnson found his mind engaged with the external world, not separated from it. Johnson viewed the nature of man as being engaged in a process of integration; he explained man's nature in terms which combined rather than dissected the faculties into hierarchical categories. One can see in Johnson's philosophy striking anticipations of the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead and the pragmatism of John
Indeed, Johnson's theorizing was never far from the practical experience of daily life which he believed ought to be lived with common sense.

As we saw in Chapter Two, Johnson believed the imagination was prone to extend our desires and to create unrealistic hopes; it required the eternal vigilance of reason in order to preserve sanity, virtue, and happiness. However, Johnson's use of the term reason differs from that of several of his contemporary theorists. He did not mean by the word what Locke, for example, meant: an abstract intellectual exercise governed by the rules of logic with "truth" or "falsehood" determined by careful intellectual analysis. For Johnson, reason was broader and more practical. Throughout the Sermons, Johnson calls for the exercise of practical reason, of a kind of common-sense and enlightened self-interest, to cope with the concrete problems of life. He was thoroughly familiar with the process Freud was to call "rationalization"—using the ego to justify and defend what the id desires. Indeed, Johnson made the same distinction that Freud made between the "pleasure principle," which seeks immediate gratification regardless of consequences, and the "reality principle," which defers immediate pleasure for the sake of later and greater satisfactions:
Every man is conscious, that he neither performs, nor forbears anything upon any other motive than the prospect, either of an immediate gratification, or a distant reward; that whether he complies with temptation, or repels it, he is still influenced by the same general regard to his own felicity; but that when he yields to the solicitation of his appetite, or the impulse of his passions, he is overborne by the prevalence of the object before him; and when he adheres to his duty, in opposition to his present interest, he is influenced by the hopes of future happiness (Sermon 14, 149).

He astutely acknowledged man's predilection for self-delusion—man often does not use his reason to integrate his appetites and passions for his long-term happiness. Rather, he prefers the immediate gratification of his desires or the chimeras created by his imagination. Furthermore, in a similar context, we can recall Swift's famous comment:

I have got materials towards a treatise, proving the falsity of that definition animal rationale, and to show it would be only rationis capax. Upon this great foundation of misanthropy . . . the whole building of my Travels is erected; and I never will have peace of mind till all honest men are of my opinion . . . . The matter is so clear that it will admit of no dispute.4

In this letter, Swift suggests two broad views of reason included in the legacy of philosophical debate on the

nature of man. His definitions—animal rationale and rationis capax—suggest the two traditions of reason we will examine under the headings "peripatetic" and "Lockean."

The first of these inherited concepts, drawn from the developments of Renaissance psychology, argued that reason was an independent faculty, able to derive truths from innate ideas, apart from any reliance on data supplied by the senses. In Samuel Johnson the Moralist, Robert Voitle has called this "Peripatetic Reason" (2), partly because it was the more traditional and philosophical view, holding that reason was our connection with God. The continental rationalists, like Descartes and Spinosa, subscribed to this exalted view of reason. Descartes, for example, believed that reason was the "only valid criterion of truth," and noted that using his reason in everything was what pleased him most about his philosophical methodology. In his Discourse on Method, Descartes described how reason alone was the source of all truth:

First, I tried to discover the general principles, or first causes, of all that is or can be in the world, without for this purpose

---


considering anything but God alone, its Creator, and without deriving these principles from anything but certain seeds of truth which are naturally in our souls. After that, I examined what were the first and most ordinary effects that we could infer from these causes. And it seems to me that I thereby discovered the skies, the stars, and earth, and even, on the earth, water, air, fire, minerals, and certain other such things . . . (52).

This high view of reason was also embraced in England. For example, the Deist Tindal insisted that the priority of reason to revelation was proved either by revelation's acknowledgment of that priority or by the obvious falsity of a denial of man's rationality. By emphasizing reason, Tindal was also emphasizing the sufficiency of natural theology; he made truth and happiness the product of "right reason":

the happiness of all beings consists in the perfections of their nature; and the nature of a rational being is most perfect when it is perfectly rational; that is, when it governs all its actions by the rules of right reason; for then it arrives at the most perfect, and consequently the happiest state a rational nature can aspire to: and every deviation from the rules of right reason, being an imperfection, must carry with it a proportionable unhappiness; and a man's happiness and duty must consist in the same things, since no one can be obligated to do anything that does not some way or other contribute to his happiness; and consequently, according to the sense men have of their own happiness, and of the means which will
naturally procure it, they may assuredly attain the knowledge of their respective duties.7

Tindal argued that religious revelation could offer man no truths that he could not discover through his reason (78); indeed, he believed that natural religion and revealed religion were the same:

Whereas, if we allow the Light of Nature sufficient to enable us to judge rightly in these matters, and consequently to distinguish truth from falsehood, we must own since there can be no disagreement in truth that there's an exact conformity between internal and external revelation, with no other difference but as the manner of their being revealed (58).8

In similar fashion, William Wollaston, a natural religionist, defined religion as "an obligation to do ... what ought not to be omitted, and to forbear what ought not to be done."9 This religion is discoverable by reason alone; it does not require any necessary reinforcement


8 The general position of the Deists toward revelation is perhaps best illustrated by the full title to Toland's influential work: Christianity Not Mysterious: or a Treatise Showing that there is Nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, nor above It, and that No Christian Doctrine can be Properly Called a Mystery (1718).

from an external source, such as divine revelation. Samuel Clarke also reflects the tradition of the continental rationalists when he asserts that

reason, which is the proper nature of man, can never . . . lead man to anything else than universal love and benevolence: and Wars, Hatred, and Violence can never arise but from extreme corruption.¹⁰

In spite of this high view of reason, Clarke recognized that

the practice of Vice, is accompanied with great Temptations and Allurements of Pleasure and Profit, and the practice of Virtue is often threatened with great Calamities, Losses, and sometimes even with Death itself (34).

Therefore, "the eternal rule of right and equity" which is discoverable by reason alone is not adequate for motivating moral behavior. Clarke believed if good and evil were equally balanced in the world, each having similar allurements and similar difficulties, then reason would be able to choose virtue. But the pleasure of vice and the difficulty of virtue

alters the Question, and destroys the practice of that which appears so reasonable in the whole

Speculation, and introduces a necessity of Rewards and Punishments (34-35).

Nevertheless, Clarke believed that "love and benevolence" were the products of right reason.

Johnson agreed with Clarke regarding the existence of an indispensable relationship between reason and religion. Indeed, Johnson pointed out that "religion is the highest Exercise of Reason; let us not begin by turning all reason out of Doors,"¹¹ and he steadfastly maintained that

truth, indeed, is always truth, and reason is always reason; they have an intrinsic and unalterable value, and constitute that intellectual gold which defies destruction.¹²

Moreover, he frequently spoke "with great commendation of Clarke's Universality . . . and seemed not disposed to censure him for his Heterodoxy" (Life, IV, 524). Specifically, Johnson agreed with Clarke that reason can engage man in ethical considerations--"he that thinks reasonably must think morally."¹³ Johnson accepted much of Clarke's

---


traditional notion that reason is supreme in moral thought.

Indeed, Johnson would not quarrel with the Deists in their appeal to reason in matters of religion; however, he believed that the Deists had not given certain proofs of Christianity, such as Biblical revelation and miracles, a fair examination: "no honest man could be a Deist; for no man could be so after a fair examination of the proofs of Christianity" (Life, II, 8-9). Johnson esteemed reason as an important tool by which man ought to examine "the proofs of Christianity" against the touchstone of daily experience:

It is astonishing that any man can forbear enquiring seriously, whether there is a God; whether God is just; whether this life is the only state of existence; whether God has appointed rewards and punishments in a future state; whether he has given any laws for the regulation of our conduct here; whether he has given them by revelation; and whether the religion publickly taught carries any mark of divine appointment. These are questions which every reasonable being ought undoubtedly to consider with an attention suitable to their importance; and he, whom the consideration of eternal happiness or misery cannot awaken from his pleasing dreams, cannot prevail upon to suspend his mirth, surely ought not to despise others for dulness and stupidity.

Let it be remembered that the nature of things is not alterable by our conduct. We cannot make truth; it is our business only to find it. No proposition can become more or less certain or important, by being considered or neglected. It is to no purpose to wish, or to suppose, that to be false, which is in itself true, and therefore to acquiesce in our own
wishes and suppositions, when the matter is of eternal consequence, to believe obstinately without grounds of belief, and to determine without examination, is the last degree of folly and absurdity (Sermon 20, 222-223).

Moreover, in opposition to the Deists, Johnson refutes any purely rational or moral doctrine that is entirely abstracted from religion . . . . Men left wholly to their appetites and instincts, with little sense of moral or religious obligation, and with faint distinctions of right and wrong, can never be safely employed or confidently trusted: they can be honest only by obstinacy, and diligent only by compulsion or caprice.14

Johnson recognized that, while man can use his reason to discover moral principles, acting on the knowledge supplied by his reason requires the motivation provided by religion:

To subdue passion, and regulate desire, is the great task of man, as a moral agent; a task, for which natural reason, however assisted and enforced by human laws, has been found insufficient, and which cannot be performed but by the help of religion (Sermon 18, 193).

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 crimes, as may overbear all the temptations which temporal hope or fear can bring in his way, and enable him to bid equal 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 (Rambler 7, 37-38).15

Man's reason can discover morality, but only "the value of the reward promised to virtue, and the terrors of the punishment denounced against crimes" can supply him with the motivating power to be moral. Indeed, the motivating power of "obedience to the divine will" allows man to partially atone for his weak and corrupt nature and anticipate the happy prospect of salvation:

He will naturally pour out his supplications to the Supreme Being . . . for assistance and protection . . . . and by recollecting His promises, [he] will confirm himself in the hope of obtaining what he desires, and if . . . he steadily practices the duties on which they depend, he will soon find his mind stayed on God, and be kept in perfect peace, because he trusteth in him (Sermon 14, 157-158).

The pragmatic Johnsonian emphasis on obedience as motivation for man's ethical conduct is generally lacking in the doctrines of the Deists, the rationalists, and the natural religionists.

Another important figure in this tradition which exalted reason is William Law. Indeed, the influence Law

15 For similar ideas see Rambler 41, 225, Rambler 78, 50; Sermons 7, 12, 14, 15, 25, 28.
exerted on Johnson is testimony to the rationality of Johnson's own religious beliefs.\textsuperscript{16} The fact that Johnson described Law as an "overmatch" for him (\textit{Life}, I, 68) and the \textbf{Serious Call} as "the finest piece of hortatory theology in any language" (\textit{Life}, II, 122) makes an examination of the book desirable.

The whole of the \textbf{Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life} might be described as an argument for an ordered, deliberate, and above all a rational Christianity. Reason should guide men in everything:

\begin{quote}
All men . . . as men, have one and the same important business, to act up to the excellency of their rational nature, and to make reason and order the law of all their designs and actions.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

Reason is the great and distinctive force of humanity, so that to deny it is to deny one's humanity:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{William Law, A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life} (1728; rpt., New York: Dutton, 1906), 109.
\end{quote}
If you live contrary to reason, you do not commit a small crime, you do not break a small trust; but you break the law of your nature (100).

To avoid this, we must train the reason through the right kind of schooling, since "the only end of education is to restore our rational nature to its proper state" (231) in order that we may learn to do everything "by strict rules of reason and piety" (52).

Law sees religion not merely in harmony with reason, but even to a large degree dictated by it, so that "true religion is nothing else but simple nature governed by right reason" (243). The "reason and wisdom which He [God] has implanted" in us are to be our guides and rulers (124), and if we examine the situation closely, we will, he says, discover that the demands of reason and the duties of religion are the same (123-128). Furthermore, Law maintains that reason is God's unique gift to man and is a kind of link with God since His primary attribute is also reason. To use one's reason or to follow the dictates of "right reason" meant to discover the attributes of that celestial link. It meant to recognize and accept the Divine order of the universe. Law observed that reason was man's unique and identifying characteristic; therefore, the famous dictum know thyself ultimately meant that man was to know the qualities and
content of "right reason" and so know his proper relationship to God:

Now knowledge itself would be no excellence, nor ignorance any reproach to us, but that we are rational creatures. But if this be true, then it follows plainly that knowledge which is most suitable to our rational nature, and which most concerns us, as such, to know, is our highest, finest knowledge . . . . If, therefore, our relation to God be our greatest relation, if our advancement in His favour be our highest advancement, he that has the highest notions of the excellence of this relation . . . proves himself to be master of the best and most excellent knowledge (302).

Law felt that man's entire life should be devoted to God in a way that translated itself into a strict daily regimen of virtuous behavior and frequent self-examination. He believed that man's proper use of his reason would provide him with the knowledge of his duties towards God and neighbor. Law's rules for self-examination are rules for achieving the only kind of self-knowledge that he felt was necessary or worthwhile--knowledge of one's follies and sins. Through such self-examination, man will know not only his relationship to God, a relationship of forgiveness and mercy on His part and gratitude on ours, but also he will know his proper relationship to other people, a relationship of tenderness and compassion for follies and sins:
Consider these great truths; that this mysterious redemption, all these sacrifices and sufferings, both of God and man, are only to remove the guilt of sin . . . you know more of the folly of your own heart than you do of other people's; and can charge yourself with various sins that you only know of yourself, and cannot be sure that other sinners are guilty of them. . . . If you will deal justly, you must fix the charge at home, and look no farther than yourself . . . . A serious and frequent reflection upon these things will mightily tend to humble us in our own eyes, make us very apprehensive of the greatness of our own guilt, and very tender in censuring and condemning other people (292-295).

Law not only set the standards high but he felt that salvation was achieved by a herculean struggle. The great business of man was to enter into that struggle and to discipline his life into one of obedience to the commands of God:

The salvation of our souls is set forth in Scripture as a thing of difficulty, that requires all our diligence, that is to be worked out with fear and trembling . . . . Many will miss of their salvation who seem to have taken some pains to obtain it (21).

After Law set up perfect obedience as a standard, he faced the obvious objection to it that it was impossible to follow. Law conceded that it was so; therefore, he shifted his ground of argument from an insistence that man live his life in perfect obedience to the law of God to man's sincere endeavor to be obedient. Was he trying the best he knew how to so rule his life?
You perhaps will say, that all people fall short of the perfection of the Gospel, and therefore you are content with your feelings . . . . For the question is not whether Gospel perfection can be fully attained, but whether you come as near it as a sincere intention and careful diligence can carry you (21).

Thus, Law answered his critics by maintaining that man can test his sincerity through the performance of virtuous actions.

The problem Johnson found with a tradition which maintained such an exalted view of reason was that it tended to ignore human experience. A basic assumption of Tindal, Wollaston, Clarke and other natural religionists was that man's nature was almost completely amenable to the dictates of his reason. However, Johnson observed that man's nature reflected a predilection to rationalize --to be guided not by evidence but by the vagaries of imagination and desire. Johnson saw man as a creature prone to error because of his finite ability to use his reason without self-delusion. Moreover, unlike William Law, Johnson did not understand human nature in terms of static concepts of mind against body or in a hierarchy of separate faculties of reason, instinct, will, and imagination; rather, he described these attributes of man's nature in terms of a process of integration. He recognized that the faculties of human nature were
intimately connected and that it was the integration of man's instincts, passions, desires, and imagination with reason that created the possibility for reason to be in command of human nature [Ramblers 4, 41, 47]. Furthermore, Johnson understood the dictum "know thyself" as not meaning primarily or exclusively a knowledge of one's relationship to God but rather a knowledge of one's own qualities and attributes--knowing the cause for one's feelings of anxiety, depression, alienation and isolation. Within the Sermons, Johnson demonstrates that a radical lack of self-knowledge produces immature individuals who remain alienated from others and experience a vacuous existence:

We are lulled with indolence, we are seduced by pleasure, we are perverted by bad examples, and we are betrayed by our own hearts. No sooner do we, in compliance either with the vanities or the business of life, relax our attention, than we grow cold and indifferent, dilatory and negligent (Sermon 19, 204).

Johnson speaks of a morality which is not static, nor even completely dependent on eternal commands, but rather dynamic and almost evolutionary. It looks forward toward modern psychological conclusions regarding the interrelationship between human attributes rather than
backward to the hierarchical distinctions of the classical and medieval philosophers.  

Johnson steadfastly maintained that reason was extremely useful in regard to religion:

For the truths of religion are attested by evidence, which must be yielded to as soon as it is considered; and confirmed by proofs, which nothing but inattention can resist. But to consider, and weigh this evidence seriously and impartially, the mind must be abstracted, in some measure, from the objects that surround us; objects that strike us strongly, not because they are great, but because they are near; while the views of futurity affect us but faintly, not because they are unimportant, but because they are distant (Sermon 16, 176-177).

He believed that man must carefully examine the remedies suggested by religious revelation in order to determine their suitability for dealing with the realities of human experience:

When revelation is consulted, it appears that such a state is really promised, and that, by the contempt of worldly pleasures, it is to be obtained. We then find, that instead of lamenting the imperfection of earthly things, we have reason to pour out thanks to him who orders all for our good, that he has made the world, such as often deceives, and often afflicts us; that the charms of interest are not such, as our frailty is unable is resist, but that we have such interruptions of our pursuits, such languor in our enjoyments, such pains of body and

---

18 See, W. J. Bate, The Achievement of Samuel Johnson, 93-94, for Bate's perceptive observation that Samuel Johnson anticipates many of Freud's insights on human nature.
anxieties of mind, as repress desire, and weaken temptation (Sermon 12, 135).

As we have seen, the natural religionists argued that reason seemed to render divine revelation unnecessary for salvation. Johnson disapproved of their failure to use reason to objectively examine the claims of religious revelation:

The prevailing spirit of the present age seems to be the spirit of skepticism and captiousness, of suspicion and distrust, a contempt of all authority, and a presumptuous confidence in private judgement; a dislike of all established forms, merely because they are established, and of old paths, because they are old (Sermon 7, 77).

Johnson's methods for validating the truth of revelation are the pragmatic ones of appealing to the authority of common testimony and of demonstrating that the events narrated in Scripture are relevant to human experience:

The Christian religion has very strong evidences. It, indeed, appears in some degrees strange to reason; but in History we have undoubted facts against which reasoning a priori we have more arguments than we have for them; but then testimony has great weight and casts the balance" (Life, II, 398).

It is clear that all arguments of the natural religionists seemed to Johnson less important than the testimony of ancient authority which tended to establish revelation itself as grounded in the facts of history. For example,
William Windham asked for Johnson's opinion of "natural" and "revealed" religion. Johnson bypassed the traditional arguments and artificial distinctions of the natural religionists and chose to discuss "revealed" religion only:

For revealed religion there was such historical evidence as, upon any subject not religious, would have left no doubt. . . . With respect to evidence, Dr. Johnson observed that we had no such evidence that Caesar died in the Capitol, as that Christ died in the manner related. 19

For Johnson, then, a reliable way to examine the truth of revelation is to appeal to the authority--to the collective reason--of the ancients:

The oral doctrines and occasional explications of the apostles would not be immediately forgotten in the churches to which they had preached, and which had attended to them with the diligence and reverence which their mission and character demanded . . . . Thus, by consulting first the holy Scriptures, and next the writers of the primitive church, we shall make ourselves acquainted with the will of God; thus shall we discover the good way, and find that rest for our souls which will amply recompence our studies and enquiries . . . (Sermon 7, 83).

On another occasion, speaking of those who denied the truth of revealed religion, Johnson said:

It is always easy to be on the negative side. If a man were now to deny that there is salt

upon the table, you could not reduce him to an absurdity. Come, let us try this a little further. I deny that Canada is taken, and I can support my denial by pretty good arguments. The French are a much more numerous people than we; and it is not likely that they would allow us to take it. "But the ministry have assured us, in all the formality of the Gazette, that it is taken." Very true! But the ministry have put us to an enormous expense by the war in America, and it is their interest to persuade us that we have got something for our money. "But the fact is confirmed by thousands of men who were at the taking of it." Aye, but these men have still more interest in deceiving us. They don't want that you should think the French have beat them, but that they have beat the French. Now suppose you should go over and find that it is really taken, that would only satisfy yourself; for when you come home we will not believe you. We will say, you have been bribed. Yet, Sir, notwithstanding all these plausible objections, we have no doubt that Canada is really ours. Such is the weight of common testimony. How much stronger are the evidences of the Christian religion! (Life, I, 428).

We may conclude, then, that Johnson's esteem for man's reason made him as wary of unprovable assumptions in religion as in other branches of human inquiry. Unlike the natural religionists, however, Johnson believed that man should use his reason to objectively examine religious revelation against the touchstone of human experience and the testimony of authority.

The Vision of Theodore is the locus classicus for the Johnsonian conception of the relation of reason to religion. It is written in the form of a moral allegory which describes man's difficult journey up the Mountain of
Existence. In the allegory, Theodore, Hermit of Teneriffe, observes some travellers struggling up the mountain; they graduate from Education's care into the protection of "two powers of superior aspect"\(^{20}\)--Reason and Religion. As one of the two superior powers on the Mountain of Existence, properly directed Reason safely guides the traveller to the truth of Religion:

> I am Reason, of all subordinate beings the noblest and the greatest; who, if thou [a traveller] wilt receive my laws, will reward thee like the rest of my votaries, by conducting thee to Religion (169).

In the allegory, Reason watched Religion's steps "with the most anxious attention, and was visibly confounded and perplexed if ever she suffered her regard to be drawn away" (169). Early in the journey, some travellers became literally perplexed--entangled in Habit's chains--and fell; now, about half-way up the mountain, Reason is described as becoming philosophically perplexed without Religion's constant attendance.

As the journey continues, Theodore, rewarded for his obedience to Reason, meets Religion and chooses her for his guide. Again, he observes travellers struggling with Habits; they attempt two opposite strategies to defeat

them: either loosening Habit's chains one by one or bursting out suddenly. Theodore learns that the first strategy, of retreating "by the same degree as they advanced" (171) into Habits' chains, is inadequate. The second strategy exhausts the fugitive, weakening him into renewed susceptibility to the next attack. Having reached an impasse where neither alternative works, some of the travellers fail to recognize the need for outside help. Unaided, they founder. A few, recognizing their need, address Reason; these choose less wisely than their fellows who, like Theodore, address Religion:

Reason counselled them, at their first entrance upon her province, to enlist themselves among the votaries of Religion; and informed them that if they trusted to her alone, they would find the same fate with her other admirers, whom she had not been able to secure against Appetites and Passions, and who, having been seized by Habits in the regions of Desire, had been dragged away to the caverns of Despair (169).

The Vision of Theodore uses the term reason in the sense of abstract logic; as such, it leaves the pilgrims perplexed and lost. Indeed, Theodore's Reason was what Kant would later call "Pure Reason;" it lacked the commonsense wisdom of "Practical Reason." What "Pure Reason" lacks, despite theoretical rigor and adherence to intellectual demands, is the ability to direct the will to virtuous behavior. Pascal sagely recognized this truth in
his well-known aphorism: Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connait point. Both Theodore and Johnson found reason wanting in its abstract and theorizing sense; it required the assistance of religion to guide men along the path of virtue.

The second concept of reason developed from seventeenth-century influence was what is sometimes called Lockean reason. Alexander Campbell Fraser defines it in these terms:

[Reason] signifies the inferential faculty, or power of drawing conclusions, either demonstratively, by deduction from self-evident principles, or inductively, on grounds of probability. It is thus synonymous with reasoning.  

Here, reason is not a "bloodless, cock-sure rationalism," but a "particular way of reasoning" based on a "deductive-empirical analysis" [emphasis mine].

Locke believed in the power and limits of reason. He, like Johnson, saw reason as an inferential mode of thinking. Locke asserted that it is proper for man to use


his reason to examine and judge the truths of revelation, where such truths can be known through our own ideas (IV.xviii.4,8). Moreover, we are not "obligated" to believe any statement in religion which is distinctly contrary to reason (IV.xviii.6). Reason, however, is not opposed to faith:

faith is nothing but a firm assent of the mind: which, if it be regulated, as is our duty, cannot be afforded to anything but upon good reason; and so cannot be opposite to it (IV.xvii.24).

But again, reason is limited because of certain inhibiting factors beyond man's control. Personifying reason, Locke says that:

Reason, though it penetrates into the depths of the sea and earth, elevates our thoughts as high as the stars, and leads us through the vast spaces and large rooms of this mighty fabric, yet it comes far short of the real extent of every corporeal being. And there are many instances wherein it fails us (Essay, IV.xvii.9).

Among the instances Locke catalogues are the lack of ideas (the material of reasoning) to work with, obscure or imperfect ideas (such as the concept of infinity or a ten-thousand-sided figure), an inability to see the connection between two ideas (as in premise and conclusion), and the use of unclear terms. More importantly for our purposes, Locke asserted that man must provide his reason with the
empirical data necessary for it to determine the validity of religion (Essay, IV.xvii.6).

An early eighteenth-century representative of the Lockean tradition of reason is Berkeley, whose philosophy Johnson and Boswell occasionally discussed (Life, I, 471; IV, 27). Like Johnson, Berkeley ranked reason above imagination, and said that "upon all subjects of moment ... a man ought to use his reason," (Alciphron, III, 251) which is "the principle part of our nature" (Alciphron, III, 86). Reason is an important regulator:

It is highly needful that all the motions, and passions of the soul should be under the regulation and influence of Reason, whose office it is to see they are placed on proper objects.

However, like Locke (though with more of a specifically religious emphasis), Berkeley believed that reason sometimes leads us "into uncouth paradoxes, difficulties, and inconsistencies" because we too often begin with


false principles. He noted that some people attribute too much to reason while others attribute too little (Alciphron, III, 182). Reason is "a faculty of such mighty extent and power, especially towards mischief" (Alciphron, III, 207) that conscience and religion are necessary to keep it in line with good. Thus, a "Christian, indeed, is for confining reason within its due bounds; and so is every reasonable man" (Alciphron, III, 182).

Joseph Butler, in his Analogy of Religion, while providing a reasoned defense of Christianity, extended Locke's arguments and concentrated on proving reason to be mysterious in its operation and inconclusive in its findings. He says, "reason gives us the advantage and superiority over" the animal kingdom, and yet it imperfectly comprehends many of the truths of nature (Analogy, 223). Reason, according to Butler, can guide us along the way to faith, but cannot discover all truth:

By reason is revealed the relation, which God the Father stands in to us. In Scripture are revealed the relations, which the Son and Holy

26 Johnson's exposure to Butler's Analogy of Religion can be demonstrated from Christie's Sale Catalogue to Johnson's personal library. Butler's work is listed as entry 250.

Spirit stand in to us . . . . God is the governor of the world, upon the evidence of reason; that Christ is the mediator between God and man, and the Holy Ghost our guide and sanctifier, upon the evidence of revelation . . . [emphasis mine] (Analogy, 194).

Reason is to be a judge of revealed religion: "Reason can, and it ought to judge, not only of the meaning, but also of the morality and the evidence of revelation" (Analogy, 220), even though in spiritual and revelatory matters it is limited to examining proofs and evidence and cannot discover the benefits or consequences of faith, which is a matter for experience (Analogy, 197). Like Locke, Butler believed that reason was by itself incapable of establishing a full moral system, especially one uncomplicated by superstition, so that revelation was necessary for the completion and perfection of morality just as it was for religion (Analogy, 186-7).

Two main characteristics of the Lockean tradition of reason--(1) that it is a process, and (2) that it makes use of experimental data--are important for understanding Johnson's view. In the Dictionary, he defines reason as "the power by which man deduces one proposition from another, or proceeds from premises to consequences; the rational faculty." This faculty or power he associates with process:
Few men have been made infidels by argument and reflection; their actions are not generally the result of their reasonings, but their reasonings of their actions. Yet these reasonings, though they are not strong enough to pervert a good mind, may yet, when they coincide with interest, and are assisted by prejudice, contribute to confirm a man, already corrupted, in his impieties, and at least retard his reformation, if not entirely obstruct it (Sermon 5, 54).

Reason is not an automatic faculty which can issue truths at will; it is a kind of mental tool which man must energetically manipulate to produce either virtuous or sinful results.

Further, Johnson frequently associated reason with experiment or experience--reason needs the data of the external world to function properly. An example from Richard Hooker in the Dictionary shows that "reason is the director of man's will, discovering in action what is good; for the laws of well-doing are the dictates of right reason." Without action there can be no rational discovery. Because Johnson invariably regarded reason as operating upon an "empirical collection of materials," he was not, as Arieh Sachs has claimed, "doomed in his commitment to the kind of faith which could afford him no comfort at all." Rather, in his Sermons, Johnson

consistently maintained that the comfort provided by religious faith was associated with its capacity to deal effectively with the actualities of human nature and the pragmatic problems of this life:

The love of God will engage us to trust in his protection, to acquiesce in his dispensations, to keep his laws, to meditate on his perfection, and to declare our confidence and submission, by profound and frequent adoration, to impress his glory on our minds by songs of praise, to inflame our gratitude by acts of thanksgiving, to strengthen our faith, and exalt our hope, by pious meditations, and to implore his protection of our imbecillity, and his assistance of our frailty, by humble supplication: and when we love God with the whole heart, the power of godliness will be shewn by steadiness in temptation, by patience in affliction, by faith in the divine promises, by perpetual dread of sin, by continual aspirations after higher degrees of holiness, and contempt of the pains and pleasures of the world, when they obstruct the progress of religious excellence (Sermon 13, 145).

Far from being spun out of the innate materials of one person's mind, the products of reason are an aggregate of cumulative human experience. Reason must combine with experience to make virtue or truth a reality:

But though we should suppose, what reason and experience disprove, that poverty and ignorance were calamities to those only on whom they fall, yet surely the sense of their misery might be sufficient to awaken us to compassion [emphasis mine] (Sermon 19, 213).
Johnson's position concerning reason is broader than either the Peripatetic or the Lockean understanding we have sketched in the preceding pages. Johnson insists that man is a co-agent in his own salvation and that his will is free; however, Johnson also argues that man cannot by his own devices, not even with his rational faculty, manage the integration of his reason with his imagination, emotions, passions and desires. Man cannot, unaided by religion, escape from his present state of vacuity.

Johnson's view of reason as the controlling faculty in man's nature is more comprehensive than that of many of his contemporaries; moreover, it is an aspect of his thought that has been neglected by most modern critics.

Two examples from the Dictionary, under his definition of reason, testify to Johnson's awareness that others held a narrower view of reason than his own. One illustration is taken from Dryden's Religio Laici:

Dim, as the borrow'd beams of moon and stars
To lonely, weary, wand'ring travellers,
Is reason to the soul: and as on high,
Those rowling fires discover but the sky,
Not light us here; so reason's glimmering ray
Was lent, not to assure our doubtful way,
But guide us upward to a better day.

For Dryden, reason plays only a preparatory role, like the Greek pedagogue who accompanied the young scholar from home to school, providing protection and guidance but not
education. The dim and borrowed light cannot truly illumine and fulfill but only "guide us upward to a better day." The other example, from Swift's *Miscellanies*, combines the ideas of a reason "true and just" yet limited both in religious matters and in our general lives:

It would be well, if people would not lay so much weight on their own reason in matters of religion, as to think every thing impossible and absurd, which they cannot conceive: how often do we contradict the right rules of reason in the whole course of our lives? Reason itself is true and just, but the reason of every particular man is weak and wavering, perpetually swayed and turn'd by his interests, his passions and his vices.

Johnson himself sometimes remarks on the various limitations of reason. For example, reason is frequently incapacitated by a simple lack of knowledge or time with which to work. Without properly established conditions, reason is further limited and may not be able to function:

Not only knowledge, judgement, and experience, but uninterrupted leisure and retirement are necessary, that the chain of reasoning may be preserved unbroken, and the mind perform its operations, without any hindrance from foreign objects (*Sermon 7*, 81).

Occasionally we will be able to discover some knowledge, but because it is only partial or because we insist upon considering only one aspect of it, we might form a wrong judgment on the issue (*Life*, II, 131).
Even with all necessary information present, however, reason still does not always prevail. Sometimes the emotions or the violence of the passions overpower reason and cause us to act against what we have calmly thought out and know to be right:

Men are very seldom disappointed, except when their desires are immoderate, or when they suffer their passions to overpower their reason, and dwell upon delightful scenes of future honours, power, or riches, till they mistake probabilities for certainties, or wild wishes for rational expectations [emphasis mine] (Sermon 5, 58).

Moreover, many times the strength of reason is not sufficient to overcome the impressions of our senses, so that, for example, someone who strikes us as "void of pity" can never appear merciful afterwards, however much our reason may tell us that he is (Sermon 4, 41).

Some people purposefully "lay their reason asleep" (Rambler 53, 288) when they know that its conclusions would be opposite to their desires, for we do not always want to do what reason informs is right. We are like those engaged

in shew, in merriment and noise [who] please themselves, not with thinking justly, but with avoiding to think at all, with a suspense of all the operations of their intellectual faculties, which defends them from remembrance of the past, or anticipation of the future (Sermon 14, 150).
Often we do not refuse to hear reason altogether, but we manipulate it for our own ends:

Such men suffer frequent disturbance from the remonstrances of reason, and the reproaches of conscience, and do not set reason, or conscience, at defiance, but endeavour to pacify them with assuasive promises of repentance and amendment (Sermon 15, 162-3).

When this manipulation of reason has continued long enough, we become a slave to our desires and our willingness to be ruled by reason is weakened. We resign our reason to empty expectations for happiness and thus pay little or no attention to the problems of our current state (Sermon 15, 163). Reason then is prevented from warning us of approaching calamity, and has become a distorted, if not useless, faculty. A man sunk into corruption has so diligently and effectively ignored his reason that:

he is indeed not easily to be reclaimed; his reason, as well as his passions, is in combination against his soul, and there is little hope, that either persuasion will soften, or arguments convince him (Sermon 4, 41).

However, Johnson steadfastly maintained that reason was extremely useful in regard to religion. Johnson's astute observations on human nature—man's dangerous propensity to eschew moral responsibility and to prefer "the gay sallies of the imagination" (Sermon 20, 221) or
to "indulge any desire that happens to arise, with very little resistance or compunction" (Sermon 10, 111) in a futile attempt to fill the vacuity of life—reflect his belief that man is susceptible to self-indulgence and self-delusion. Indeed, it is not easy to tell how blinding such pleasant arts of self-delusion can be but we receive some indication from those who are in love, where we see "how much a secondary passion can cloud our judgment" (Rambler 28, 152). True self-knowledge comes only through the correcting lens of reason which allows us to

control all those emotions, which comparison produces: he will not consider himself as made poorer by another's wealth, or richer by another's poverty; he will look, without malignity, upon superiority, either external or intellectual; he will be willing to learn of those that excel in wisdom, and receive instruction with thankfulness; he will be willing to impart his knowledge, without fearing lest he should impair his own importance, by the improvement of his hearer (Sermon 11, 121).

He frequently remarked on the delusion which results when man fails to use his reason to examine the data of concrete experience or to yield to the weight of authority in his search for the stability of truth:

Some of the philosophers, indeed appear to have sought a nobler, and a more certain remedy, and to have endeavoured to overpower the force of death by arguments, and to dispel the gloom by the light of reason. . . . It is plain, that the
constitution of mankind is such, that abstruse and intellectual truths can be taught no otherwise than by positive assertion, supported by some sensible evidence, by which the assertor is secured from the suspicion of falsehood (Sermon 25, 263-265).

Furthermore, Johnson maintained that we are

blessed with a clearer light, and taught to know the will of our Maker, not from long deductions from variable appearances, or intricate disquisitions of fallible reason, but by messengers inspired by himself . . . (Sermon 4, 40).

We can see, then, that Johnson's view of reason is strikingly original. He relied on some concepts of traditional Christian theology as well as on contributions of the secular philosophers. However, he selected from the sources what he saw as cogent and persuasive; he left behind what simply did not make sense to him. Johnson could not ascribe such lofty powers to reason as the rationalists had conferred on it, but neither could he dismiss reason as merely a slave to the passions as Luther and others had argued. Johnson stressed consistently personal moral responsibility and the importance of choice in which practical reason plays its part. However, Johnson recognized that even practical reason is weakened by the rationalizing and self-delusive capacity within man's nature to think up arguments which justify whatever he desires.
Johnson, then, is no irrationalist, no mechanistic determinist, like Hobbes; neither is he a rigorous rationalist, like Locke, believing reason capable of leading man to full understanding and control over his life. Johnson recognized that the mind and will cooperate in shaping man's life by a series of choices—some of which spring from non-rational sources. Religion supplies a practical guide partly because it is based upon divine revelation, but partly also because it is true to human experience. Religion provides pragmatic consolations for the problems caused by man's weak and self-delusive nature.

II

The substance and depth of Johnson's religious beliefs has been carefully examined and analyzed by a number of contemporary critics. These same critics have also detailed the background of Johnson's faith in the

---

popular doctrines and controversies of the eighteenth century which surrounded him; arguments over Deism, whether truth beyond sense data and reason could be known, the freedom of the human will, and other issues, some of which has been touched on above. Johnson's serious interest in these matters is reflected in his library, which at the time of his death contained books by more than eighty theologians, almost three hundred books and the largest category in his collection.

In the previous chapter, we examined Johnson's steadfast belief that one of the most important inferences to be drawn from the free agency of man was the relevancy of Christianity for man's nature. Without the inescapable teaching of personal moral responsibility supplied by religion, and without the invigorating power supplied by the idea of future rewards and punishments, Johnson believed that few would struggle with themselves very long. Instead, a kind of psychological defense mechanism would cause them to project the blame for unhappiness onto


other people or onto some external circumstances. Then, a world of delusion and wrong perceptions would be created; this self-delusion would reconcile what they wanted to believe with what actually is. Johnson says that "on many occasions we make the musick which we imagine ourselves to hear" (Rambler 94, 136) and we constantly practice many "arts of voluntary delusion" (Rambler 146, 15) which are intended to reconcile us to our vices and which effectively keep us from inquiring into our true state.

If we refuse to recognize that "the limits of human enjoyment" are fixed "by immoveable boundaries" (Rambler 178, 173) and allow our desires to increase, to fix on earthly objects, to inflame the imagination with wild hopes, pain is inevitable: 33

We fail of being happy because we determine to obtain felicity by means different from those which God hath appointed (Sermon 5, 58).

Johnson reasons to the relevancy of religion by demonstrating its pragmatism--the motivation provided by religion fits man's frail and self-delusive nature. Lacking such motivation, a man will be totally at the mercy of his animal drives:

33 See, for example, The Vanity of Human Wishes; The Vision of Theodore; Rasselas; Sermons 10, 12, 14, 15, 18, 20, 25; Rambler 2, 13; Rambler 106, 200; Ramblers 67, 101, 116, and 123.
A man whose attention is disengaged, who is neither stimulated by hope, nor agitated by fear, is wholly exposed to the tyranny of his appetites (Sermon 26, 282).

Nothing is worthy of our ardent wishes, or intense solicitude, that terminates in this state of existence; those only make the true use of life, that employ it in obtaining the favour of God, and securing everlasting happiness (Sermon 5, 54).

Moreover, in the Dictionary, the very definition of religion is "virtue, as founded upon reverence of God, and expectation of future rewards and punishments." These "future rewards and punishments" are the only complete fulfillment for man; indeed, Johnson stresses that to live religiously, is to walk, not by sight, but by faith; to act in confidence of things unseen, in hope of future recompense, and in fear of future punishment (Sermon 10, 110).

Hope itself, then, can be a great blessing and source of happiness to man but, since it is subject to the misdirections of desire and the wrong expectations of imagination, it must be regulated by the pragmatic demands of religion:

He that hopes to find peace by trusting in God, must obey him; and when he has at any time failed in his obedience, which amongst the best men will be very frequent, he must endeavour to reconcile God to him by repentance. He may then find another occasion of exercising his trust, by assuring himself, that "when the wicked forsakes his way, and the unrighteous man his
thoughts, and returns unto the Lord, he will have mercy upon him, and abundantly pardon" (Sermon 14, 157).

Furthermore, about one-third of the examples Johnson gives for hope in the Dictionary refer to the fulfillment of man's hope in religion's promise of eternal life. A typical selection is a quotation from Davies:

When in heav'n she shall his essence see,
This is her sov'reign good, and perfect bliss;
Her longing, wishings, hopes, all finish'd be;
Her joys are full, her motions rest in this.

If man does not hope in the promises of God as contained in revelation, but hopes in the assurances of men, his hope will be fallacious and great unhappiness will result. A practical consolation of religion, then, is that it supplies man with the motivating power to lead an ethical life. It is the emphasis on future rewards and punishments which supplies religion with the remedies required for man's weak nature. This is the reason, as James Gray says, for "religion and morality being inextricably united" (150); and, in the words of Robert Voitle, "morality must ultimately be based on religion" (180).

Johnson follows the tradition, going back at least to the Restoration, of seeing immortality as the distinctive
Boswell once remarked that "the great article of Christianity is the revelation of immortality" and Johnson "admitted it was" (Life, III, 188). While the Deists maintained that they could arrive at the truth of immortality through deduction, Johnson appeals to the authority of "the preachers of Christianity" to support his belief:

that any man could be a Jew, and yet deny a future state, is a sufficient proof that it had not yet been clearly revealed, and that it was reserved for the preachers of Christianity to bring life and immortality to light. In such a degree of light they are now placed, that they can be denied or doubted no longer, but as the gospel, that shews them, is doubted or denied. It is now certain that we are here, not in our total, nor in our ultimate existence, but in a state of exercise and probation, commanded to qualify ourselves, by pure hearts and virtuous actions, for the enjoyment of future felicity in the presence of God; and prohibited to break the laws which his wisdom has given us, under the penal sanction of banishment from heaven into regions of misery (Sermon 10, 108-109).

The writers of antiquity, Johnson maintains, had no true knowledge of immortality:

34 Robert South, for instance, states that the distinctive motivating power of religion is based on the revelation of immortality. South observes that "the discriminating excellency of Christianity consists not so much in this, that it discovers more sublime truths, or indeed more excellent precepts than philosophy . . . as that it suggests more efficacious arguments to enforce the performance of those precepts, than any other religion or institution whatsoever" (Sermon V [second series], on Titus 1.1, Sermons, V, 81).
The ancient heathens, with whose notions we are acquainted, how far soever they might have carried their speculations of moral or civil wisdom, had no conception of a future state (Sermon 10, 107).

It is this ignorance of futurity which explains their eager pursuit of temporal happiness and their recommendation of that pursuit to others:

The darkness and uncertainty through which the heathen were compelled to wander in the pursuit of happiness, may, indeed, be alleged as an excuse for many of their seducing invitations to immediate enjoyment, which the moderns, by whom they have been imitated, have not to plead. It is no wonder that such as had no promise of another state should eagerly turn their thoughts upon the improvement of that which was before them; but surely those who are acquainted with the hopes and fears of eternity, might think it necessary to put some restraints upon their imagination (Rambler 29, 158).

The ultimate consolation which religion offers man for the vacuity of life is the possibility of personal salvation through "obedience to the divine will" (Rambler 7, 37). Indeed, the crux of Johnson's position in the Sermons rests on his observation that man's experience of vacuity in this life argues for the experience of satiety in the next life. For Johnson, salvation simply means a state of eternal happiness after death. In the Dictionary, his only definition for salvation is "preservation from eternal death; reception to the happiness of heaven."
He uses the word synonymously with "eternal bliss," "heaven," "eternal happiness," and "future happiness."

There can be no doubt that Johnson regards the attainment of this state as the only proper goal of human existence. Saving one's soul is "the business of life" (Sermon 15, 161) and "the object of greatest importance" (Life, IV, 417). The problem of how salvation is attained by man is "the important question, which it becomes every human being to study from the first hour of reason to the last" (Sermon 28, 302).

Indeed, the question of how salvation could be attained--specifically, the role of good works or morality and the role of faith--was a matter of considerable debate between the Evangelicals and the Anglicans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Both factions agreed that works without faith were vain; however, the Evangelicals accused the Anglicans of over-emphasizing morality at the expense of saving faith. The Evangelicals feared that such emphasis created the erroneous belief that the performance of good works was sufficient for salvation. For example, William Law, in his *Serious Call To A Devout And Holy Life*, answered the question of how salvation is attained by emphasizing the fact that man must struggle to perform good works:
Weak and imperfect men shall, notwithstanding their frailties and defects, be received as having pleased God if they have done their utmost to please Him . . . . We cannot offer to God the service of angels; we cannot obey Him as man in a state of perfection could; but fallen men can do their best, and this is the perfection that is required of us; it is only the perfection of our best endeavours, a careful labor to be as perfect as we can (66-67).  

On the other hand, the Evangelical's overwhelming emphasis on faith and on the utter inadequacy of good works opened them up to the accusation of abandoning morality totally. The Evangelical position was popularized by George Whitefield and John Wesley. For example, Wesley insisted that man's good works amounted to nothing without faith. Indeed, Wesley maintained that man possessed "a present inward-light, a saving faith" and that salvation was offered gratuitously through Christ's universal sacrifice for mankind:

For there is nothing we are, or have, or do, which can deserve the least thing at God's hand . . . . Wherewithal then shall a sinful man

35 Similar passages are found in Samuel Clarke, Sermon 1, I, 2.

36 John Calvin's first and most important dogma in his Institutes of the Christian Religion is that God is totally sovereign; man is totally depraved (II, 68). In this concept of God's omnipotence and man's complete depravity are implied the doctrines of predestination (election and reprobation), the lack of freedom of the will, and the limited atonement (Christ died only to save the elect. Calvin's beliefs in election and limited atonement denied the efficacy of good works.
atone for any the least of his sins? With his own works? No! Were they ever so many or holy, they are not his own, but God's.  

Wesley did admit that there was some room for human volitions in the appropriation of divine grace, but he stressed that man ultimately relied on the gratuitous nature of Christ's grace:

a full reliance on the blood of Christ; a trust in the merits of His life, death and resurrection; a recumbency upon him as our atonement and our life, as given for us, and living in us; and in consequence hereof, a closing with him, and cleaving to him (V, 9).

The well-known Evangelical clergyman William Romaine, whose work Miss Hill Boothby recommended to Johnson, wrote that saving faith is an inward experience; it needs no support from human experience or from the general testimony of man:

And whoever has received these ordinary operations of the Holy Spirit, has in his own heart clear and full testimony of the Godhead, and almighty power of the blessed Spirit. He wants no outward miracles. This great inward work is to him complete evidence; and he is able to rest his salvation with as full trust and confidence upon it, as if he had seen the apostles exert their miraculous gifts and graces . . . . We


must plead and intreat, and importune you to seek his assistance, but the success must come from him. The word itself is but a dead letter, unless he animate it; and therefore the preaching of it can have no power, unless he accompany it. We may plant and water, but he must give the increase. 39

In similar fashion, in his Sermon on "The Parable of the Ten Virgins," Tillotson warns against the danger of emphasizing the efficacy of virtuous actions without faith:

Some have proceeded to that height, as if they could drive a strict bargain with God for eternal life and happiness; and have treated him in so insolent a manner, by their doctrine of the merit of their devotions and good works, as if God were as much beholden to them for their service and obedience, as they are to him for the reward of them (Sermon 31, II, 551).

All this Johnson understood and his praise for the works of Wesley and Whitefield was sincere but qualified (Life, I, 458; III, 409). Indeed, there were some things about the Evangelical position of which he was severely critical. The "inner light of grace," he told Maxwell, seemed to him a vicious principle because it was neither reasonable nor natural based on his observations of human nature:

Speaking of the inward light, to which some Methodists pretended, he [Johnson] said, it was a principle utterly incompatible with social or civil security. 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 know where to find him! (Life, II, 126).

Perhaps Johnson's most characteristic religious assumption is that salvation is offered not gratuitously but conditionally:

Trust in God, that trust to which perfect peace is promised, is to be obtained only by repentance, obedience, and supplication, not by nourishing in our own hearts a confused idea of the goodness of God, or a firm persuasion that we are in a state of grace; by which some have been deceived, as it may be feared, to their destruction. We are not to imagine ourselves safe, only because we are not harassed with those anxieties about our future state, with which others are tormented; but which are so far from being proofs of reprobation, that though they are often mistaken by those that languish under them, they are more frequently evidences of piety, and a sincere and fervent desire of pleasing God. We are not to imagine, that God approves us because he does not afflict us, nor, on the other hand, to persuade ourselves too hastily that he afflicts us, because he loves us. We are, without expecting any extraordinary effusions of light, to examine our actions by the great and unchangeable rules of revelation and reason, "to do to others as we would that they should do to us," and to love God with all our heart, and express that love by keeping his commandments (Sermon 14, 156-157).
Christ's sacrifice has merited salvation but only for those who fulfill the conditions under which it is offered. Johnson's Sermons reflect his understanding of a God who is closely associated with human experience:

It is just that we should consider every opportunity of performing a good action, as the gift of God, one of the chief gifts which God bestows upon man, in his present state, and endeavour to improve the blessing, that it may not be withdrawn from us, as a talent unemployed; for it is not certain, that he, who neglects this call to his duty, will be permitted to live, till he hears another (Sermon 19, 212).

For Johnson, God does not justify or sanctify man without man's co-operation in this process as a free and responsible moral agent. As Jean Hagstrum has pointed out, this "belief in conditional salvation" constitutes one of the "main features" of Johnson's Christianity. Johnson warns against allowing faith in salvation to obscure the fact that there are still terms to be fulfilled:

Yet let us likewise be careful, lest an erroneous opinion of the all-sufficiency of our Saviour's merits lull us into carelessness and security. His merits are indeed all-sufficient! But he has prescribed the terms on which they are to operate (Sermon 28, 304).

The Evangelicals in general and the Calvinists in particular were absolutely insistent on salvation by grace alone. Nonetheless, they placed great stress on the importance of virtue and good works not as a means of gaining salvation but as a sign that one is of the elect. If one believed himself to be saved and continued to live a life of wickedness, he would be deceived because no man truly saved by divine grace could continue in such a life. The Calvinists, therefore, had the strongest motivation to manifest good works—not as a means of earning their salvation (for such is clearly impossible) but rather as a means of displaying their membership in the elect. The Evangelicals in practice tended to place greater stress on holiness of living and personal virtue than did the Anglicans, who were, again in practice, somewhat more relaxed about individual morality. Consequently, Johnson never challenged the orthodox position of salus sola gratia but his practical nature advocated the necessity of maintaining moral standards given the weakness of human nature. He found it understandably difficult to see how man could be genuinely "saved" and still lack personal virtue. The Calvinists agreed. The only difference was a semantic one. Johnson spoke of good works as a condition of salvation, while the Puritans and the Methodists called good works a manifestation of salvation.
Johnson was fearful of a failure to manifest sufficient virtue, whether it be called a condition or a sign of salvation, and this anxiety led to his almost pathological fear of death. He was skeptical of the assurance of salvation felt by the followers of Wesley and Calvin, remarking to Boswell that "the most rational . . . look upon salvation as conditional; and as they never can be sure that they have complied with the conditions, they are afraid" (Life, IV, 278). Johnson obviously included himself among "the most rational" group. Boswell reported a similar remark made during a visit to Oxford during the same year:

... as I cannot be sure that I have fulfilled the conditions on which my salvation is granted, I am afraid I am one of those who may be damned (looking dismally). DR. ADAMS: What do you mean by damned? JOHNSON: (passionately and loudly) Sent to Hell, Sir, and punished everlastingly! (Life, IV, 299).

Not many critics who have given attention to Johnson's religious beliefs have paid sufficient attention to the fact that his fear of death is above all a logical and natural extension of his conviction that holy fear is necessary for virtuous living and hence for eternal

41 For an excellent analysis of the intellectual foundation for Johnson's fear of death see Jean Hagstrum's article, cited above. Hagstrum's fine study makes some of my points redundant.
happiness. He envied those who were so very sure they were saved but his common sense told him that such assurance was highly questionable. Far from being something to be ashamed of, the fear of death, in Johnson's view, is the mark of a good and pious man. When Boswell observed that William Dodd, the convicted forger, seemed unafraid at his hanging, Johnson replied:

Sir, Dr. Dodd would have given his hands and legs to have lived. The better a man is, the more afraid he is of death, having a clearer view of infinite purity (Life, III, 154).

In Sermon 14, Johnson reminds his readers that those anxieties about our future state . . . far from being proofs of reprobation . . . are more frequently evidences of piety, and a sincere and fervent desire of pleasing God (157).

The fear of death is actually man's anxiety over not having fulfilled the conditions necessary for salvation; hence, it is a fear of what might follow death—hell. As such, it is something to be desired and cultivated, not something to be avoided. No other reason can account for this fear (158).

42 See, for example, Quinlan, Samuel Johnson: A Layman's Religion, 127, 135-136; Hagstrum, "On Dr. Johnson's Fear of Death," 308-319.

43 For additional evidence of Johnson's belief that the fear of what follows death positively influences man's moral conduct, see Johnsonian Miscellanies, I, 223-234, 227, II, 16; Life, II, 298, IV, 278, V, 180; Thraliana, I, 203; Samuel Johnson, The Letters of Samuel Johnson, col.
for his general lack of reticence about his own fears or for having the face of his watch inscribed in Greek with the words of the New Testament—"the night cometh [when no man can work]" (Life, II, 57).

Johnson believed that the practice of virtue would yield remedies for the vacuity of life because virtuous actions help to alleviate the miseries and problems of daily living and partially contribute to man's hope for eternal salvation. For example, he states that

the terms, upon which we are to hope for any benefits from the merits of Christ, are faith, repentance, and subsequent obedience (Sermon 9, 104).44

Even though a man does not know if these conditions have been met in his life, he must strive to live ethically. In his statement of purpose for Sermon 28, Johnson names the same three virtues:

44 The use of all three designations was perhaps not as common as simply "repentance and faith" or "faith and obedience," though the meaning was the same no matter what combination was used. For example, Archbishop Secker employs the same categories as Johnson in his popular Lectures on the Catechism of the Church of England (1769):

Now these Conditions, or Obligations, on our Part, are three: that we renounce what God forbids: that we believe what he teaches, and do what he commands; or, in other words, Repentance, Faith, and Obedience (17-18).
Salvation is promised to us Christians, on the terms of faith, obedience, and repentance. I shall therefore endeavour to shew how . . . we may exert faith, perform obedience, and exercise repentance, in a manner which our heavenly Father may, in his infinite mercy, vouchsafe to accept [Johnson's own emphasis] (Sermon 28, 303).

By faith, first of all, Johnson signifies a firm belief in Christian doctrine. For instance, faith is defined as:

a full and undoubting confidence in the declarations made by God in the holy Scriptures, a sincere reception of the doctrines taught by our blessed Saviour, with a firm assurance that he died to take away the sins of the world, and that we have, each of us, a part in the boundless benefits of the universal sacrifice (Sermon 28, 303-304).

Also, the first definition of faith in the Dictionary is simply "belief of the revealed truths of religion." This notion of faith is woven throughout Johnson's discussions of the topic in the Sermons. For example, in Sermon 7, "a well-grounded belief" is equated with "a firm and settled persuasion of the fundamental articles of our religion" (83). The person who lacks faith possesses

a mind restless and undetermined, continually fluctuating betwixt various opinions, always in pursuit of some better scheme of duties, and more eligible system of faith, eager to embrace every new doctrine, and adopt the notions of every pretender to extraordinary light (Sermon 7, 83).
The truths which are the proper objects of belief include all of divine revelation—"the declarations made by God in the holy Scriptures . . . the doctrines taught by our blessed Saviour" (Sermon 28, 303-4). Of course, some of these truths and doctrines are more important than others. Sermon 22 contains a brief list of truths to be believed:

we must then endeavour to invigorate our faith by returning frequently to meditate upon the objects of it, our creation, our redemption, the means of grace, and the hope of glory (Sermon 22, 235).

As we have already seen, it is the last item on this list which Johnson seems to have considered the most useful—the one most likely to prompt the performance of virtuous activity.

Faith, then, provides some practical consolations for the vacuity of life. First, it teaches us to seek our happiness in eternity. The Sermons are filled with references to the preparatory nature of this life for the life of the world to come, with the relative insignificance of what happens to us now except as it relates to what we shall be in the hereafter, and with the great blessing of Christianity in bringing immortality to light [Sermons 5, 10, 25]. Religion offers man "a
reasonable expectation of a more happy and permanent existence" (Sermon 4, 44).

Second, and somewhat paradoxically, this very focus on eternal happiness brings some degree of happiness or at least contentment to this life. Most of our unhappiness is caused by some "fictitious good" (Adventurer 111, 451), so that when we focus on eternity and give up our desperate grasping after worldly things, we begin to grow happier, not only because of our future hope but also because, by reducing and devaluing our earthly wants, we grow less anxious about them. Here religion serves as a regulator of desire, keeping us from fixating upon every worldly object as some new thing necessary for happiness, and thereby allowing a natural happiness to rise up in the soul:45

The consideration of the vanity of all human purposes and projects, deeply impressed upon the mind, necessarily produces that diffidence in all worldly good, which is necessary to the regulation of our passions, and the security of our innocence. In a smooth course of prosperity, an unobstructed progression from

45 Johnson repeatedly stresses the healing benefits of recognizing our weak condition in the light of eternity. See, for example, The Vanity of Human Wishes, Idler 37, 116, Adventurer 67, 387-389, Adventurer 119, 461-468, Rambler 8, 40-46, Rambler 17, 92-97, Rambler 28, 156, Rambler 58, 309-313, Sermon 15, 112, Sermon 18, 193. Other Christian writers also emphasized the practical benefits of frequently focusing on our eternal destiny. See, for example, William Law, A Serious Call, 116, 122, 133-147, 268.
wish to wish, while the success of one design facilitates another, and the opening prospect of life shews pleasures at a distance, to conclude that the passage will be always clear, and that the delights which solicit from far, will, when they are attained, fill the soul with enjoyments, must necessarily produce violent desires, and eager pursuits, contempt of those that are behind, and malignity to those that are before. But the full persuasion that all earthly good is uncertain in the attainment, and unstable in the possession, and the frequent recollection of the slender supports on which we rest, and the dangers which are always hanging over us, will dictate inoffensive modesty, and mild benevolence (Sermon 12, 134).

This process of a "backward transfer" of happiness from futurity to present is made clearest when Johnson considers the comforts of the dying:

To afford adequate consolations to the last hour, to cheer the gloomy passage through the valley of the shadow of death, and to ease that anxiety, to which beings, prescient of their own dissolution, and conscious of their own danger, must be necessarily exposed, is the privilege only of revealed religion (Sermon 25, 261).

Elsewhere he says, "Piety is the only proper and adequate relief of a decaying man" (Rambler 69, 367). To recognize a secure future in the face of death is certainly a source of happiness in this life; so that sick or well, anyone who contemplates his end with a focus on his eternal reward should derive some comfort from it. Yet, Johnson remained terrified at the prospect of death because
experience had taught him that the conditions of salvation were extremely difficult to fulfill.

Johnson's understanding of faith as a means to salvation, and hence as a consolation for the vacuity of life, derives not from what faith is but from what it does—it produces obedience and repentance. Faith that does not produce these attributes is not true faith. Johnson makes this very clear when he asserts that those whose faith is not productive of good works will be consigned to everlasting flames:

Those who contented themselves with believing, and professing Christianity, without obeying its precepts; those, who while they call the Author of our faith, the Lord, their Master, and their God, and yet neglect his precepts and work iniquity, will be rejected by him at the last day, as those whom he has never known; those to whom his regard never was extended; and, notwithstanding the confidence with which they may claim his intercession, will not be distinguished by any favour from other sinners (Sermon 14, 156).

To have the same opinions naturally produces kindness, even when these opinions have no consequence; because we rejoice to find our sentiments approved by the judgment of another. But those who concur in Christianity, have, by that agreement in principle, an opportunity of more than speculative kindness; they may help forward the salvation of each other, by counsel or by reproof, by exhortation, by example; they may recall each other from deviations, they may excite each other to good works (Sermon 11, 122-123).
Faith, the cause of obedience, is also considered an act of obedience, a virtue, a good work.

Johnson's morally pragmatic view of religion is demonstrated by the fact that he places less emphasis on faith than on obedience and repentance—virtues which are intrinsically linked to authority. It is not faith, not the intellectual assent to theological propositions, which is central for Johnson but rather repentance and obedience. Indeed, the references to faith in his works and conversations are minimal. Boswell reports only one statement regarding faith (Life, IV, 123); virtue, by contrast, appears nineteen times in the index to the Life. Moreover, in the periodical essays, Johnson never discusses faith as such, though several explicitly treat religious subjects and though Rambler 110 is entirely devoted to the topic of repentance. Most of the explicit references to faith occur in the Sermons; indeed, Sermons 4, 7, 10, 14, and 28 contain substantial discussions of the topic. Finally, in Johnson's prayers and diaries, where obedience and repentance are a constant theme, there are no more than sixteen uses of the word faith or its synonyms.46

Indeed, it is not faith but the second virtue--obedience--which receives the heaviest emphasis in the Johnsonian scheme of religion. For Johnson, the performance, in obedience to divine law, of virtuous acts is the practical manifestation of religion. As we may recall, the very definition of religion in the Dictionary is "virtue, as founded upon reverence of God, and expectation of future rewards and punishments." Johnson asserts that tranquility can be found only by the man who realizes that he is "a being sent into the world only to secure immortal happiness by his obedience to those laws which he has received from his Creatour" (Sermon 5, 63). Rambler 7 designates "the perpetual renovation of the motives of virtue" as "the end for which all the rites of religion seem to be instituted" (40). In Sermon 3, the salvific necessity of good works is forcefully asserted:

The Bible tells us, in plain and authoritative terms, that there is a way to life, and a way to death; that there are acts which God will reward, and acts that he will punish. That with soberness, righteousness, and godliness, God will be pleased; and that with intemperance, iniquity, and impiety, God will be offended; and that of those who are careful to please him, the reward will be such, as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard; and of those who, having offended him, die without repentance, the punishment will be inconceivably severe, and dreadful (Sermon 3, 29-30).
Clearly, this constitutes an extraordinarily simple and logical understanding of the Christian gospel; it reflects Johnson's pragmatic belief in a God who is intimately associated with human experience. Indeed, the belief that salvation is partially the reward of virtue is completely typical of Johnson's Sermons.

It is here, however, that a contradiction seems to arise. In the previous chapter, we examined Johnson's firm conviction that man's nature is weak, constantly prone to temptations, and morally corrupt. Nevertheless, the eternal destiny of this weak creature is dependent upon his fulfillment of extremely exacting divine precepts. Johnson, however, avoids this contradiction by mitigating the demands of divine righteousness. So, though it is true that man's eternal happiness hinges chiefly on obedience, it is also true that man often fails to be obedient. God in his mercy requires only that man do his best, and he graciously accepts man's "best endeavours" as if they were truly meritorious.

Given man's natural weakness, it would be quite unreasonable for God to do otherwise. Indeed, claims Johnson, reason itself tells us that if God did insist on perfect obedience, man's worship would be vain:

> If God were a power unmerciful and severe, a rigid exactor of unvaried regularity and unfailing virtue; if he were not to be pleased
but with perfection, nor to be pacified after transgressions and offenses; in vain would the best men endeavour to recommend themselves to his favour; in vain would the most circumspect watch the motions of his own heart, and the most diligent apply himself to the exercise of virtue. . . . God would not be to be served, because all service would be rejected. . . . (Sermon 2, 18).

God in his mercy therefore requires only sincere obedience. As long as the attempts to obey him are heartfelt and earnest, he will overlook the inevitable shortcomings. This kind of God, writes Johnson, is not vainly worshipped:

It is reasonable, that we should endeavour to please him, because we know that every sincere endeavour will be rewarded by him; that we should use all the means in our power, to enlighten our minds, and regulate our lives, because . . . our conduct, though not exactly agreeable to the divine idea of rectitude . . . will not be condemned by that God, who judges of the heart, weighs every circumstance of our lives, and admits every real extenuation of our feelings and transgressions (Sermon 2, 19). 47

The final virtue of repentance is best viewed as an extension of this divine leniency. Though the believer can be assured that God will automatically overlook his errors and shortcomings as long as they are unintentional, some provision must also be made for deliberate transgressions. Repentance supplies this need. Even "those that

47 For similar statements, see Sermon 6, 72; Sermon 9, 98; Sermon 28, 304-305.
have polluted themselves with studied and premeditated wickedness" are "not for ever excluded from his favour" because repentance gives them the

means by which pardon may be obtained, and by which they may be restored to those hopes of happiness, from which they have fallen by their own fault (Sermon 2, 19).

Without the benefit of repentance, men could only languish hopelessly in their sins and the "progress of life could only [be] the natural descent of negligent despair from crime to crime" (Rambler 110, 221).

In the Dictionary, Johnson defines repentance as "sorrow for sin, such as produces newness of life, penitence." However, his pragmatic attitude towards religion is again demonstrated through his emphasis of reform over contrition in the practice of repentance. Sorrow is a necessary constituent, but the sinner

is only to expect mercy upon his reformation. For reformation is the chief part of repentance; not he that only bewails and confesses, but he that forsakes his sins, repents acceptably to God (Sermon 2, 21).

Rambler 110 stresses a similar point:

Repentance is the relinquishment of any practice, from the conviction that it has offended God. Sorrow, and fear, and anxiety, are properly not parts, but adjuncts of repentance (Rambler 110, 223).
The mere intention of reforming is sufficient only when the time or opportunity for reformation is denied. Such is the situation addressed in Sermon 20. The Reverend William Dodd, a popular preacher, convicted of forgery and sentenced to capital punishment, appealed to Johnson for help. Johnson assented and sought to gain a pardon, but without success. Johnson then wrote Sermon 28, which was to be preached by the soon-to-be-hanged clergyman before the other prisoners at Newgate. The sermon promotes repentance with a gallows urgency:

God will consider that life as amended, which would have been amended if he had spared it. Repentance in the sight of man, even of the penitent, is not known but by its fruits: but our Creator sees the fruit, in the blossom, or the seed (Sermon 28, 308).

Repentance, if done properly, has wonderful efficacy; it brings forgiveness, reconciliation, and a renewed hope of eternal blessedness. Even a lifelong course of sin will not condemn a man who repents in time:

Yet shall no man be excluded from future happiness . . . even by long habits of intemperance, or extortion. Repentance and new life will efface his crimes, reinstate him in the favour of his judge, restore him to those promises which he has forfeited, and open the paths to eternal happiness (Sermon 22, 232).

Indeed, a man killed in the very commission of a crime can be saved if he truly repents:
BOSWELL: When a man is the aggressor, and by ill-usage forces on a duel in which he is killed, have we not little ground to hope that he is gone into a state of happiness? JOHNSON: Sir, we are not to judge determinately of the state in which a man leaves this life. He may in a moment have repented effectually, and it is possible may have been accepted by GOD (Life, IV, 212).

This belief necessarily implies a less comforting idea—the failure to repent can condemn a sinner to eternal punishment. For repentance is not just one way of abolishing past sin; it is the only way.

That Johnson himself felt strongly about the efficacy and necessity of repentance is especially indicated by its dominance as a theme throughout his prayers and meditations. The majority of his prayers, for instance, contain a plea for assistance in repenting. The birthday prayer of 1758 is typical:

Almighty and most merciful Father, who yet sparest, and yet supportest me, who supportest me in my weakness, and sparest me in my sins . . . enable me to improve the time which is yet before me to thy glory and my own salvation. Impress upon my soul such repentance of the days misspent in idleness and folly, that I may henceforward diligently attend to the business of my station in this world, and to all the duties which thou hast commanded (65).

The focus here is also typical—not on contrition but on amendment of life. Johnson's minute examination of his failings is not at all unusual in the Christian tradition.
For example, Donald J. Greene refutes the charge of "mor-bidity" in Johnson's "Prayers and Meditations" and he suggests that their emphasis on self-condemnation fits into the Anglican tradition of the General Confession. 48 If sorrow is mentioned in his prayers, it is usually in an appeal that it might be productive of reformation, as in this prayer of 1754:

Almighty God vouchsafe to sanctify unto me the reflections and resolutions of this day, let not my sorrow be unprofitable; let not my resolutions be vain. Grant that my grief may produce true repentance (55).

As this quotation also indicates, Johnson's famous resolutions, so often made and so often broken, cannot really be understood apart from his practice of repentance. True contrition brings forth resolutions which, in turn, ought to bring forth amendment. For example, on the anniversary of his mother's death, Johnson writes:

I am sorrowful, O Lord; let not my sorrow be without fruit. Let it be followed by holy resolutions and lasting amendment (66).

Although repentance clearly has an eminent role in Johnson's understanding of religion, it nevertheless occupies a subordinate position to obedience. As Johnson

---

told Mrs. Knowles, the terms of salvation are first of all obedience, and "where obedience has failed, then, as suppletory to it, repentance" [emphasis mine] (Life, II, 294). Not only is repentance subordinate to obedience, it is, to some degree, itself a form of obedience. First of all, if, as Johnson believes, repentance consists chiefly of reformation or amendment, then repentance could also be defined simply as the resumption of obedience. Of course, repentance has other elements but the return to obedience seems paramount. Second, Johnson describes repentance, like faith, as a duty (Sermon 2, 26)--in other words, as an act of religious obligation. Hence, although Johnson usually prefers to treat repentance and obedience as fairly distinct categories, there does appear to be considerable overlap.

That it is possible to be saved by the practice of faith, obedience and repentance presupposes that certain provisions have been made for man's weak, sinful and corrupt nature. Salvation would not be possible without Christ's satisfaction for sin. Man's sin required a "propitiation," which, among other things, compensated for "the imperfections of our obedience and the inefficacy of our repentance" (Life, IV, 129). It is Christ's "merits" which supply "what is deficient in our endeavours" (Sermon 28, 304), allowing God to accept imperfect instead of
perfect obedience. While the Redemption renders man's
good works acceptable to God, it is grace that gives
sinful man the power to perform them.

By grace in the religious sense, Johnson almost
always signifies divine assistance in the form of direct
influence or inspiration; in Roman Catholic theology this
is called "actual grace." Grace gives the Christian
both the desire and the power to obey God; indeed, no good
work is possible without divine assistance. In his Easter
Eve prayer of 1757, Johnson prays for "that grace without
which I can neither will nor do what is acceptable to
thee" (63). In a prayer of 1750, Johnson wrote that "by
... Grace whatever I have thought or acted acceptable to
Thee has been inspired and directed" (42).

Furthermore, grace is especially needed for the exercise of repentance:

But as this reformation is not to be accomp­lished by our own natural power, unassisted by
God, we must, when we form our first resolutions
of a new life, apply ourselves, with fervour and
constancy, to those means which God has pre­cribed for obtaining his assistance (Sermon 2,
24).

49 Though grace is the word Johnson commonly uses to
refer to divine help and influence, it should be noted
that Holy Spirit is employed in the same sense almost as
often.

50 For similar usage of the term grace, see Samuel
Johnson, Diaries, Prayers, and Annals, 70, 96, 118.

51 For Johnson's prayers for assistance in repenting,
see Diaries, Prayers, and Annals, 46, 69, 92.
As this quotation suggests, divine aid does not come unbidden to the needy believer; it must be sought for, chiefly in prayer but also in the Eucharist, which imparts "the supernatural and extraordinary influences of grace" (Sermon 9, 90). "We must," adds Johnson in the passage from Sermon 2 noted above, "implore a blessing by frequent prayer, and confirm our faith by the holy sacrament" (Sermon 2, 24). Acquiring grace, furthermore, requires more than ordinary effort. It requires not only "fervour and constancy," but in the performance, "our utmost natural powers" because "God only co-operates with the diligent and the watchful" (Sermon 9, 101). In other words, God gives grace not gratuitously but in response to human effort.

This is not to suggest, however, that Johnson believes that men can be saved by good works. Not only does he recognize the insufficiency of human obedience, which God mercifully accepts instead of true righteousness, but he insists upon the necessity of grace for all worthy human actions. Though Johnson's qualification of the efficacy of good works does not constitute a denial of the salvific value of works, it clearly defines that value in negative terms. Works are not that by which we shall be saved but that without which
we shall not be saved. They are necessary but not necessarily sufficient for salvation. Man cannot save himself; he must rely on divine assistance for every good work. Indeed, in all of Johnson's *Sermons*, especially in the conclusions, we find requests for the grace needed to obey and repent. Johnson's position throughout his sermons is that the Christian co-operates with the grace of God in attaining eternal happiness.52

Johnson cannot escape the orthodox dictum that no man is worthy of salvation or able to earn it; yet, Johnson cannot accept a concept of salvation which is barren of good works. His ambivalence and restless efforts to reconcile his pragmatic moral sense with accepted Christian doctrine make him somewhat unique in eighteenth century thought. Few critics of Johnson's religion have paid sufficient heed to this uniqueness.

Johnson, then, believes in a religion which elevates man—not to the level assigned him by the Deists, rationalists, or natural religionists certainly, for man remains

---

weak and imperfect—but at least to a level where he can exercise some moral freedom and thus bear responsibility for his actions. As we have seen, man is not perceived by Johnson as merely the passive object of divine favor, but as the co-agent of his own eternal happiness. Man has the ability and the freedom to co-operate or not to co-operate with divine grace, and he will be rewarded or punished accordingly. So, despite man's limitations, weaknesses, and his need for divine leniency and assistance, he still retains some measure of prelapsarian freedom and dignity.

It is clear from Johnson's Sermons that his understanding of religion is not one which stresses the utter inability of man to contribute to his own salvation or which stresses the totally gracious nature of God's gift of eternal life. Instead, he emphasizes moral endeavor as a remedy for the vacuity of life and as an indispensable requirement for the consolation of eternal happiness. Though Johnson apparently considers repentance and faith as necessary for eternal happiness, obedience is the paramount condition. As we have seen, his understanding of faith and repentance is so moralistic that there does not seem to be much difference between his asserting that eternal happiness depends on obedience or virtue. Within the Sermons, repentance essentially means renewed
obedience, and faith's value for eternal happiness seems to derive chiefly from its being the cause of obedience.

Consequently, the reasons for religion's great consolation for the vacuity of life is its pragmatism; it provides solutions for the problems caused by man's frail and self-delusive nature. It provides not just emotional stability (Adventurer 107, 445), but a standard of judgment by which to evaluate things of this world; it allows us to proceed with our eyes open, and to see our state; not as hope or fancy may delineate it, but as it has been in reality appointed by divine Providence (Sermon 15, 160).

Whenever our passions become clouded by some new wish or some wonderful idea, when reason grows confused about the goodness or possibility of the wish or idea, religion supplies man with the proper fixed goals for the life, together with the motives for action and the standard for measuring those actions. Throughout his Sermons, Johnson asks the question of how man was to be consoled for the misery of living and he answers it by belief in salvation through Christ. Yet, his answer is always framed by a practical, secular, and psychological understanding of human nature.

Johnson's Sermons show man how to alleviate the vacuity of his existence in a variety of ways. One can
integrate his reason with his desires, his instincts and his passions; he can cultivate a mature and realistic self-understanding, including social relationships; and he can extend the benefits of his own experience to others according to the rule of social benevolence. It is not simply a matter of looking to Christ as an ideal example to be followed, but an assiduous and constant pursuit of maturity and the emotional integration of one's whole self that is necessary to ease the feeling of vacuity. Since by nature we are creatures of the future where imagination and desire range "in quest of future happiness" (Rambler 5, 25), religion supplies man's reason, imagination, and desires with the proper fulfillment for their cravings in its promise of salvation.53 So, the emptiness is filled. For Johnson, then, religion "appears, in every state of life, to be the basis of happiness" (Sermon 1, 15).

53 See, for example, Rambler 203, 291-294; Rambler 2, 10; Rambler 41, 221; Sermons 7, 14, 15, 20, and 25.
CHAPTER FOUR

JOHNSON'S SERMONS AND
ENGLISH SERMON STYLE

I

While the sermon appears to have lost much of its eminence as a literary form in modern times, it is important to remember that Johnson considered it a significant part of English literature. He makes this clear in a conversation concerning the posthumous sale of the Honorable Topham Beauclerk's library. Wilkes remarks on the irony that Beauclerk, a renowned rake, should have owned so many volumes of sermons:

Mr. Beauclerk's great library was this season sold in London by auction. Mr. Wilkes said, he wondered to find in it such a numerous collection of sermons; seeming to think it strange that a gentleman of Mr. Beauclerk's character in the gay world, should have chosen to have many compositions of that kind. JOHNSON: Why, Sir, you are to consider that sermons make a considerable branch of English literature; so that a library must be very imperfect if it has not a numerous collection of sermons: and in all collections, Sir, the desire of augmenting it grows stronger in proportion to the advance in acquisition (Life, IV, 105-106).
Johnson applies literary criteria to the sermon genre when he states that a thorough study of English letters, including sermons, yields riches in all areas of learning. He boasts that the English language is fabulously rich in "treasures of theological knowledge," surpassing all other vulgar tongues not only quantitatively but qualitatively as well. Moreover, Johnson observes that the English are blessed with a multitude of divines who are "learned, elegant and pious" (Idler 91, 283-284).

Johnson's various remarks on the English sermon reveal his sensitivity to both the homiletic and the literary traditions of the genre.¹ For example, Hugh

¹ W. Fraser Mitchell, English Pulpit Oratory from Andrewes to Tillotson (New York, 1962), traces the development of the English sermon from a homiletic or didactic form to a literary form (133-343). Like Johnson, Mitchell suggests that the didactic and literary dimensions of the sermon were not mutually exclusive considerations for the sermon writer in the eighteenth century. He describes the sermon's evolution:

from a period when its form and content were governed by certain rhetorical and homiletic ideals to a period when it becomes almost a province of literature, in so far as conformity to the prevailing literary standards was required also from the preacher. Its subject-matter underwent an equally important transformation, and the attempts early in the eighteenth-century by Steele and Addison to draw men off from strife and faction in politics, by insisting on a wide range of common interests, found a counterpart in the choice of non-controversial subjects, often of a strongly ethical character, noticeable in the work of dissenters and churchmen alike (136).
Blair is the sermonist whom Johnson most frequently praises for his fidelity to the didactic or homiletic end of the sermon genre, as well as for the artistic excellencies of his sermons. His spontaneous remarks on Blair can be seen as a reflection of those principles which he considers important for a good sermon; as such, they can be broadly understood as Johnson's "standards" for the genre. Moreover, an examination of the vocabulary which Johnson uses to describe Blair's excellencies suggests Johnson's sensitivity to the oral, written, homiletic and literary dimensions of the sermon tradition.

On the publication of Blair's first sermon, Johnson writes to his printer, William Strahan, "I have read over Dr. Blair's first Sermon, with more than approbation, to say it is good is to say too little" (Letter 505.1). Two

2 When Boswell requests a list from Johnson of "the best English sermons for style" (Life, III, 247-248), the order of the sermonists is imposed by Boswell's suggestions and only towards the end of the list does Johnson make his own nominations. Approving or disapproving of a writer suggested by someone else is quite different from spontaneously selecting a sermonist for praise or blame. It is unfortunate that the catalogue requested by Boswell, from the sheer statistical weight of the many names it includes, is sometimes given such emphasis as an indication of Johnson's taste in sermons. See, James Gray, Johnson's Sermons: A Study (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), Chapter Two. Actually, it is a misleading piece of evidence when considered alone. Hugh Blair is a figure who does not appear in the catalogue at all.
months later he brings up the sermon in a letter to
Boswell, when he describes it as "excellently written both
as to doctrine and language" (Letter 507). In May, he
again compliments Boswell on his countryman's skill,
"Please to return Dr. Blair. Thanks for his sermons. The
Scotch write English wonderfully well" (Letter 515). By
November, Blair seems to have made a reputation for
himself, for Johnson writes to Boswell that "Dr. Blair's
sermons are now universally commended, but let him think
that I had the honour of first finding and first praising
his excellencies" (Letter 565). Johnson admired Blair's
measured sentences and his meticulously selected phrases
as models of sermon style. In 1778, for example, Johnson
offers glowing praise for Blair's ability to write sermons
directed, not to the emotions, but to man's reason.
Johnson says that Blair's "doctrine is the best limited,
the best expressed: there is the most warmth without
fanaticism, the most rational transport. I wish Blair
would come over to the Church of England" (Life, III,
339).

Johnson has found in Blair a sermonist whom he can
praise for both literary and homiletic skills. Not only
does he appeal to Johnson's sense of propriety by fitting
his subject matter to his audience, but he does so in a
disciplined and restrained way--his warmth is without
fanaticism, and his transport is rational. Johnson is not toying with oxymorons; he is merely pointing to the careful control which he feels Blair shares with literary masters. Moreover, Johnson's comments reflect some of the principles which he considers important for the genre.

One of the first requirements of a good sermon is sensitivity to the audience, that is, the fitness of the subject matter developed within the sermon to the pragmatic moral and religious needs of the congregation to whom it is addressed. Blair has the skill to "limit" his doctrine or to select subjects that are appropriate for the flock he is addressing. In another conversation, Johnson expresses his dissatisfaction with Zachariah Mudge for attempting more than what his hearers could comprehend and hence for accomplishing nothing. Moreover, after expressing his dissatisfaction with Mudge, he praises Blair again, as if reminded of his success by Mudge's failure:

Mudge's Sermons are good, but not practical. He grasps more sense than he can hold; he takes more corn than he can make into meal; he opens a wide prospect, but it is so distant, it is indistinct. I love Blair's Sermons. Though the dog is a Scotchman, and a Presbyterian, and everything he should not be, I was the first to praise them. Such was my candour! (Life, IV, 98).
Johnson's metaphors here are vivid and exact. Gathering more corn than can be made into meal conjures up a wondrously lively picture of superfluity and excess—characteristics which Johnson consistently opposed.

Nowhere is Johnson more the hardheaded and practical realist than in the criticism of his own church. To succeed a sermon must reach its audience—a much less sophisticated audience than the relatively intellectual elite who might read a volume of printed sermons. Although he does not lower his high literary standards when judging a sermon, he is concerned with how the sermon, as a dramatic and public form of rhetoric, can make religion personal and immediate to the congregation. Indeed, Johnson's own Sermons often reflect an uneasy balance between his strict sense of literary propriety and the pragmatic objectives of the genre.

The chief purpose of a sermon, after all, is to persuade those who hear it to commit themselves to a change of life. A sermon must not simply effect a bland act of intellectual assent; rather, it must engage man's mind, heart, and will with the practical concerns of personal reformation. This makes the genre different from ordinary essays, even theological ones. There is a dialectical tension between the pulpit and the pew with the preacher striving for nothing less than the conversion
and salvation of his auditors. Thus, Johnson manifests an ambivalence about the preaching of the Evangelicals and Methodists. He admires the fervor and zeal of their preaching; yet, he remains suspicious of an unchecked and undisciplined appeal to the emotions—of a style that is primarily hortatory with little literary grace or theological substance. He specifically cautions against the abuse of oratorical techniques:

Whether action may not be yet of use in churches, where the preacher addresses a mingled audience, may deserve inquiry. It is certain that the senses are more powerful as the reason is weaker; and that he whose ears convey little to his mind, may sometimes listen with his eyes till truth may gradually take possession of his heart. If there be any use of gesticulation, it must be applied to the ignorant and the rude, who will be more affected by vehemence than delighted by propriety. In the pulpit little action can be proper, for action can illustrate nothing but that to which it may be referred by nature or by custom. He that imitates by his hand a motion which he describes, explains it by natural similitude; he that lays his hand on his breast when he expresses pity, enforces his words by a customary allusion. But theology has few topics to which action can be appropriated; that action which is vague and indeterminate will at last settle into habit, and habitual peculiarities are quickly ridiculous (Idler 90, 280-201).

Johnson had a strong distaste for anything that smacked of the demagogic; he consistently praises and admires moderation and restraint. Describing the Reverend Zachariah Mudge's style of delivery, Johnson commended him
for being "forcible . . . [but] not turbulent; disdaining anxious nicety of emphasis, and laboured artifices of action." Moreover, Mudge's style showed "natural dignity"; it did not direct attention to the speaker at the cost of the content (Life, IV, 77).

Johnson seems to be counseling an avoidance of the artificial or contrived in sermon delivery and insisting instead on a degree of naturalness. Johnson approved of those techniques which allowed the preacher to naturally and easily stress a point with a gesture or a change of tone or volume or pace. However, when the preacher calls such attention to himself that his auditors are diverted from what he is saying to the way in which he is saying it, then clearly, the bounds of propriety have been surpassed.

Johnson's loyalty to the established church does not prevent him from criticizing the Anglican clergy for their failure to touch "the common people":

He observed that the established clergy in general did not preach plain enough; and that polished periods and glittering sentences flew over the heads of the common people, without any impression upon their hearts. Something might be necessary, he observed, to excite the affections of the common people, who were sunk in languor and lethargy, and therefore he supposed that the new concomitants of methodism might probably produce so desirable an effect. The mind, like the body, he observed, delighted in change and novelty, and even in religion itself, courted new appearances and
modifications. Whatever might be thought of some methodist teachers, he said, he could scarcely doubt the sincerity of that man, who travelled nine hundred miles in a month, and preached twelve times a week; for no adequate reward, merely temporal, could be given for such indefatigable labour [emphasis mine] (Life, II, 123).

Johnson was enormously impressed by the sincerity of the Methodist preachers. He attributed the success of these preachers to their expressing themselves "in a plain and familiar manner, which is the only way to do good to the common people" (Life, I, 459). The learned and brilliant clergymen of the established church should, in Johnson's view, follow suit:

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 (Life, I, 459-460).

Johnson frankly admitted that practical moral principles were "better taught in English sermons than in any other books ancient or modern" (Idler 91, 283). Indeed, Johnson's own practice as a sermon writer reflects his sensitivity to the didactic objective of the genre. When we examine his Sermons, we discover that the elegant and restrained Rambler style predominates; only occasionally does he express himself in the "plain and familiar manner"
of the Methodists. It must be remembered, however, that Johnson's Sermons were not intended for an uneducated congregation of lower class parishioners; rather, most of his Sermons were written for John Taylor's congregation of middle class merchants, landowners, shopkeepers and bankers.

Johnson's Sermons are couched in terms designed to appeal to common sense; they generally avoid making emotional appeals of a purely hortatory kind. Johnson was aware of the dramatic situation of the sermon and he recognized the skilled use made of emotional appeal by the Evangelicals; however, he remained suspicious of such appeals perhaps because of his own fears regarding the insatiable nature of man's desires and the tyranny of his imagination. Johnson feared the loss of rational control over the imagination and the will; an excess of emotion was simply in violation of the dictates of common sense and decorum which called for moderation, balance and discipline.

Johnson noted several principles of propriety for a sermon writer to observe as he strove to direct his hearers towards religious commitment and proper moral activity--the fitness of the subject matter to the audience, the disciplined and restrained use of emotional appeal, gesture and intonation. Indeed, Johnson was
poignantly aware of the didactic nature of the sermon genre. Unlike an essay which seeks primarily intellectual persuasion and affirmation, he recognized that the sermon sought to change some practical behavior patterns in human nature.

Johnson also subjects the sermon to the same standards of diction, structure, and decorum that he uses in evaluating drama and poetry. We have already discussed the homiletic elements which Johnson singles out.

3 The close connection between the development of English prose style in general from the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries and sermon composition in particular has been astutely noted by Mitchell:

That in the end preaching and prose could be judged by the same standards is itself evidence of the closeness of their connection, for taste in so large measure depends on what is most widely disseminated, that but for the reformation and simplification of the pulpit-address it is almost certain there would have been no simplification of English prose; or, at least, such simplification as might have resulted from the influence of the Court, and the growth of scientific enquiry, would never have been universally accepted and applauded as that which the example and influence of the preachers brought about. If Elegance of Style, according to Hughes' quaint simile, is 'like a coy Mistress,' in England, it may be said, she was first wooed by the divines and given a place in the Temple, where men at rare intervals learned to revere her, and heard from her lips the musical and luminous utterance towards which in their best literary efforts they laboured ever afterwards to approach (Mitchell, 396).
for praise in Blair. Let us now attempt to uncover some of those elements in the style of Blair's Sermons for which Johnson admires him.

Blair's Sermon 1, which Johnson praises on three occasions, discusses the unity of piety and morality; it is a relationship essential to Johnson's own concept of Christian ethics. Blair treats the complementary nature of prayer and good works—a pragmatic religious principle which Johnson firmly espouses. The topic sentence of Sermon 1 illustrates some elements in his style for which Johnson praises him:

> It is to the conjunction of prayer and alms, that I purpose now to direct your thoughts, as describing the respectable and amiable character of a man, as forming the honour and the blessedness of a true Christian; piety joined with charity, faith with good works, devotion with morality (Sermon 1, 3).

Blair's use of parallelism is clear—it is extended,

---

4 As early as 1766, Johnson expresses his commitment to an active social religion rather than passive and self-centered devotion: "It is our first duty to serve society; and, after we have done that, we may attend wholly to the salvation of our own souls. A youthful passion for abstract devotion should not be encouraged" (Life, II, 10).

complex, and varied just enough to prevent monotony. There is a valid distinction between "respectable" and "amiable," between "honour" and "blessedness." The pairs are not merely synonyms marshalled together to swell the sentence.

Blair's diction relies on a vocabulary of general terms. For example, Blair writes his Sermon 1 with universal applicability:

> Cast your eyes over the whole earth. Explore the most remote quarters of the east or the west. You may discover tribes of men without policy, or laws, or cities, or any of the arts of life: But no where will you find them without some form of religion (Sermon 1, 5).

The apparent redundancy in the example cited above is actually a stylistic echo of the philosophical outlook being presented: man is everywhere the same, so descriptions of human nature throughout the world ought not to vary.

6 A schematic representation of the parallelism in this sentence shows that there is one pair of parallel phrases with four points of parallelism, and a triplet of parallel phrases with two points of parallelism. The deviations from perfect parallelism are in parentheses:

as describing/the respectable/and amiable (character)/ of a man
as forming/the honour/ and (the blessedness)/ of a (true) Christian
piety (joined)/with charity
faith /with (good) works
devotion /with morality
Besides using a style which Johnson finds agreeable, Blair adapts the traditional formal structure of the sermon. Blair's sermon is organized around a point-by-point outline introduced *early* in the sermon and followed with varying degrees of diligence and strictness. Blair's outline, however, is so graceful that it actually enhances the sermon while serving as an organizing device:

I shall first endeavour to show you, that alms without prayers, or prayers without alms, morality without devotion, or devotion without morality, are extremely defective; and then shall point out the happy effects of their mutual union (Sermon 1, 3).

The ease with which Blair dignifies the outline's utilitarian purpose with his meticulously selected phrases would have appealed to Johnson as a model of graceful sermon prose.

For Johnson, then, the great appeal of Hugh Blair is his ability to integrate both the homiletic and literary dimensions of the sermon; such integration makes his *Sermons* successful instruments of moral persuasion as well as works distinguished by their artistic merit. Indeed, the Johnsonian "standards" for an effective sermon which we have isolated and examined--the fitness of the subject matter to the audience; disciplined and restrained use of emotional appeal, gesture and intonation; the stylistic characteristic of parallelism; the controlled use of...
repetition and figurative devices; sensitivity to a choice of diction which stresses universal concepts over particular ones; and attentiveness to formal structuring techniques within the sermon tradition—reveal his sensitivity to the sermon as "a considerable branch of English literature" (Life, IV, 105). However, it must not be assumed that those elements which Johnson singled out for praise in Blair are to be automatically found in his own Sermons. Though Johnson's Sermons bear the mark of his own distinctive style, they were strongly influenced by the English homiletic tradition from the middle of the sixteenth until the middle of the eighteenth century.7

Indeed, further examination of Johnson's Sermons will reveal some important deviations from those characteristics which he found so praiseworthy in Blair's works. All these variations suggest Johnson's efforts to test the truth of religious revelation against the reality of human experience and to blend gracefully the homiletic and the literary dimensions of the sermon genre within his own Sermons.8

7 James Gray, Johnson's Sermons, 48. James Gray locates and examines Johnson's Sermons within the English homiletic tradition. See, for example, chapters 2 and 3 for a comprehensive comparison of the themes found in Johnson's Sermons with the English pulpit tradition.

8 In Johnson's Sermons, James Gray notes that both the literary and the homiletic dimensions of the sermon tradition are reflected in stylistic differences—in
II

It is important to examine the homiletic and literary characteristics of the English sermon as Johnson understood them in order to appreciate the significance of his specific deviations from the tradition. Indeed, in The Achievement of Samuel Johnson, Walter Jackson Bate astutely notes:

The self-protective, insomnia-like need to anticipate and be awake to every qualification is able, in his other thinking, to unite with the equally powerful need to extract stable meaning, and to "surmount" the clutter of conflicting reactions. But the absolute criteria of religion represented another sort of finality, different from that he was accustomed to struggle up to empirically, and one in which so much had to be taken, as it were, on trust. There is no reason to think that Johnson's general habit of "incredulity," which once led Boswell to say that he came "near Hume's argument against miracles," could be wholly anesthetized, or put as it were in cold storage, the minute he approached religion (168-169).

Gray's critical terminology, in "The Form and Style of the Sermons" (chapter 4), is one of dichotomy; he speaks of the "Rambler voice" and the "Preacher voice" (192) in the Sermons. Gray observes that Johnson's sermon style "occasionally takes on a regularity close in manner to that of the Psalms and Proverbs of the Old Testament;" at other times, it is "intellectual and poetic"--more reflective of the Rambler and Rasselas style (207-208). However, Gray notes that there is no tension between these "two voices"; nonetheless, he is conscientious enough to observe that perhaps there ought to be. He points out that Johnson had always been uneasy at the thought of a combination of religion and rhetoric, reminding us that (to use Johnson's own words) "the good and evil of eternity are too ponderous for the wings of wit" (230).
Specifically, the Sermons reflect a struggle between the validity and sufficiency of two authorities: (1) the ability of revealed Christian religion to address the limitations of man's weak nature—prone to the delusions of the imagination, to the insatiable desires of the will, and to temptations of every kind; (2) the reliability of human experience to address these same limitations. This tension between Johnson's fundamental and pragmatic adherence to the validity of human experience and his belief in Scriptural revelation propels much of the argument in each of his Sermons; it also reflects his primary deviation from a tradition which tended to accept revelation without critical examination.\(^9\)

When Boswell requests a list of "the best English sermons for style," Johnson judges two authors, Tillotson and South, solely on the merits of their style. Regarding Jeremiah Seed, however, he discusses both style and content: "Seed has a very fine style; but he is not very theological." He reverts to pure literary criticism in his commentary on John Jortin, whom he describes as "very

\(^9\) William R. Siebenschuh makes explicit the tension between human experience and Biblical revelation in Johnson's Sermons, a tension tentatively suggested by James Gray in Johnson's Sermons (see especially, Chapter Four). Siebenschuh argues that this tension indicates the strength of Johnson's religious faith. See, "On the Locus of Faith in Johnson's Sermons." Studies in Burke and His Time, Vol. 17 (Spring, 1976), No. 2, 103-117.
elegant," and on William Sherlock, who is "very elegant, though he has not made it his principal study." However, in the case of Samuel Clarke, Johnson's disapproval of his theology prevents him from wholehearted literary endorsement: "I should recommend Dr. Clarke's sermons, were he orthodox." Even though Boswell phrases his question in specific literary terms, Johnson feels the necessity of including commentary on doctrine as well (Life, III, 247-248).

Although Johnson comments on both style and content, it must not be concluded that he confuses the two or allows his sympathy for an author's views to influence his evaluation of the literary quality of the work. W. Fraser Mitchell's description of post-Restoration critics who recognized the integral relationship between English prose style in general and effective sermon style in particular fits Samuel Johnson's critical awareness perfectly:

The earlier critics had been content to attack their theological rivals and to denounce their style as out of keeping with what they believed to be the sacred aim of pulpit-oratory. But the later critics of the post-Restoration period were concerned not only with the abuses which had taken possession of the sermon, but desired a reform of pulpit style as a step towards the simplification of style in general. Perverted and ill-applied rhetoric came to be condemned, not because particular preachers or their parties did not approve of its use, but as being inherently unsuitable to the sermon and offensive to cultivated taste. In this way the two strains of criticism--what may be described as
hermeneutic criticism and literary criticism--combined, and the dramatists, the poets, and the essayists found an ally in the preacher, who had come to desire, quite as much as they, an elegance and unaffected ease of manner. The pulpit, consequently, which for long had been the last refuge of antiquated modes of rhetorical expression, and a prime corrupter of style, not only assented to a reform too frequently attributed solely to the Court acting under the French influence and the growing exigencies of natural science, but was itself a pioneer in the movement for a simplification of style [emphasis mine] (Mitchell, 401-402).

In his Preface to the *English Dictionary*, Johnson reveals his sensitivity to the union of hermeneutic and literary criticism—to the integral connection between general developments in English prose style and homiletic practice. For example, Richard Hooker, sermonist and stylist, is mentioned with approval in the same breath as the Bible, Bacon, Raleigh, Spenser, Sidney, and Shakespeare:

But as every language has a time of rudeness antecedent to perfection, as well as of false refinement and declension, I have been cautious lest my zeal for antiquity might drive me into times too remote, and crowd my book with words now no longer understood. I have fixed Sidney's work for the boundary beyond which I make few excursions. From the authors which rose in the time of Elizabeth, a speech might be formed adequate to all the purposes of use and elegance. If the language of theology were extracted from Hooker and the translation of the Bible; the terms of natural knowledge from Bacon; the phrases of policy, war, and navigation from Raleigh; the dialect of poetry and fiction from Spenser and Sidney; and the diction of common life from Shakespeare, few ideas would be lost
to mankind for want of English words in which they might be expressed.\textsuperscript{10}

Johnson's analyses of particular sermonists must be taken at face value—explicit approval of style cannot be construed to include approval of content, nor can a negative opinion of style be extended to include a condemnation of the author's views.

In his observations on the English sermon genre, Johnson almost completely ignores all pre-Restoration preachers. As far as we know, the prominent Renaissance preachers, such as John Donne and Lancelot Andrewes, had no impact on him because he makes no mention of their sermons. Moreover, Johnson's attitude toward metaphysical wit, such as Donne and Andrewes employed in their sermons and devotional writings, was such that he would have been unlikely to imitate it. Although he nowhere directly attacks the wit found in many pre-Restoration sermons, neither does he praise the metaphysical word-play, convoluted arguments or speculations about theological paradoxes of its practitioners.\textsuperscript{11}


\textsuperscript{11} W. Fraser Mitchell's analysis of the English sermon tradition offers some possible insight into Johnson's almost complete disregard of the sermon writers before the Restoration. Mitchell presents the earlier
A crucial exception to Johnson's disregard of sermon writers before the Restoration period is Jeremy Taylor.\textsuperscript{12} If we take Taylor as a representative of seventeenth century style, a comparison of his style with Johnson's makes it clear why Johnson did not value pre-Restoration sermon writers. Excerpts from Taylor's sermons show that seventeenth-century preachers as the beginning steps in the evolutionary process of which the Restoration preachers, with their plain style, were the final result:

\begin{quote}
Eloquence, it is obvious, was valued, but it was to be eloquence expressive of reason and which had shed pedantry and the ingenious quibbling of the 'metaphysical' preachers (336).
\end{quote}

Furthermore, in the \textit{Life of Cowley}, Johnson expresses his well-known disdain for the heavy imagery and fine distinctions of the metaphysical poets. He would have found such embellishments even more inappropriate for the sermon because they distract from the didactic purpose of that genre. Moreover, unlike the "metaphysical" sermonists, there is no dwelling on the physical symbol as an embodiment of spiritual truth--almost no theological sacramentalism--in Johnson's \textit{Sermons}. Indeed, the use of imagery with "its parts yoked violently together" is as foreign to Johnson's sermon style as to any stylistic expression that he employed or admired.

\textsuperscript{12} Mitchell calls Taylor one of the two seventeenth-century masters of elegant English prose (242). We know that Johnson is familiar with Taylor's work because he quotes him on the folly of lashing up unnecessary fear within one's soul (\textit{Rambler} 29, 162) and cites Taylor in the \textit{Dictionary} under charity and love. That Johnson knows Taylor's \textit{Sermons} is evident from his statement that, in his \textit{Sermons}, Taylor "gives very good advice: never lie in your prayers; never confess more than you really believe; never promise more than you mean to perform" (\textit{Life}, IV, 294-295). Furthermore, the works of Jeremy Taylor are listed as entries 213, 351, and 477 in Christie's sale catalogue for Johnson's personal library. [Mr. Christie. \textit{A Catalogue of the Valuable Library of Books, of the late learned Samuel Johnson} (London: n.p., 1785)].
he could not be farther removed from Johnson in terms of style. Perhaps the most prominent element of Taylor's style is a love of imagery so rich that it borders on the baroque. A fair example of Taylor's taste for rich figurative language is this simile based on God's displeasure with insincere prayer:

cold prayers are not put into the account in order to effect an acceptation, but are laid aside like the buds of roses which a cold wind hath nipped into death and the discoloured tawny face of an Indian slave.13

The combination of blasted roses and a tawny face is almost surrealistic in its incongruity. In another sermon, after a meditation on the external manifestations of sin, Taylor draws this memorable picture:

We have already opened this dunghill covered with snow, which was indeed on the outside white as the snow of leprosy, but it was no better; and if the very colours and instruments of deception, if the fucus and ceruse be so spotted and sullied, what in the corrupted liver, and in the sinks of the body of sin? (Sermon 20, 247).

Taylor has succeeded in portraying with vivid detail the repulsiveness of sin.

At the risk of oversimplification, we may say that Taylor's style is essentially synthetic; he rejoices in a

profusion of images without questioning the relationship between parts. The stylistic implications of a synthetic approach are apparent in Taylor's description of the final judgment:

God is pleased to compare Himself to a lion; and though in this life He hath confined Himself with promises and gracious emanations of an infinite goodness, and limits Himself by conditions and covenants, and suffers Himself to be overcome by prayers, and Himself hath invented ways of atonement and expiation; yet when He is provoked by our unhandsome and unworthy actions, He makes sudden breaches, and tears some of us in pieces; and of others He breaks their bones or affrights their hopes and secular gaieties, and fills their house with mourning and cypress and groans and death: but when this Lion of the tribe of Judah shall appear upon His own mountain, the mountain of the Lord, in His natural dress of majesty, and that justice shall strike, and mercy shall not hold her hands; she shall strike sore strokes, and pity shall not break the blow; and God shall account with us by minutes, and for words, and for thoughts: and then He shall be severe to mark what is done amiss; and that justice may reign entirely, God shall open the wicked man's treasure, and tell the sums and weigh grains and scruples (Sermon 2, 23).

Taylor's metaphor of the leonine character of the Almighty is powerfully vivid and dramatic. However, Taylor fails to apply the scene he describes to the concrete experience of his congregation--what specific acts of his flock will warrant such severity from the Almighty?

Johnson's extreme caution when using and analyzing imagery is in direct opposition to Taylor's exuberant
employment of a multitude of images which may be only tenuously related to each other. For Taylor, the multiplication of images adds the type of complexity and richness he prefers in his sermons. For Johnson, always aiming at accuracy in the expression of complex relationships, lavish imagery can confuse things. Ornate or excessive imagery can call attention to itself as a figurative device and distract from the subject matter; moreover, it can blur distinctions while it stresses similarities.

Johnson is extremely cautious in the use of figurative language, avoiding the practice of piling images on top of one another. When he does resort to metaphor, he is at great pains to explain even the simplest image, fearful that it might be misunderstood. For instance, when he expounds on the Scriptural quotation, "As you sow, so shall you reap," he observes that

To sow and to reap are figurative terms. To sow, signifies to act; and to reap, is to receive the product of our actions. As no man can sow one sort of grain, and reap another, in the ordinary process of nature; as no man gathers grapes of thorns or figs of thistles, or when he scatters tares in the furrows, gathers

---

14 Mitchell points out that Taylor's sermons also include a fine plain style (253), but this fact does not change the overall impression of confused but lavish imagery.
wheat into his garners; so, in the final dispensations of providence, the same correspondence shall be found in the moral system (Sermon 10, 115).

Johnson is pragmatic in his approach to life and his sermon style reflects that ruling principle. In his view, a sermon should be a practical discourse having an immediate and important application to the purposes of life (Life, I, 459). There are only subtle differences between Johnson's moral essays and his Sermons. Johnson's moral essays are more discursive, while his Sermons are more didactic. The essays, though often introduced with quotations, are not rigidly bound to them as are the Sermons. James Gray observes that "the paradox, the neatly turned conceit, the convoluted symbol, the far-fetched analogy" are all "conspicuously absent" from Johnson's sermon style (Johnson's Sermons, 49). In a critical assessment even more severe than Gray's, Jean Hagstrum characterizes Johnson's Sermons as "colorless" because "his religion gave him no symbol, no ritual, no mythological machinery, no epic or tragic personages, no pageantry."15 Johnson's Sermons, however, are not completely colorless. Such imagery that is found in the Sermons is often overlooked because it lacks detail. When Johnson seeks to illustrate an abstraction, he is careful

15 Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism, 66-68.
Nor is it true only of men, who are engaged in enterprise of hazard, which restrain the faculties to the utmost, and keep attention always upon the stretch. Religion is not only neglected by the projector and adventurer, by men, who suspend their happiness on the slender thread of artifice, or stand tottering upon the point of chance. . . . There is no interest so small, nor engagement so slight, but that if it be followed and expanded, it may be sufficient to keep religion out of the thoughts. . . . But let them not be deceived, they cannot suppose that God will accept him, who never wished to be accepted by him, or made his will the rule of action [emphasis mine] (Sermon 10, 110-111).

The abstract terms of artifice and chance are encased in two separate and parallel metaphors no less effective for the absence of specific visual detail. Yet, as Hagstrum and Gray suggest, Johnson's imagery has a tendency to sink into the background of his Sermons; indeed, it is overshadowed by the more obvious and dominant elements of his Sermon style—the carefully graduated sentence, parallelism, antithesis, and subordination achieved mainly through the use of noun clauses.

Johnson's sentences exhibit a strong sense of artistic control; they tend to be long, logical and rhythmic. For example, the following passage from
Johnson's *Sermons* approaches the length of Taylor's sentence constructions:

That society is necessary to the happiness of human nature, that the gloom of solitude, and the stillness of retirement, however they may flatter at a distance, with pleasing views of independence and serenity, neither extinguish the passions, nor enlighten the understanding, that discontent will intrude upon privacy, and temptations follow us to the desert, every one may be easily convinced, either by his own experience, or that of others (Sermon 1, 3).

If a major phrase is deleted from Johnson's sentence, the parallelism, antithesis, and rhythm are upset to such an extent that the omission is felt immediately. However, in the sample sentence from Taylor's *Sermon 2*, entire "sub-sentences" can be removed without raising the reader's attention because there is no controlled rhythm to disturb. Johnson always seeks out logical, causal, or antithetical relationships through syntax. Such stylistic techniques help to mirror his view of the complex nature of man. Taylor, on the other hand, uses fifteen "and" clause connectives for the mere combination of ideas; he uses only three connectives ("yet," "but," "then") to impose a more sophisticated relationship on the sentence parts. Nevertheless, Taylor's method of composition still demonstrates a regularity, a grace, a sonorousness which is close in manner to the rhythm of the Psalms:
Things are so ordered by the great Lord of all the creatures, that whatsoever we do or suffer shall be called to account, and this account shall be exact, and the sentence shall be just, and the reward shall be great; all the evils of the world shall be amended, and the injustices shall be repaid, and the divine providence shall be vindicated, and virtue and vice shall forever be rewarded by their separate dwellings and rewards (Sermon 1, 9).

Johnson's omission of Taylor from his catalogue of English sermon stylists, then, can possibly be traced to certain elements in Taylor's style--elaborate and complex imagery, and simple, casual syntax--which are directly contrary to Johnson's precise imagery and his controlled and complex syntax.

With the major exception of Taylor and a few other seventeenth century divines, Johnson's observations on

__Another pre-Restoration preacher with whom Johnson reveals familiarity is Richard Baxter, a Puritan; however, he mentions Baxter's Sermons only once. In addition to this singular reference to Baxter's Sermons, Johnson refers to Baxter's spiritual autobiography, Reliquiae Baxterianae, on two consecutive days in his journal. [See Diaries (March 29 and 30, 1766), 106-108]. Moreover, Christie's sale catalogue for Johnson's personal library lists Baxter's works as entries 113, 360, 510, 527, and 597. Johnson's mention of Baxter's Sermons occurs in this exchange with Sir Joshua Reynolds:

Sir Joshua once observed to him, that he had talked above the capacity of some people with whom they had been in company together. "No matter, Sir," (said Johnson); "they consider it as a compliment to be talked to, as if they were wiser than they are. So true is this, Sir, that Baxter made it a rule in every sermon that he preached, to say something that was above the capacity of his audience" (Life, IV, 185).__
the sermon begin with the Restoration preachers. Robert South, Johnson says in his attempt to list the great sermon stylists for Boswell, is "one of the best, if you except peculiarities, and his violence, and sometimes coarseness of language" (Life, III, 248). Explaining that the church leader need not "speak and exhort" in his own person, South says "it is not the gift of every Person, nor of every Age, to harangue the multitude, to Voice it high and loud." 17 "To Voice it high and loud" is, at the very least, an inelegant description of a method of preaching. South calls men's consciences "Hell and Damnation-proof" (15). Johnson would probably have

This rule is highly uncharacteristic of Baxter, whose plain style resulted from his desire to be comprehensible to all members of his audience:

That his plainness is directly attributable to Baxter's desire to make his meaning clear to the most ignorant of his auditory is beyond doubt, and that he was practical rather than speculative is due to the same cause (Mitchell, 270).

Johnson's remark, "above the capacity of his audience," would have to stand out in bold relief from the plain style characteristic of Baxter in order to be effective.

In addition to Taylor and Baxter, Christie's sale catalogue records that Johnson owned the works of two other pre-Restoration preachers: Lancelot Andrewes' Sermons (entry 214) and Hugh Latimer's Sermons (entry 628). However, we have no record of Johnson himself making any reference to the sermons of either Lancelot Andrewes or Hugh Latimer.

17 Robert South, Sermon Preached at Lambeth-Chappel on the 28th of November (Savoy: n.p., 1666), 8.
regarded this as unnecessary coining, which could be avoided by more disciplined sentence construction. Other colloquialisms occur in South's description of a person tempted to be profane:

\[\text{tacitly to approve, and strike in with the Scoffer, and go sharer both in the Mirth and Guilt of his prophane Jests (30).}\]

South, on occasion, violates the stylistic requirements of decorum and consistency of diction, but these violations are not frequent enough to prevent Johnson from general approval of his sermon style.

Johnson expresses some reservations regarding the style of Archbishop John Tillotson, whose popularity flourished far into the eighteenth century. W. Fraser Mitchell offers the following assessment of the influence of Tillotson's homiletic style:

\[\text{The type of sermon to which he [Tillotson] set the seal of his approval consists in the statement of a general proposition arising out of the text, treated of under three or four main aspects, which lead naturally to a conclusion corresponding with the proposition. The thought of each sermon is consequently very easy to follow, and, as the illustrations are all strictly pertinent--no extraneous ornament being added--the syntax natural, and the diction such as was ordinarily employed by educated men, the general effect is one of the greatest possible lucidity and charm. . . . Tillotson's architectural ability in designing a sermon, the propriety of his examples, and the uniform dignity yet simplicity of his diction was}\]
appreciated well into the eighteenth century (Mitchell, 337).

When Boswell asks Johnson for a list of his favorite sermon stylists, Boswell immediately suggests Tillotson as the first possibility:

Boswell: Tillotson?
Johnson: Why, not now. I should not advise a preacher at this day to imitate Tillotson's style; though I don't know; I should be cautious of objecting to what has been applauded by so many suffrages (Life, III, 247-248).

Johnson hesitated about recommending Tillotson's sermons as models for style, although he admired them for their emphasis on what was pragmatic in religion, for their carefully controlled arguments, and for their lack of affectation. Archbishop Tillotson's sermons are direct and practical; however, they are also deficient in graceful stylistic embellishment. Indeed, after Tillotson, the plain but well-modulated style could go no farther; the maintenance of that approach without sinking to the level of the merely commonplace was exceedingly difficult. Nevertheless, many eighteenth-century preachers pushed the "plain style" of Tillotson to its extreme by removing almost all emotional appeal from their sermons. Perhaps, this was in reaction to the over-abundance of emotion in the preaching of the Evangelicals. It may have been in reaction to the Anglican emphasis on ritual as the central
act of worship—an emphasis which tended to relegate the sermon to a position of minor importance. The result was that many sermons which attempted to imitate Tillotson's style became dull and ponderous. In his own sermon compositions, Johnson avoided the excessive austerity of the imitators of Tillotson's style; he went back to Tillotson himself in his search for the practical and unadorned expression of theological truth and added to it his own restrained stylistic embellishments.

Another Restoration sermonist who enjoyed widespread popularity in the eighteenth century was William Sherlock. Johnson remarked that Sherlock's "style too is very elegant, though he has not made it his principal study" (Life, III, 248). However, Sherlock's most popular work was a religious tract not intended for oral delivery and it is the one to which Johnson almost certainly refers—A Practical Discourse Concerning Death. By 1743 it had gone into its twenty-fourth edition. Sherlock's work runs well over three hundred pages, whereas most printed sermons contemporary to his are about twenty pages long. However, Sherlock is consciously writing in the tradition of the literary sermon or religious tract; he makes this clear in a preface to his former congregation, the Masters of the Bench:
One reason of Publishing this Plain Discourse is, because I cannot now preach to you as formerly I have done, and have no other Way left of discharging my Duty to you, but by making the Press supply the Place of the Pulpit.18

The Discourse is organized around the traditional outline form of the sermon, with one chapter devoted to each topic:

I shall, 1. Consider what Death is, and what Wisdom that should teach us. 2. The certainty of our Death . . . 3. The Time of our Death; it must be once, but when, we know not. 4. The natural Fears and Terroirs of Death, or our natural Aversions to it, and how they may be allayed and sweeten'd (3).

Sherlock's outline does not promise much original thought, but it does show why the Discourse appeals to Johnson, who spends a lifetime preparing for death and attempting to deal with his fear of death. However, to understand Johnson's opinion of Sherlock's style, we must examine excerpts from the Discourse itself. One selection will show what is "very elegant" about Sherlock:

First then, let us consider Death only as our leaving this World; a very delightful Place, you'll say, especially when our Circumstances are easy and prosperous: Here a Man finds whatever he most naturally loves, whatever he takes Pleasure in; the Supply of all his Wants, the Gratification of all his Senses, whatever an earthly Creature can wish for or desire (5).

The style of this passage gives the general impression of amplification rather than multiplication; that is, it reworks one set of relationships rather than attempting to cover a great number of concepts. However, Sherlock lapses into casual structure and vocabulary, such as "a very delightful Place, you'll say." Such an easy style, rather than a studied one like Johnson's, suggests Sherlock's sensitivity to and accommodations of the oral dimension of the sermon genre.

The three remaining sermonists included in Johnson's answer to Boswell's question are eighteenth-century figures. Describing Jeremiah Seed, Johnson says, "Seed has a very fine style, but he is not very theological" (Life, III, 248). Johnson's objections are probably based on Seed's sermons concerning the Trinity, in which he states that belief in the Trinity is a matter of personal conscience. However, many of Seed's sermons deal with general moral issues which do not involve controversy:

It is a common Observation, that however forward Men may be to repine at the unequal Portion which God has allotted them of worldly Blessings; yet they are generally well satisfied with their Share of inward Endowments: it being as hard to meet with a Person, who humbly thinks he has too little Sense and Merit, as it is to find
one, who fancies he has too great Riches and Honour.\textsuperscript{19}

This opening sentence of Seed's Sermon 1, on pride, demonstrates his mastery of general terminology and careful parallelism. The theme of pride is grounded in Seed's general observations on human nature and in the immediacy of the situation being addressed by the sermon.

Another sermonist whose work Johnson describes as "very elegant" (Life, III, 248) is John Jortin. An excerpt from Sermon 15, on the fear of God, is representative of Jortin's style:

If we believe God's government over his subjects to be such as in any other being we should call arbitrary, founded upon mere will and pleasure and over-ruling power: if we fancy that he is provoked at such things as would offend no good man, and is to be pacified again by such homage and such services as no wise man would accept; that is, if we clothe him with our infirmities, and make him in some respects weaker than some of ourselves are, these unworthy apprehensions must raise in our minds an abject and servile dread of him, and produce a religion overrun with terror and superstition.\textsuperscript{20}

Although this type of statement alternates in Jortin's Sermons with many shorter and simpler sentences, as in the case of Tillotson and Taylor, the more complex and

\textsuperscript{19} Jeremiah Seed, Eight Sermons (London: n.p., 1757), II, 2.

\textsuperscript{20} John Jortin, Sermons on Different Subjects (London: n.p., 1826), I, 194.
extended sentences are those which are more typical. While precise parallelism in which three or four elements are repeated in successive phrases does not appear in Jortin's Sermons, the overall effect of his style is one of parallelism. For example, in the selection cited above, three out of four of the clauses are conditional. The elaboration or rephrasing of one central thought is probably what Johnson considers "very elegant" in Jortin.

The final critical comment in Johnson's list for Boswell is revealing precisely because it tells so little about a figure who so greatly influenced Johnson's religious attitudes--Samuel Clarke. Johnson probably read Clarke oftener than any other sermonist--at least he makes more frequent notations about reading him than any other sermonist. In his Diaries, Johnson records six occasions on which he reads from Clarke's sermons. Yet, in his catalogue for Boswell, he praises Clarke in the most qualified way:

I should recommend Dr. Clarke's sermons, were he orthodox. However, it is very well known where he is not orthodox, which was upon the doctrine of the Trinity, as to which he is a condemned heretick; so one is aware of it (Life, III, 248).

21 (March 28, 1766), 105; (May 7, 1769), 122; (April 14, 1770), 129; (April 15, 1770), 132; (April 9, 1773), 155; (April 14, 1781), 305.
Johnson was so persuaded of the practical value of orthodox Christian doctrine that he had a horror of heresy. It seemed to him that heresy would undermine the assurance of salvation, the promise of life after death. As we have seen, Johnson had a pathological fear of dying and the "true faith" gave him solace which enabled him to endure. If the "hereticks" were right, who knows what one might face after death? Clarke himself remained within the Church of England but insisted that the doctrine of the Trinity was an optional belief for the individual Christian.

In the previous chapter, we observed that Clarke differs from many other natural religionists in the limitations of his rationalism. Once skepticism on the major points of doctrine has been satisfied, he advises that the Christian should believe, without rigorous examination, the minor points of doctrine:

> To sincere Believers, . . . being once satisfied in the main and great Truths of Religion, they suffer not themselves to be moved, and their Faith in this great point shaken, by naive and uncertain disputes about particular Questions of less moment (Sermon 1, 23).\(^{22}\)

Indeed, Clarke recognizes the fundamentally non-rational nature of faith itself:

---

Faith is that firm belief of things at present not seen: Because it is an Act, not of the Understanding only, but also and chiefly of the Will (Sermon 1, 3).

Clarke did not consider natural religion to be an attack on Christianity; rather, he viewed it as preliminary to the truth of religious revelation:

Natural Religion is the best Preparative for the reception of the Christian. The Love of Truth and Virtue in general, is the Dispensation of the Father; And the Doctrine of the Gospel in particular, is the Dispensation of the Son (Sermon 1, 9).

Finally, the nature of the conversation in which Johnson gives Boswell his list of preachers must be remembered--Boswell begins by suggesting his own candidates and Johnson merely approves or disapproves. This format is partly responsible for Clarke's lowly position on the list. Moreover, Johnson does not confuse artistic criteria with religious considerations. The distinction remains quite clear--approval of Clarke's style but disapproval of one point in his theology.

This survey of Johnson's opinions about particular sermonists reveals a significant catholicity in taste. Although he slights the early sermonists with the exception of Taylor, he appreciates the wide range of styles represented by many post-Restoration preachers:
All the latter preachers have a good style. Indeed, nobody now talks much of style: everybody composes pretty well. There are no such unharmonious periods as there were a hundred years ago (Life, III, 248).

In his own sermon compositions, Johnson avoided the rhetorical excesses of Taylor and the extreme austerity of expression found in many of the imitations of Archbishop Tillotson's plain style. Moreover, while he always points out deviations from orthodoxy, he does not limit his praise to those who propound his own theological beliefs. Johnson recognizes that even those whose doctrine may be questionable, like Clarke, may nonetheless manifest homiletic and literary skills which must be acknowledged.

III

In a letter to the Reverend Charles Lawrence, a young clergyman apprehensive about the duty of preaching to his congregation, Johnson offers very practical insights on how to compose a good sermon. Lawrence had been adapting material taken from other divines for his own sermons. Johnson encourages him to attempt an original sermon on occasion and he concludes his letter by attempting to soothe the young man's fears with a description of the easy, almost mechanical, aspects of sermon composition based on the outline form:
Your present method of making your sermons seems very judicious. Few frequent preachers can be supposed to have sermons more their own than yours will be. Take care to register, somewhere or other, the authors from whom your several discourses are borrowed; and do not imagine that you shall always remember, even what perhaps you now think it impossible to forget.

My advice, however, is, that you attempt, from time to time, an original sermon; and in the labour of composition, do not burthen your mind with too much at once; do not exact from yourself at one effort of excogitation, propriety of thought and elegance of expression. Invent first, and then embellish. The production of something, where nothing was before, is an act of greater energy than the expansion or decoration of the thing produced. Set down diligently your thoughts as they rise, in the first words that occur; and, when you have matter, you will easily give it form: nor, perhaps, will this method be always necessary; for, by habit, your thoughts and diction will flow together.

The composition of sermons is not very difficult: the divisions not only help the memory of the hearer but direct the judgment of the writer; they supply sources of invention, and keep every part in its proper place (Life, III, 437).

An examination of Johnson's Sermons, however, shows that his advice to Lawrence is deceiving in its simplicity.

In this letter, Johnson professes his fidelity to the rather formal and traditional outline structure of the sermon. However, in his own use of the outline, Johnson is an innovator. His greatest deviation from the traditional sermon structure is in his position of the outline. He frequently delays the outline until one-fourth of the
sermon has been spent on a general and discursive considera-
tion of the sermon topic. Common practice is to begin the sermon with the outline so that the structure is clear from the outset. Johnson, however, frequently begins with a leisurely unfolding of the general topic and then introduces the outline. This practice de-emphasizes the outline and makes it less restricting; indeed, by its very position, it usually does not affect one-fourth of the sermon.23

Although this may seem insignificant, it demonstrates Johnson's acute sensitivity to public taste—to his audience and to their pragmatic concerns. In the seventeenth century, congregations seemed to possess an insatiable appetite for preaching; they listened for hours to sermons placed end to end.24 Such congregations did

---

23 An extreme example of Johnson's delay in introducing the traditional homiletic outline is Sermon 14. This sermon is ten pages in length; the outline occurs on the sixth page after Johnson has already made his strongest points.

24 According to Mitchell, at no time in the world's history had preaching played so important and disproportionate a part in political and social life as it did in England during the seventeenth century. Never before had such numbers of sermons been delivered on public or private occasions, and never before had such quantities of sermons and religious treatises come from the press. For example, allowing for the fact that the Westminster Assembly was a gathering of clergymen, still there is something abnormal about a day spent as was Monday, October 16, 1643. According to the Rev. John Lightfoot, the occasion was a solemn fast:
not need much enticement to enter a sermon, so the
preacher could plunge into the outline, confident that his
listeners were receptive. In the eighteenth century,

First Mr. Wilson gave a picked psalm, or
selected verses of several psalms, agreeing to
the time and occasion. Then Dr. Burgess prayed
about an hour: after he had done, Mr. Whittacre
preached upon Isa. xxxvii. 3, "This day is a day
of trouble," etc. Then, having had another
chosen psalm, Mr. Goodwin prayed; and after he
had done, Mr. Palmer preached upon Psal. xxv.
12. After whose sermon we had another psalm,
and Doctor Stanton prayed about an hour; and
with another psalm and a prayer of the prolocu-
tor [i.e. Dr. Twisse], and a collection for the
maimed soldiers . . . we adjourned till tomorrow
morning. [The Whole Works of the Rev. John
contains "The Journal of the Proceedings of the
Assembly of Divines, from January 1, 1643, to
December 31, 1644." As cited by Mitchell, 256].

According to Mitchell, the conditions which we
glimpse behind these facts were hardly calculated to
produce pulpit oratory of a highly finished type.
Political prejudice, religious enthusiasm and the neces-
sity of meeting the exigencies of the moment influenced
what was delivered. The prevailing tone of such sermons
is one of gloomy dogma (Mitchell, 255-257). However,
Mitchell's assessment is not wholly true. Dreary as such
a day may appear to the modern reader, it is important to
recall several factors. The age was one in which drama
and other forms of light entertainment were illegal.
Listening to sermons was a popular form of public ac-
tivity, providing the occasion for social interaction.
Moreover, the political and social issues of the day were
closely intertwined with theological importance. A kind
of theocracy was beginning to take root.
however, the sermon is no longer so universally esteemed. 25

Johnson reveals his awareness of the decline in enthusiasm for the sermon through his defense of the subject matter frequently treated in sermons. For example, in Sermon 1, he apparently feels susceptible to attack on the grounds that marriage is a frequent topic among sermon writers. So, he defends himself by asserting:

It is, therefore, no obligation to the propriety of discoursing upon them [the duties of marriage], that they are well known and generally acknowledged; for a very small part of the disorders of the world proceed from ignorance of the laws by which life ought to be regulated; nor do many, even of those whose hands are polluted with the foulest crimes, deny the reasonableness of virtue, or attempt to justify their own actions. Men are not blindly betrayed into corruption, but abandon themselves to their passions with their eyes open; and lose the direction of truth, because they do not attend to her voice, not because they do not hear, or do not understand it. It is, therefore, no less useful to rouse the thoughtless than instruct the ignorant; to awaken the attention than enlighten the understanding (Sermon 1, 5).

25 In The English Church in the Eighteenth Century (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1878), C. J. Abbey and J. H. Overton note a decline in the quality and quantity of sermons after the Restoration (II, 37). However, they list Sherlock, Smalridge, Waterland, Seed, Ogden, Atterbury, Mudge, and Butler as outstanding sermon writers (II, 37). In general terms, Johnson's taste in sermons is within the mainstream of eighteenth-century opinion.
Johnson feels that he must capture the congregation's interest. He therefore often postpones the outline and begins with a defense of the topic. For example, in sermon 14, this defense of the sermon's subject-matter immediately precedes and introduces the formal outline:

Since, therefore, the pursuit of perfect peace is the great, the necessary, the inevitable, business of human life; since this peace is to be attained by trust in God, and by that only; since, without this, every state is miserable, and the voluptuous and the busy are equally disappointed; what can be more useful, than seriously to enquire, First, what is meant by this trust in God, to which perfect peace is promised? and, Secondly, by what means this trust in God is to be attained? (Sermon 14, 154-155).

Placing the defense just before the formal outline, Johnson softens the blow; he emphasizes the importance of the subject matter before the sermon begins in earnest.

The subject matter Johnson selects for his Sermons demonstrates his pragmatic attitude towards religion: marriage, the necessity of repentance, lying, fraud, charity, good government, the vanity of human life. Even his discussion of God's attributes leads to a practical application--if God is merciful, we may repent; if God is just, we must reform.

Johnson's most frequent method of beginning a sermon is to write a paragraph on some general phase of human existence which the congregation has experienced and with
which they can empathize. For instance, Sermon 1 begins with a comment on man's essentially social nature:

That society is necessary to the happiness of human nature, that the gloom of solitude, and the stillness of retirement, however they may flatter at a distance, with pleasing views of independence and serenity, neither extinguish the passions, nor enlighten the understanding, that discontent will intrude upon privacy, and temptations follow us to the desert, every one may be easily convinced, either by his own experience, or that of others (Sermon 1, 3).

Clear parallels exist between this paragraph and Johnson's writing techniques in the Rambler essays. The most noticeable similarity is that of style: the extended, frequent sets of parallels, the careful balance, the preponderance of abstract nouns and noun clauses, the "consensus" phrase. Furthermore, in imitation of the Rambler style, sixteen of the Sermon introductions are marked by a series of parallel noun clauses which lead to a short and rather anticlimactic verbal phrase.26

26 For example, six of Johnson's Sermons begin with a noun clause introduced by that (Sermons 1, 2, 7, 12, 23 and 24. Moreover, nine other Sermons have noun clauses in the first paragraph (Sermons 3, 5, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17 and 20). Sermon 25 begins with a series of infinitives, so the first word is to, but otherwise the formula of noun clause preceding and dominating the verb applies:

To afford adequate consolations to the last hour, to cheer the gloomy passage through the valley of the shadow of death, and to ease that anxiety, to which beings, prescient of their own dissolution, and conscious of their own danger,
Several of the Rambler and the Sermon introductions, besides sharing stylistic similarities, evoke a similar mood of melancholy over the miseries of life. Moreover, Johnson's religious and secular writings on the vacuity of human life generally conclude in pragmatic exhortations to strive for the improvement of the situation. Although the Rambler essays stop short of an explicitly religious answer to the problem of life's emptiness, their analysis of the problem, as far as it goes, is similar to the introductions of Sermons 5, 12, 15, 23.

These four sermons open on a note of melancholy with Johnson describing either the vanity or the misery of human existence. For example, Sermon 5 considers the literary treatment of human misery:

There is nothing upon which more writers, in all ages, have laid out their abilities, than the miseries of life, and it affords no pleasing reflection to discover that a subject so little agreeable is not yet exhausted (Sermon 5, 53).

must be necessarily exposed, is the privilege only of revealed religion (Sermon 25, 261).

W. K. Wimsatt, in The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson, analyzes Johnson's wide use of parallelism and balance in his great moral essays; he does not examine Johnson's Sermons. More specifically, Wimsatt notes Johnson's characteristic use of noun clauses to illustrate complex relationships through his sentence construction in the Rambler essays (15-23).

27 See, for example, Ramblers 2, 6, 13, 16, 20, 31, 53, 61, 66, 87, 96, 106, 114, 127, and 176; Sermons 5, 12, 15, and 23.
Sermon 12 begins with a recognition that man will not admit the obvious but disagreeable truth that all human desires and actions are vain:

That all human actions terminate in vanity, and all human hopes will end in vexation, is a position, from which nature withholds our credulity, and which our fondness for the present life, and worldly enjoyments, disposes us to doubt, however forcibly it may be urged upon us, by reason or experience (Sermon 12, 127).

In Sermon 15 Johnson dwells on the ubiquitous nature of man's misery. He chooses as his text Job—the prototype of questioning but submissive endurance to the human condition:

The position, contained in this sentence, neither requires, nor admits proof or illustration; being too evident to be denied, and too clear to be mistaken. That life is of short continuance, and is disquieted by many molestations, every man knows, and every man feels; and the complaint, attributed to Job, in the history that is supposed to be the oldest book of which mankind is in possession, has been continued, and will be continued, through all human generations with endless repetitions (Sermon 15, 159).

The opening paragraph of Sermon 23 is a survey of the various responses to the inescapable fact of human misery:

That the life of man is unhappy, that his days are not only few, but evil, that he is surrounded by dangers, distracted by uncertainties, and oppressed by calamities, requires no proof. . . . Accordingly we find the miseries of our
present state lamented by writers of every class, from the inspired teachers of religion, who admonish us of our frailty and infelicity, that they may incite us to labour after a better state, where "there is fullness of joy, and pleasures for evermore," to the vainest and loosest author, whose design is to teach methods, not of improving, but of wasting time, and whose doctrine St. Paul, speaking in a borrowed character, has well expressed in one short sentence, "Let us eat and drink, for to­morrow we die" (Sermon 23, 237-238).

This repeated theme of the misery of human existence is grounded in Johnson's general observations on human nature and in the immediacy of the particular situation being addressed by the sermon. Indeed, the examples taken from these four Sermons indicate Johnson's sparse usage of Biblical parallels for the particular contemporary situation he is examining. Johnson does not seem to be interested in relating the Biblical text closely to practical human experience. He manifests a distinct preference for describing the nature of man in contemporary terms, for clothing misery in contemporary garb, and for using Biblical parallels almost incidentally. Johnson's limited usage of Scripture is again indicative of the pragmatic religious perspective of a layman. Some sermon writers would stretch Scripture to surprising lengths to make it "fit" a particular situation, but Johnson was not one of them. He was never concerned with providing an apologia for the Bible but
rather with offering helpful guidance to human beings wrestling with their daily problems. Where a Biblical text is useful, Johnson will take it up in his Sermons; however, he is at no pains to find Biblical justification for his presentations. Moreover, the delay of the formal outline in his Sermons reserves the consolations provided by Scriptural revelation until one-fourth of the sermon is completed; it allows Johnson first to test the validity of human experience for addressing the vacuity of existence and only then to bring consolation from the Divine Word to a problem clearly grounded in the direct experience of his auditors. As we observed earlier, many sermon writers address their own situations and problems through their sermons. Insofar as the experience of the sermon writer matches that of his audience, his sermons will be effective. Insofar as his experience is unique, his words will fail to move the congregation to reform. In his Sermons, Johnson is eager to reach the Taylor, Dodd, or Aston congregations with the practical issues they struggle with in their daily lives.

Another bond between the Rambler and the Sermon introductions is the surprising prevalence of secular vocabulary. Nineteen of Johnson's Sermons open on a secular note; they have no religious terminology in the
first paragraph. Sermon 24, for example, proposes that a good government must be led by individuals concerned with the common good. The first sentence deals with a generally accepted secular principle; that is, government has been perverted from its original aim:

That the institutions of government owe their original, like other human actions, to the desire of happiness, is not to be denied; nor is it less generally allowed, that they have been perverted to very different ends from those which they were intended to promote. This is a truth, which it would be very superfluous to prove by authorities, or illustrate by example (Sermon 24, 249).

For the most part, Johnson uses religious terms when he is writing about a divine attribute such as mercy (Sermon 2) or justice (Sermon 3), or when he discusses a particular phase of the liturgy, such as communion (Sermons 9 and 22). For all other subjects, particularly those which deal with human behavior and relationships, he begins on the secular level and gradually moves into a religious context. The usual progression in his discussions of human vacuity is obvious—if everything in this life results in emptiness, man should shift his attention to the next life.

See, for example, Sermons 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 26, 27.
By having first disarmed his congregation with a secular approach, Johnson is in effect easing his auditors into a consideration of religious material. That Johnson extends the secular introduction into the majority of his sermons is significant because it illustrates his religious pragmatism in addressing the increased secularism around him. The use of such non-traditional introductions in his sermons also reflects Johnson's belief in the validity of human experience to suggest some strategies for coping with the vacuity of human nature.

Sometimes Johnson begins his sermons by attempting to give the congregation a historical perspective on the Scriptural text. For instance, in Sermon 6, he outlines Solomon's credentials as a sage:

The writings of Solomon are filled with such observations upon the nature and life of man because they were the result of long experience assisted with every advantage of mind and fortune. An experience that had made him acquainted with the actions, passions, virtues, and vices of all ranks, ages, and denominations of mankind, and enabled him, with the Divine assistance, to leave to succeeding ages, a collection of precepts that, if diligently attended to, will conduct us safe in the paths of life (Sermon 6, 65).

Sermon 11 is based on 1 Peter 3: 8: "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous." To show the
importance of this list of Christian virtues, Johnson explains the situation in which it was given:

The apostle, directing this epistle to the new converts, scattered over the provinces of Asia, having laid before them the great advantage of the religion which they had embraced, no less than the salvation of their souls, and the high price for which they were redeemed, the precious blood of Christ, proceeds to explain to them what is required by their new profession (Sermon 11, 117).

He begins Sermon 13 with an analysis of the ambiguous text: "Having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (2 Tim. 3: 5):

When St. Paul, in the precepts given to Timothy for his instruction how to regulate and purify the conversation of the first Christians, directed him to take care that those men should be avoided, as dangerous and pestilent, who, having the form of godliness, denied the power; it is reasonable to believe, that he meant, in his direct and immediate intention, to awaken his caution against gross hypocrites; such as may easily be supposed to have appeared too often in the most early seminaries of Christianity; who made an appearance of righteousness subservient to worldly interest; and whose conversion, real or pretended, gave them an opportunity of preying upon artless simplicity, by claiming that kindness which the first believers showed to one another; and obtaining benefactions which they did not want, and eating bread for which they did not labour (Sermon 13, 137).

Johnson feels the text should be placed in its original context because he chooses to interpret Paul's warning as applying to a different type of hypocrite--more prevalent
in Johnson's day than gross pretenders to Christianity—namely, the man who obeys the external religious forms but who is internally unclean. Johnson apparently feels that the new application is justified by the changes which history has worked on the size and status of the church; as a respecter of tradition and history, he must explain that his application is new.

These few instances of Scriptural commentary, however, are contrary to Johnson's usual Sermon introductions, which, as we have seen, serve several rhetorical purposes: (1) they capture the auditor's attention more effectively through their universal concerns and general application than would an outline of the sermon's contents; (2) they ease the secular mind into a serious consideration of the relevance of religion's answers to human questions—an approach the modern theologian Paul Tillich describes as "the method of correlation"; (3) they emphasize Johnson's religious pragmatism by first examining human experience—thereby delaying the traditional appeal to religious revelation—to find consolations for the vacuity of life.

Moreover, these methods of bending the traditionally rigid outline form of the sermon reflect Johnson's concern for propriety; that is, the sermon's subject matter ought to address the particular concerns of the audience in
order for the sermon to be a successful persuasive device. Johnson also reflects this pragmatism in his layman's approach to Biblical quotations. He does not choose a text for interesting syntactical problems or alternate translations, as several of the scholar-clergy had done. Nor does he buttress his arguments with excessive and eclectic quotations, like the Latitudinarians. Moreover, he does not attempt to awe his congregation with his knowledge of esoteric vocabulary. On rare occasions Johnson goes into what may be called Scriptural exegesis, which for him consists of an attempt to resolve possible ambiguity in the literal meaning of the quotation. In Sermon 11, which considers the Scriptural text, "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion, one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous" (I Peter 3: 8), Johnson explains:

The word which is rendered having compassion, seems to include a greater latitude of signification, than the word compassion commonly obtains. Compassion is not used, but in the sense of tender regard to the unhappiness of another. But the term used by Saint Peter may

29 William Laud, for instance, writes a sermon [A Sermon Preached before his Majestie at Wansted (London: n.p., 1621)] examining all possible syntactic relationships in the text: "Pray ye for the peace of Jerusalem: May they prosper who love thee! / Peace be within thy ramparts, Prosperity within thy palaces!" (Psalm 121: 6-7). Laud comments, "I have now done with Rogate pacem, pray for peace, but that Jerusalem is come again in my way. But it is a strange Jerusalem" (23).
mean mutually feeling for each other, receiving the same impressions from the same things, and this sense seems to be given it by one of the translators [Castalio] (Sermon 11, 119).

Later in the same sermon, Johnson gives two alternative translations, but since no choice is necessary in terms of his discussion, he carries the exegesis no further:

In pursuance of his injunctions to be of one mind, and to sympathize one with another, he directs them, to love as brethren, or to be lovers of the brethren [Hammond] (Sermon 11, 121-122).

Similarly, in Sermon 19, Johnson comments on a possible misunderstanding of the Scriptural command—"But thou, when thou givest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth" (Mt. 6:3):

By this precept it is not to be understood, that we are forbidden to give alms in publick, or where we may be seen of men; for our Saviour has also commanded, that our "light should so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven." The meaning, therefore, of this text is not that we should forbear to give alms in the sight of men, but that we should not suffer the presence of men to act as the motive to our charity, nor regard their praise as any object to our wishes; a precept surely reasonable; for how can that act be virtuous, which depends not upon our own choice, but upon that of others, and which we should not have performed, if we had not expected that they would have applauded it? (Sermon 19, 210).
Johnson thus aptly states the practical effect of the Biblical text by demonstrating its insight into human motivation.

Johnson usually writes from a text which is perfectly clear on its literal level. For him, a quotation is merely a springboard for a discussion of a particular dilemma drawn from human experience. Indeed, Johnson's use of Scriptural revelation in his *Sermons* suggests that it possessed a status of theory rather than of empirical truth—a theory, which like any other, had always to be put to the test of human experience. As a record of religious revelation, Scripture is historical; Johnson's *Sermons* suggest that revelation is not its own sufficient judge and that to scrutinize it with the aid of pragmatic human experience does not invalidate that revelation. For example, his Scriptural texts are those which the average churchgoer already knew; yet, he proposes to look at their concrete implications for daily life more carefully than his listeners would have had the inclination to do before. In *Sermon 15*, his text is "Man that is born of woman, is of few days, and full of trouble" (Job 14: 1). He divides the sermon into two parts, one a consideration of the shortness of life, the other, of its miseries:

But since the mind is always of itself shrinking from disagreeable images, it is sometimes necessary to recall them; and it may contribute
to the repression of many unreasonable desires, and the prevention of many faults and follies, if we frequently, and attentively consider, First, that "man born of a woman is of few days." And, Secondly, "that man born of a woman is full of trouble" (Sermon 15, 160-161).

In this case, Johnson grounds the Biblical quotation directly in the general experience of his auditors.

In its use of quotations, Sermon 1 is unique among Johnson's Sermons; yet, its technique is also highly characteristic of Johnson's attitude towards the sermon form. The general topic of this sermon is the nature and obligations of marriage, and the Scriptural text is "Therefore shall a man leave his father, and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife" (Genesis 2: 24). He chooses one of the most familiar descriptions of marriage in the Bible; its literal meaning leaves little doubt or ambiguity. Yet, the text does not shape the sermon itself. To describe the nature of matrimony, Johnson compares it to friendship. The comparison is in the form of a series of adages about friendship; Johnson simply applies these dicta to marriage as well.

In a sense, Johnson is following the Latitudinarian practice of buttressing his arguments with quotations from the ancients, but there is an important difference in the
way Johnson uses quotations. Although "He that hath friends, has no friend" has a Greek origin, and "Friendship amongst equals is the most lasting" was first written in Latin, Johnson places the emphasis on the simple folk-wisdom underlying the precepts:

> It has long been observed that friendship is to be confined to one; or that, to use the words of the axiom, "He that hath friends, has no friend" ... It is remarked, that "Friendship amongst equals is the most lasting" (Sermon 1, 9-10).

This technique is unusual for Johnson because he rarely uses so many quotations in a single sermon. However, he finds in these adages words that square with human experience; they have an almost axiomatic status. Johnson buttresses his argument, not with his usual appeal to authority, but with an appeal to common sense, which is perhaps the strongest support of all.

Sometimes, he repeats the text, or parts of it, in order to impose unity on the sermon. For example, Sermon 7, is based on this Biblical text:

---

30 For the reader, the original quotations are available in footnotes; for the listener, the impression is created that Johnson is dealing in the same intellectual currency and experience to which the congregation has access. Strict friendship "is to have the same desires and the same aversions," Johnson observes; the explanation is in a footnote, "An observation of Catiline in Sallust" (Sermon 1, 11).
Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein (Jer. 6:16) (Sermon 7, 75).

Halfway through the sermon, when he describes modern intellectuals, Johnson again manifests his religious pragmatism in his blending of Biblical revelation with human experience:

They seem, even when considered with the utmost candour, to have rather consulted their own imaginations, than to have asked for the old paths, where is the good way (Sermon 7, 81-82).

The Scriptural text which introduces Sermon 3 is taken from Proverbs 28: 14—"Happy is the man that feareth always: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief" (Sermon 3, 29). At the end of this sermon, as in almost half of his sermon compositions, Johnson uses a deliberate blending of Biblical wisdom and common sense in order to encourage responsible moral conduct:

Let us all, therefore, watch our thoughts and actions; and that we may not, by hardness of heart fall into mischief, let us endeavour and pray, that we may be among them that feared always, and by that fear may be prepared for everlasting happiness (Sermon 3, 38).

Johnson, then, uses Biblical quotations sparingly. His usual technique consists in the incorporation of the Scriptural text into the delayed outline of his sermon and
almost invariably a repetition of the same text blended into his hortatory conclusion. Johnson's Sermon 1 is atypical because he incorporates five new quotations in his comparison between friendship and marriage. However, the number of quotations involved even in Sermon 1 does not alter Johnson's approach. He is a layman interested in demonstrating the value of common human experience for easing the problems of life; he never uses the sermon genre to debate fine points of theology. His restrained use of Biblical quotations, then, is another facet of his layman's approach to religion. The ordained clergy of the day, both Established and Non-Conformist, had a strong interest in debating fine points of theology from the pulpit and made generous use of Scripture to support their contentions. Johnson, however, followed neither example.

So far we have examined several of the rhetorical devices in Johnson's Sermons which reflect his Rambler style: a general introduction to the Sermon's subject-matter grounded in human experience; secular diction, parallelism, and the disciplined use of figurative devices; the delayed and in a sense "buried" outline; and the restrained use of easily comprehended Biblical quotations. These characteristics of Johnson's Sermons are variations from the formal sermon tradition; each variation accentuates the value Johnson places on concrete
experience in dealing with the vacuity of life. Johnson's belief that common sense and actual experience provide man with the best test for the validity of any postulate of religion finds expression in his **Sermons** no less than in his other writings. He does not seek to persuade his auditors by saying, in effect, "The Bible tells me so." He relies rather on the vacuity of human experience to produce concurrence and commitment to the antidotes suggested by religion.

Johnson's morally pragmatic attitude towards religion is also demonstrated by his sensitivity to the immediate occasion for the **Sermon**. As we saw in Chapter One, Johnson used the particular character of the audience or the peculiar situation for which he was writing the sermon in order to suggest morally appropriate modifications of human behavior. Johnson never confines himself to the traditional homiletic practice of offering consolation only through generalized and abstracted appeals to religious revelation. For example, **Sermon 23**, was preached on January 30, the anniversary of Charles I's execution. It is a pragmatic moral **exemplum** which denounces disobedience and wilful rebellion:

Of the strife, which this day brings back to our remembrance, we may observe, that it had all the tokens of "strife" proceeding from "envy." The rage of the faction, which invaded the rights of the church and monarchy, was disproportionate to
the provocation received. The violence with which hostility was prosecuted, was more than the cause, that was publicly avowed, could incite or justify (Sermon 23, 246).

Whatever one's opinion may be of the political views in the passage, Johnson is clearly shaping this sermon to the circumstances surrounding its delivery. At the same time, the Sermon demonstrates Johnson's preference for pragmatic moral principles; it is an embodiment of the universal moral standards of personal honesty and respect for others that have a relevance and truth independent of time.

In Sermon 19, on charity, Johnson refers specifically to the occasion of the sermon, namely, the founding of an orphanage dependent on public donations. He relates the abstract concept of the religious duty of exercising charity toward those in need to this specific occasion, referring to "the reasonableness of laying hold on the present opportunity for the exercise of our charity" (Sermon 19, 212). The mere exhortation to practice charity is insufficient; it must be translated into an actual charitable deed.

31 Johnson is following a tradition, which dated back to January 25, 1661, when Parliament ordered the thirtieth of January to be kept as a day of penance and humiliation; moreover, it ordered that a sermon be composed in praise of the martyred Charles I.
Sermon 25, which he writes for his wife's funeral, includes a highly individualized list of virtues for which the departed should be emulated:

Yet, let it be remembered, that her wit was never employed to scoff at goodness, nor her reason to dispute against truth. In this age of wild opinions, she was as free from skepticism as the cloistered virgin. She never wished to signalize herself by the singularity of paradox. She had a just diffidence of her own reason, and desired to practice rather than to dispute. Her practice was such as her opinions naturally produced. . . . That she had no failings, cannot be supposed: but she has now appeared before the Almighty Judge; and it would ill become beings like us, weak and sinful as herself, to remember those faults which, we trust, Eternal Purity has pardoned (Sermon 25, 269).

A litany of virtues was a traditional homiletic device for personalizing the funeral sermon. Johnson is deeply touched by the death of his wife; yet, he is also greatly concerned with adapting a painful personal experience so that it will be spiritually enriching for the congregation. Johnson's funeral sermon is effective because it is personal and concrete in its treatment of mourning; Johnson draws from his personal experience of loss to suggest some general strategies for coping with the death of a loved one.

Johnson's funeral sermon emphasizes the survivor's proper response to death. Drawing from his own experience the realization that sorrow is a necessary result of the
loss of a loved one, he attempts to sublimate the sorrow and to channel it into two specific religious expressions. The first is perpetuation of the memory of the departed through the emulation of her virtues:

> Let us therefore preserve her memory for no other end but to imitate her virtues; and let us add her example to the motives to piety which this solemnity was, secondly, instituted to enforce (Sermon 25, 269-270).

The second method of religious instruction is to encourage virtuous action based on the realization of impending judgment which the recent death has aroused in the living:

> Let it, therefore, be our care, when we retire from this solemnity, that we immediately turn from our wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right; that, whenever disease, or violence, shall dissolve our bodies, our souls may be saved alive, and received into everlasting habitations (Sermon 25, 271).

The mourner can solace himself with the belief that sorrow in the face of death is not merely a natural emotional response to the experience of loss, but also an instruction and warning to the mourner regarding his personal conduct during this earthly pilgrimage.

In Sermon 18 Johnson addresses himself to a particular type of fraud which he feels is a product of eighteenth-century circumstances and attitudes rather than an abuse common to all societies and ages. The particular
"society" referred to in the sermon probably consisted of those who administered the local benefit fund for the almshouses and charities of Ashbourne; the officers of the fund had invited John Taylor to preach to them:32

For the particular application of this doctrine, I am sorry, that my native place should afford an opportunity. But since this society has called me to stand here before them, I hope no man will be offended, that I do my duty with fidelity and freedom. Truth requires, that I warn you against a species of fraud, sometimes found amongst you, and that of a very shameful and oppressive kind (Sermon 18, 199).

He refers to the particular offense of depriving a contributor from the benefits of a common fund when he is in need. It is another example of Johnson using a particular experience as a means of religious instruction and warning; once again, he fits the sermon to the occasion, or in this case, to the culture.

Johnson's real masterpiece of adapting the sermon to a unique situation is The Convict's Address to His Unhappy Brethren. This sermon (Sermon 28) was written for the Reverend William Dodd and preached by him to his fellow prisoners shortly before his execution. Johnson actually takes advantage of the circumstances surrounding the

32 See, Jean H. Hagstrum and James Gray, eds., Samuel Johnson, Sermons, 199, note 3.
sermon and capitalizes on the convict-mentality of the congregation.

He begins with a fast-moving account of an incipient prison break by Paul and Silas. The prisoners are lured into the sermon by the excitement of the story and the relevance of the occasion to their own situation. Johnson here engages in a rare bit of theatricality; he exploits the drama of the situation which is known by all—the plight of the prisoners and the preacher's imminent fate. Both the occupants of pulpit and pew respond from their need to the jailer's question to Paul and Silas: "What must I do to be saved?" Johnson makes the sermon pertinent by answering the question in terms of the prisoners' situation. He stresses the urgency of the convicts' state and eliminates unnecessary theological hair-splitting: "Of the efficacy of a death-bed repentance many have disputed; but we have no leisure for controversy" (Sermon 28, 308). A few pages later he states, "But there is no time for disquisition; we must try to find the shortest way to peace" (Sermon 28, 309). Johnson's style also reflects the urgency of the situation for the prisoners—the sentences are shorter and simpler than those in all of his other sermons. Therefore, Johnson once again takes artistic advantage of the peculiar nature of the congregation and grounds his appeal
for obedience and repentance in the practical experience of the prisoners.

A test for the consolations offered by religious revelation against the reality of practical experience in Johnson's *Sermons* is noticeable in terms of another of the "standards" for a good sermon for which he praised Blair. Blair directed his sermons to man's reason; he exercised restraint and discipline in appealing to the emotions. Johnson's incipient emotional involvement in his *Sermons* is evident in his departures from his usual style of careful balance and parallelism. This is not to suggest that every "typical" sentence Johnson writes is packed with parallelism and balance—many are not. Nor am I suggesting that all sentences in the *Sermons* which are not based on parallelism and balance betray an emotional involvement. However, these limited "departures" demonstrate Johnson's belief that restraint in emotional appeal contributes towards producing the desired didactic end of the sermon.

For example, his disciplined use of repetition heightens the sense of his personal involvement in what he is expressing. In *Sermon 15*, the meditation on Job leads him to observe:

Many things which are not pleasant may be salutary; and among them is the just estimate of human life, which may be made by all with
advantage, though by few, very few, with delight (Sermon 15, 160).

"Very few" is an apparent spontaneous intrusion--though, of course, it was planned--and interrupts the parallelism of "by all with advantage" / "by few . . . with delight."

In Sermon 6, commenting on intellectual pride, he states:

But were our knowledge far greater than it is, let us yet remember that goodness, not knowledge, is the happiness of man! The day will come, it will come quickly, when it shall profit us more to have subdued proud thought, than to have numbered the host of heaven (Sermon 6, 71-72).

The clause "it will come quickly" is an unusual note in the Johnsonian cadence. Again, it gives the impression of an intrusion; it could easily have been incorporated to read, "The day will quickly come," which would place the emphasis on the parallelism at the end of the sentence. Moreover, it is a repetition of "will come" and Johnson seldom uses repetition when he can substitute parallelism.

Similar repetition occurs in Sermon 13:

To give the heart to God, and to give the whole heart, is very difficult; the last, the great effort of long labour, fervent prayer, and diligent meditation (Sermon 13, 143).

"To give the whole heart" adds only one new word to the previous phrase. It is a re-thinking of the first phrase, in a sense a correction of it, whereas Johnson's
corrections are usually worked out before the final written expression of the thought. The second half of the sentence is in Johnson's usual style, with no repetition and three parallel terms of two elements each. All these minor breaks from Johnson's accustomed style suggest his sensitivity to and accommodations of the oral dimension of the sermon genre.

The most dramatic departure in Johnson's Sermons from his usual emphasis on the role of human experience as a valid judge of the consolations suggested by religious revelation can be seen in all their conclusions. The Sermon conclusions consistently reflect the status of unassailable truth that revelation possessed for the religiously orthodox. Indeed, Paul Alkon, in Samuel Johnson and Moral Discipline, observes that "as they are more directly didactic and religious, [Johnson's Sermons] are artistically less effective than the rest of his work" (191). Alkon's critical observation is more relevant to the conclusions of Johnson's Sermons than to other sections of the works. The conclusions rely heavily on the traditional and highly formalized patterns of diction which characterized the homiletic element of the sermon tradition--the diction is highly liturgical and often paraphrases Biblical forms of address. As a practical churchman, Johnson really has no choice. He uses his
Sermons' conclusions to summarize, to impose a logical structure, to reinforce the outline, to remind the reader of the Scriptural text, and to end things with a liturgical flourish.

An important rhetorical quality distinguishes the conclusions of Johnson's Sermons from the endings of his moral essays--restrained emotional involvement with the subject matter. Johnson uses the formalized exhortation "Let us" rather than the intimate "I" or "you". For example, in Sermon 19 he begins his final sentence with the first person, but ends with a generalized Biblical quotation:

Let us endeavour to reclaim vice, and to improve innocence to holiness; and remember that the day is not far distant, in which our Saviour has promised to consider our gifts to these little ones as given to himself; and that "they who have turned many to righteousness shall shine forth as the sun for ever and ever" (Sermon 19, 213).

In such passages Johnson seems to be overlooking the thoughtful general principles rooted in human experience, which are embodied in his beginning paragraphs, for the sake of repeating the Scriptural text.

On some occasions, Johnson concludes his Sermons with a liturgical formula:

An uniform perseverance in these holy practices, will produce a steady confidence in the Divine
favour, and that confidence will complete his happiness. To which that we may all attain, God of his infinite mercy grant, for the merits of Jesus Christ, our Saviour; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour, adoration, and praise, now and ever! Amen. (Sermon 7, 84).

After examining Johnson's imaginative adaptation of so many elements from the English sermon tradition, this unoriginal use of formula in several of his Sermon conclusions is striking. When writing for the "pulpit of orthodoxy," Johnson always concludes his Sermons by bowing to the conventions of tradition--to the absolute finality of the criteria of religion for addressing the vacuity of human existence.

Johnson's Sermons demonstrate that he refuses to accept Scripture blindly, nor does he expect his auditors to do so; however, when he tests revelation against life, he finds the two in agreement. Our examination of Johnson's Sermons has revealed some important deviations from those characteristics which he found so praiseworthy in the sermons of Blair and other representatives of the English sermon tradition--variations which point to his pragmatism and to his layman's approach to religion. These modifications of the tradition include a general 

33 Additional examples of Johnson's use of liturgical formula to conclude his Sermons can be found in Sermon 6, 73; Sermon 9, 105; Sermon 25, 271; Sermon 27, 299; Sermon 28, 313.
introduction to the Sermons' subject-matter grounded in human experience; secular diction, parallelism, and the disciplined use of figurative devices; the delayed and in a sense "buried" outline; and the restrained use of easily comprehended Biblical quotations. These techniques accentuate the role of experience as a reliable test for any proposed consolation for the vacuity of life; indeed, even Scriptural revelation is not exempt from that critical scrutiny. While Johnson's Sermons formally acknowledge that Scriptural revelation provides man with such consolations, he always bases his argument on the firm foundation of human experience. Johnson's strongest impulse was always to be honest with himself and with his audience; he rejected what he considered to be oversimplification. Johnson's Sermons testify to the serious perspective which a layman, engaged in the concrete struggles of daily life, can bring to bear on religion.
Johnson described himself in his Rambler essays as "a writer whose chief end is the regulation of common life" (Rambler 11, 57) and who has undertaken "the arduous province of preserving the balance of the mental constitution" (Rambler 47, 253). In doing so, he wanted to clarify some fundamental principles of human nature. Johnson preferred neither the penchant of some rationalists for deduction from a priori configurations nor the obsession of some pedants with adventitious particulars. He had instead an affinity for inductive generalization based upon observation and reason; with this orientation, he analyzed the conduct of mankind to discover, by drawing inferences from life as it is lived, the basic and unchanging operational principles of human beings. Throughout his Sermons, Johnson demonstrated his understanding that the pragmatic bases for action together with realistic possibilities of accomplishment needed first to be understood before a sermonist could effectively motivate men to virtuous action and an improved life.
Within the vast array of human trials presented in the *Sermons*, Johnson found confirmation for his basic view that the human tragedy lay in the insufficiency of things which are limited and ephemeral to a hunger that is limitless and infinite. In classical Christian theology, this insatiable hunger for wealth, power, fame, or sexual gratification within the nature of man is called concupiscence. This orthodox theme of the contradiction between human desire and human fulfillment, of concupiscence, gives a basic coherence to the seemingly unrelated subjects treated in the *Sermons*. Moreover, the *Sermons* demonstrate that Johnson's understanding of human nature anticipated many of the discoveries of modern psychology, especially in the areas of repression, projection, fantasy, delusion, and motivation. As we have seen, Walter Jackson Bate argued convincingly that Johnson anticipated Freud's theory of repression--the process by which man attempts to escape from his anxieties and fears by pushing them into the recesses of his unconscious mind (*Achievement*, 93-94). The forces that Freud described were mainly sexual, whereas those that concerned Johnson were broader. Today, we could call Johnson's focus "existential" because it centers on the problems man encounters as he tries to grasp the meaning of life. By recognizing the existence of such fears in the human
psyche and by analyzing how such forces shaped human character and destiny, Johnson demonstrated "the pain of being a man" in a compassionate effort to bring ultimate help and comfort, rather than to reflect bitterly and cynically on life.

Indeed, Johnson's Sermons answer the question of how man is to be "consoled for the misery of life" in a conventionally religious manner--faith in the possibility of eternal salvation. The Sermons, however, always frame this conventional religious answer within a pragmatic and secular understanding of the nature of man. Through rational control and common sense, through mature and realistic perceptions about the self and about relationships to others, by extending the benefit of one's experience to others according to the rule of social benevolence, Johnson tells the auditors of his Sermons how they may pragmatically alleviate the miseries and problems of this life without simply appealing to salvation in the next life.

Johnson's Sermons reflect the insistent concerns of many eighteenth century divines with ethical conduct based on rewards and punishments, with the free agency of man, and with demonstrating that the revelation of Scripture and the demands of human reason were compatible. However, the variations in Johnson's Sermons from many of the
"standards" for an effective sermon which he singled out for praise in other sermonists--limiting the subject matter, sensitivity to the audience, disciplined and restrained use of emotional appeal, gesture and intonation; the stylistic characteristics of parallelism, controlled use of repetition and figurative devices, sensitivity to a choice of diction which stresses universal concepts over particular ones, and attentiveness to formal structuring techniques within the sermon tradition--suggest his predilection to test the truth of religious revelation against the reality of experience and common sense.

We have demonstrated that Johnson's deviations from traditional English sermon style included a secular introduction to the Sermons' subject-matter grounded in human experience; secular diction, parallelism, and the disciplined use of figurative devices; the delayed and in a sense "buried" outline; and the restrained use of Biblical quotations. These techniques accentuate Johnson's belief that human experience in itself is a reliable test for the consolations proposed by religion for life's vacuity; indeed, not even Scriptural revelation ought to be exempt from the critical scrutiny of pragmatic experience. Even when self-consciously assuming the voice of "sermon orthodoxy," Johnson could not completely
anesthetize his propensity towards skepticism. His Sermons testify to the extreme depth and profundity of a faith examined and forged from his understanding of the nature of man.

Furthermore, in some significant ways, Johnson's observations on the nature of man place him outside the prevailing Christian moral philosophies of the eighteenth century. Johnson depicts the mind not as a hierarchy of conflicting faculties but as an integrated complex; rather than advising the sublimation of the imagination and desire, he advocates their integration with reason. Moreover, the answer to ethical and psychological problems is given in the Sermons both in the traditional religious terms of Christian purpose and in secular, "psychological," terms of a realistic perception about the self and one's relationships to others.

Specifically, Johnson calls for the pragmatic exercise of charity to alleviate, at least partially, the experience of vacuity in this life. Throughout his Sermons, Johnson admonishes his auditors to be prepared to aid others; and if they cannot help their fellow men in a material way, they can at least extend to them their sympathy and try to console them in their moment of suffering:
The power of godliness, as it is exerted in the love of our neighbor, appears in the exact and punctual discharge of all the relative and social duties. He, whom this power actuates and directs, will regulate his conduct, so as neither to do injury, nor willingly to give offence. He will neither be a tyrannical governour, nor a seditious subject; neither a cruel parent, nor a disobedient son; neither an oppressive master, nor an eye-servant. But he will not stop at negative goodness, nor rest in the mere forbearance of evil; he will search out occasions of beneficence, and extend his care to those who have no other claim to his attention than the great community of relation to the universal Father of mankind. . . . One instance of the power of godliness is readiness to help the weak, and comfort the fallen, to look with compassion upon the frail, to rekindle those whose ardour is cooling, and to recall those who, by inadvertency, or under the influence of strong temptation, have wandered from the right way; and to favour all them who mean well, and wish to be better, though their meaning and their wishes have not yet fully reformed their lives (Sermon 13, 145-147).

One of the major themes in the Sermons which we have examined is that of earthly life as a testing period for men. Johnson believed in a system of rewards and punishments after death which would be meted out in accordance with the way a man has spent his life. Thus, in the exercise of charity, men make themselves eligible for everlasting rewards.

However, as an observer of mankind, Johnson knew that men are seldom motivated to goodness by the distant prospect of bliss, though that bliss is final and permanent. Men do good principally in order to relieve an
immediate ill and in the Sermons we see charity working in just such a way. Man gives his gift in order to escape the pain of vacuity and he helps another so that he might think well of himself. Johnson's Sermons demonstrate his transformation of the conventional ascetic ideal of Christianity into the pragmatic and secular concern with self-interest as the real motivator in human nature for right conduct. The Sermons do not rule out love of virtue for its own sake as a desirable goal, but they make it clear that they are not addressed primarily to those who already love virtue for its own sake. They are designed instead for those who are struggling to progress in the practice of virtue and need to have their self-interest enlisted on the side of virtue. The Sermons remind us that Johnson considered enlightened self-interest a very different matter from selfishness and a perfectly legitimate foundation for moral action.

Johnson's concept of what defines evil also reflects the complex interrelationship between the religious and the secular aspects of his definition of--and exhortations to--right conduct. The Sermons demonstrate an understanding of immorality as a process rather than as a static concept. If evil is seen as something inherent in a person or institution, then it would be within the province of the sermon writer to attack those elements.
However, Johnson does not focus on a static concept of evil; this would create a tone and attitude that could produce resentment and so would be counter-productive to the moral purpose of the Sermons. Johnson focuses instead on the processes by which evil may be produced; he depicts the consequences of these processes more by the amount and kind of harm done to other people and less by the failure to adhere to God's commandments:

they, who have looked with indifference upon the calamities of others, who have scoffed at the mourner, and insulted the captive; who have diverted the uneasiness of sympathy by vicious enjoyments, and suffered others to languish in pain or poverty, for want of that relief, which would cost only a momentary pleasure, shall be condemned to an everlasting society, with those beings, whose depravity incites them to rejoice at the destruction of mankind. And those who have, in obedience to the institutions and in conformity to the example of their Saviour, endeavoured to alleviate calamities and to remove distress; those by whose bounty the gloom of prisons has been cheered, and by whose tenderness, the languor of sickness has been solaced; those by whom oppressive power has been disarmed, and helpless innocence been defended, shall be exalted to perpetual and unchangeable felicity, and stand for ever in the presence of God, employed in the contemplation and praise of infinite benevolence (Sermon 27, 292).

While Johnson describes solace for evil in the conventional terms of hope for happiness in an afterlife, he also emphasizes the pragmatic dimensions of virtuous conduct and the solace religion offers for the vacuous experiences of this life.
Johnson is in the forefront of those self-conscious thinkers who reacted to Cartesian dualism by emphasizing the processes of the mind. He does not think in terms of the static concepts of mind against body, or in hierarchies of order, but is aware of man's struggle to integrate the passions, desires, imagination, and reason. We noted earlier William Temple's rejection of the "Cartesian faux-pas." Johnson also refused to accept this artificial separation of man from his world, of the human mind from external matter. With his typical common sense, Johnson simply bypassed Descartes and observed that man's mind, when healthy, engages the external world in a vibrant relationship. Furthermore, Johnson does not attack man for his failure to attain the Christian ideal. Man is attacked for affectations of importance, for unrealistic perceptions, for vanity, for compulsiveness. Johnson observes man as a fragmented being because man's focus is often limited solely to earthly goals and to this world as a place of flux and instability. Religion provides man with the means of overcoming the chaos of this life in two concrete ways: (1) it suggests those pragmatic behaviors which ameliorate the experience of life's vacuity, and (2) it urges man to attend to the transcendent goal of salvation.
Johnson makes clear in his *Sermons* that the only rational way to endure the radical misery of life is by placing trust in the truth of revelation:

> We know, therefore, that those whom he shall protect cannot be in danger; that neither the malice of wicked men, nor of wicked angels, can really injure them, but that persecution and danger shall only harass them for a time, and death set them free from disappointment and from pain. He therefore that trusts in God will no longer be distracted in his search after happiness, for he will find it in a firm belief, that whatever evils are suffered to befall him will finally contribute to his felicity; and that by "staying his mind upon the Lord, he will be kept in peace" (*Sermon 14*, 155).

His response is the traditional, familiar, and conventional Christian reply to the problem of life's vacuity. Johnson believed in it; yet, he also knew how inadequate it was. He knew that it could not solve the misery of life; it could only offer consolation—only assuage temporarily the anguish of existence. This realization deeply disturbed Johnson because of what it meant about the nature of life itself as well as the notion of a divinely ordered universe. Nevertheless, his response to these fears was to seek consolation in the authority of the established system of religion. Yet, Johnson's *Sermons* reveal his struggle to assert an unqualified and unquestioned acceptance of that authority; the locus of this tension suggests his almost "existential"
understanding of the inter-relationship of religion and the nature of man.

In presenting religion as a necessary adjunct to man's psychological faculties, Johnson is not arguing for an escapist, subjective substitute for facing the problems of life; rather he sees religion—the Christian faith personally applied—as a pragmatic, resolute, rational, and objective way of mastering oneself. The "stability of truth" and the "choice of eternity" he believes to be solutions to miseries created by all human choices made without direction or sound basis.

Johnson, believing that "the business of life is to go forwards" (Idler 72, 225), is not engaged in breast beating or in gestures of despair; he demonstrates in his Sermons that most of the difficulties and unhappiness of life are both personal and spiritual, and that through a right understanding of one's needs and through actions of responsible choice, many of these difficulties can be ameliorated. In opposition to the Stoics, he teaches that man's humanity cannot be escaped—desire and imagination must and will continue to exist and influence us; and in opposition to the Determinists, he argues that these faculties are subject to control and direction, and that man can choose his goals, his objects of desire and pursuit, and his hopes.
In his Sermons, Johnson's presentation of the dissatisfaction involved in the attainment of worldly goals is not intended to promote either despair or stoic resignation. Its true design is, in addition to teaching a truth about human nature, to promote reflection on the validity of religion's ability to alleviate the vacuity of life. The presentation of earthly distress and frustration is vivid and extensive in the Sermons; it functions as a comment on what Johnson believed to be the stubbornness of man's heart--his unwillingness to change his life or give up his illusions. "Since life itself is uncertain, nothing which has life for its basis, can boast of much stability" (Rambler 184, 204); therefore, in his Sermons, Johnson promotes a doctrine of stability which was objectivity based upon experience, reason, and common sense, informing and empowering Christian religion. With his intense interest in practicality and action, he sees this stability as applicable to and effective in our current lives--giving direction to our pursuits, hope of reward for our endeavors, and power or stimulation for our actions for good.

Johnson uses the Sermons, then, to make a strong case for the pragmatic applications of religion. Indeed, the religion he advocates throughout the Sermons works most effectively in the layman's world filled with vacuous
secular preoccupations. That man increases his chances for reward after this life by living according to the precepts of religion is a bonus. The *Sermons* are not just a guide to Heaven, but a portrait of the limitations of man's nature; Johnson counsels us to adopt the counsels of religion in order to alleviate the vacuity of life as best we can.


Bond, Donald F. "'Distrust' of Imagination in English Neoclassicism." *Philological Quarterly,* XIV (1935), 54-69.


Hagstrum, Jean H. "The Nature of Dr. Johnson's Rationalism." _English Literary History_, 17 (1950), 191-205.


Kenney, William. "Dr. Johnson and the Psychiatrists." *American Imago*, 17 (Spring 1960), 75-82.


Siebenschuh, William R. "On the Locus of Faith in Johnson's Sermons." *Studies in Burke and His Time*, 17 (Spring 1976), Number 2, 103-117.


APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Thomas George Kass, C.S.V. has been read and approved by the following committee:

Dr. Thomas Kaminski, Director
Associate Professor, English Department, Loyola

Dr. Douglas White
Professor, English Department, Loyola

Dr. David Loewenstein
Assistant Professor, English Department, Loyola

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

11/17/88
Date

[Signature]  
Director's Signature