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Thomas Crawford

**Enlightenment, Metaphysics and Religion
in the Boswell-Temple Correspondence**



William Johnson Temple was ten months older than Boswell. They met at Edinburgh University in 1755 when he was sixteen and Boswell fifteen, in Professor Robert Hunter's Greek class. Temple was not a Scot but an Englishman, from the most northerly part of Northumbria, then known as "North Durham." His father was a customs officer who later became Collector for Berwick-upon-Tweed and was twice Mayor of the town. All his family connections (and indeed his wife's) were with the little in-group of merchants and tradespeople who ran the borough. He only remained in Edinburgh for three years, then moved to Cambridge (to Trinity Hall), and to the Inner Temple in London, with a view to training for the English bar. He had chambers in Farrar's Buildings in the Temple, which he lent to Boswell for a time in 1763, the year of the famous London Journal. It is quite clear that Temple did not have the temperament for the bar, but it was his father's financial difficulties that clinched the matter. The Collector, Temple senior, became bankrupt towards the end of 1762, and by 1764 it seemed the Church would be both safer and more congenial than the Law. After the usual perfunctory ordination proceedings, Temple became Rector of Mamhead near Exeter in Devon in 1766, and Vicar of St. Gluvias at Penryn in Cornwall some eleven years later. In spite of early ambitions for a bishopric, his career in the Church was quite undistinguished. In some ways he resembled Mr. Casaubon in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* in that he had a consuming ambition to write a great

work of scholarship but lacked what the eighteenth century called the necessary "powers". In one respect, however, he was notably different from Casaubon, or from what George Eliot lets us infer about Casaubon: he was nothing if not sexually potent. He and Mrs. Temple had eleven children, of whom three died young; there were also a number of miscarriages. There was nothing the matter, either, with Temple's genes—or should one say, with his genes combined with his wife's: one son ended up as an Admiral, another as Lieutenant-Governor of Sierra Leone; and he was the direct ancestor of no less than *two* archbishops of Canterbury—Frederick in the late nineteenth century, and William in the mid-twentieth. Unlike Casaubon, too, William *did* achieve publication, with Boswell's help: Boswell smoothed his path with the bookseller Dilly, and he brought out *An Essay on the Clergy* in 1774 and *Moral and Historical Memoirs* in 1779. They are miserable performances, without any kind of elegance or intellectual distinction. (The *DNB* characterizes Temple as "essayist"—he does manage to achieve an entry there—but I doubt whether anybody other than a Boswell specialist has read these works since the early nineteenth century.)

Apart from those three student years at Edinburgh and a few months in London in 1763, Boswell and Temple were seldom together for more than a few days at a time. Their companionship as students obviously meant a great deal to them both, and an imaginative psycho-biographer might even be tempted to suspect some sublimated homosexuality on Temple's side, from his tender expressions of emotional deprivation when separated from the beloved. There are over 460 letters and other items, extending from 1757 to 1795, the year of Boswell's death. Many letters have not been recovered, and probably never will—I would guess at an additional 200 or so. It is the longest single correspondence in the entire Boswell archive, a fascinating record of a friendship conducted mainly by the pen, at a distance generally of several hundred miles, and over their whole adult lives.¹

The existence of the correspondence has long been known to the literary world, and its publication history is not without its amusing side. Ninety-seven of Boswell's letters to Temple were found among waste paper around 1840 in Boulogne, and published in 1857, edited by the barrister Philip (later Sir Philip) Francis. They were re-edited by Thomas Seacombe in 1907, and a third time by C.B. Tinker in 1924, for his *Letters of James Boswell*. Among the great Boswell discoveries of the early twentieth

¹The quality of their relationship is examined in the course of my essay, "Boswell and the Rhetoric of Friendship," in *New Light on Boswell*, ed. G.J. Clingham (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

century at Malahide near Dublin and at Fettercairn House, Kincardineshire, were a further twenty-five letters from Boswell to Temple (these were either drafts, or items which Boswell had asked to be returned to him for publication in a projected volume on his European travels), and 337 letters from Temple to Boswell which had never previously been known. The correspondence has been very extensively used in the Trade Edition of the Boswell Papers. Often letters to and from Temple have been printed entire; many have been printed only in part; and many, where the interest is not primarily on the Boswell side, have not been cited at all. When the entire correspondence is examined, a shift of emphasis is inevitable, away from the great biographer's doings and towards those of Temple and his family, and its value is seen to be as a unique series of historical documents, for Devon and Cornwall as well as for Scotland, for Temple's ideas and beliefs as well as Boswell's. In the present paper I shall confine myself to the following topics as they occur in the correspondence: (1) the reactions of the two men to the European Enlightenment as a whole and to the Scottish Enlightenment in particular; (2) subjects which can be loosely grouped under the headings of metaphysics and moral philosophy; and (3) religion, including the aspect of "ecclesiastical polity."

From the very beginning, the imaginations of Boswell and Temple had been dominated by the towering figures of Voltaire and Rousseau. In the early stages of the correspondence they form an insistent and sonorous *leitmotiv*—"Voltaire! Rousseau! Immortal Names," which the young men had thundered out on Arthur's Seat, and these names keep recurring in the letters. The notion of actually visiting the two sages seems to have been originally Temple's, not Boswell's, for he wrote from Cambridge in the spring of 1759, before his father's financial difficulties became acute:

If you can get your father's consent, we may this summer be thus happy. I am going to Geneva. You may study the law there better than at Edinburgh. If your father knew this, perhaps he would rather chuse you should be there, than where you now are. . . . We would make ourselves acquainted with the history, constitution, politicks and literature of the several states of Europe. Voltaire, Rousseau, immortal names! we might enjoy the benefit of their conversation.²

²All quotations from Boswell's Journals and from Temple's letters to Boswell are from the manuscripts in the Yale Boswell archive, while those from Boswell to Temple are either from there or from the collection in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. I am grateful both to Yale University Library and the Morgan Library for permission to quote from them.

The visit never took place, and young Temple did not go off to the continent on his own. One of the key autobiographical documents in the Boswell archive is the account of himself he wrote for Rousseau which Frederick Pottle translated and prefixed to *James Boswell: the earlier years* (New York and London, 1966). Before the visit, he described Rousseau in a letter to Temple as "the amiable, mild³ philosopher," and afterwards as a "genteel man, with a fine countenance and a charming voice" (To Temple, 28 December 1764).

That last letter was written in the Château de Ferney, when Boswell was on his visit to Voltaire. Although so well known—it is printed in the Trade Edition of the Boswell Papers, *Grand Tour I*, edited by Frederick A. Pottle (New York and London, 1953)—it is worth quoting at length:

He [Voltaire] received me with dignity and that air of a man who has been much in the world which a Frenchman acquires in perfection. I saw him for about half an hour before dinner. He was not in spirits. Yet he gave me some brilliant Sallies. He did not dine with us, and I was obliged to post away immediatly [*sic*] after dinner, because the Gates of Geneva shut before five, and Ferney is a good hour from Town. I was by no means satisfyd to have been so little time with the monarch of French Literature. A happy scheme sprung up in my adventurous mind. Madame De Nis the niece of M. de Voltaire had been extremely good to me. She is fond of our language. I wrote her a letter in English begging her interest to obtain for me the Privilege of lodging a night under the roof of M. de Voltaire who in opposition to our Sun, rises in the evening. I was in the finest humour and my letter was full of wit. I told her "I am a hardy and vigorous Scot. You may mount me to the highest and coldest Garret. I shall not even refuse to sleep upon two chairs in the Bedchamber of your maid. I saw her pass thro' the room where we sat before dinner." I sent my letter on Tuesday by an Express. It was shewn to M. de Voltaire who with his own hand wrote this answer in the Character of Madam De Nis. "You will do us much honour and pleasure. We have few beds; But you will (*shall*) not sleep on two chairs. My Uncle tho' very rich hath guessed at your merit. I know it better; for, I have seen you longer." . . . I returned yesterday to this enchanted castle. The Magician appeared a very little, before dinner: But in the evening he came into the drawing room in great spirits. I placed myself by him. I touched the keys in unison with his Imagination. I wish you had heard the Music. He was all Brilliance. He gave me continued flashes of Wit. I got him to speak english [*sic*] which he does in a degree that made me now and then start up and cry upon my soul this is astonishing. When he talked our language He was animated with the Soul of a Briton. He had bold flights. He had humour. He had an extravagance, he had a forcible oddity of stile [*sic*] that the most comical of our dramatis Personae could not have exceeded. He swore bloodily as was the fashion when he was in England. He hum'd a Ballad; He repeated nonsense [*sic*]—Then he talked of our

³In the manuscript Boswell seems to have written "wild," not "mild."

Constitution with a noble enthusiasm. I was proud to hear this from the mouth of an illustrious Frenchman. At last we came upon Religion. Then did he rage. The Company went to Supper. M. de Voltaire and I remained in the drawing room with a great Bible before us; and if ever two mortal men disputed with vehemence we did. Yes—upon that occasion He was one individual and I another. For a certain portion of time there was a fair opposition between Voltaire and Boswell. The daring bursts of his Ridicule confounded my understanding: He stood like an Orator of ancient Rome. Tully was never more agitated than he was. He went too far. His aged frame trembled beneath him; He cried "O I am very sick; My head turns round" and he let himself gently fall upon an easy chair. He recovered. I resumed our Conversation, but changed the tone. I talked to him serious and earnest. I demanded of him an honest confession of his real sentiments. He gave it me with candour and with a mild eloquence which touched my heart. I did not believe [*sic*] him capable of thinking in the manner that he declared to me was "from the bottom of his heart." He expressed his veneration his love of the Supreme Being, and his entire Resignation to the will of Him who is Allwise. He expressed his desire to resemble the Author of Goodness, by being good himself. His sentiments go no farther. He does not inflame his mind with grand hopes of the immortality of the Soul. He says it may be; but, he knows nothing of it. And his mind is in perfect tranquillity. I was moved; I was sorry. I doubted his Sincerity. I called to him with emotion "Are you sincere are you really [*sic*] sincere?" He answered "Before God I am." Then with the fire of him whose Tragedies have so often shone on the Theatre of Paris, he said. "I suffer much. But I suffer with Patience and Resignation; not as a Christian—But as a Man." Temple was not this an interesting Scene? Would a Journey from Scotland to Ferney have been too much, to obtain such a remarkable Interview. I have given you the great lines. The whole Conversation of the evening is fully recorded, and I look upon it as an invaluable Treasure. One day the Publick shall have it. It is a Present highly worthy of their Attention. I told M. de Voltaire that I had written eight quarto Pages of what he had said. He smiled and seemed pleased. Our important Scene must not appear till after his death. But I have a great mind to send over to London a little Sketch of my Reception at Ferney of the splendid manner in which M. de Voltaire lives. And of the brilliant conversation of this celebrated Authour at the Age of Seventy two. The Sketch would be a letter addressed to you full of gayety and full of freindship [*sic*]. I would send it to one of the best Publick Papers or Magazines. But, this is probably a flight of my over-heated mind. I shall not send the Sketch unless you approve of my doing so.

The only Rousseau item I can bring forward from Temple's side of the correspondence comes nearly twenty years later, in a letter of 22 February 1783, when the *Confessions* were first published:

In how strange a light does Rousseau appear in his Confessions! Think of one of the greatest genius's in the world waiting at table, being guilty of the meanest [*sic*] thefts and evading the consequences by the basest lies. I think I discover marks of disingenuousness. He could never be such a bête as he

pretends about his dear *Maman* as he calls her. I am apt to think there is much fiction with regard to her. If she was to appear [*sic*] what She did, he never could have painted her in the manner he does in the beginning of their connection. She seems to have been an indelicate, hypocritical sensualist. No less than three young stallions in succession and yet R. talks of the coldness of her constitution. She could not even want a bedfellow during R. short absence but he found his place supplied! I long for the *suite* in wch we shall find him recognizing his talents and discovering his powers. As yet he has hardly read a good author or written a page.

Voltaire's name, however, is mentioned several times by Temple; he is full of admiration for his defense of the victims of persecution, such as the Calas family or the other case that followed it, that of the Sirvens.⁴

Before Temple became a clergyman—i.e. in his youth in Cambridge and London—he seems to have been greatly attracted to deism and French anti-clericalism. By 28 May 1766, when he was on the brink of embracing a clerical career, he drew this distinction: he would grant the French philosophes "honour and glory not for their infidelity" (which he abhorred), but for "their genius, love and ardour for liberty, hatred of Bigots, and their noble defence of the common unalienable Rights of Mankind against oppression and Superstition." Temple's views—like those of so many people, then as now—grew steadily more conservative as he grew older. For example, when he first read Raynal's *Histoire Philosophique* in 1775 he was overwhelmed by its eloquence and found it vastly entertaining; yet on second thoughts—and after Boswell, writing from Edinburgh, had retailed Hume's commendation of the book—he veered sharply against it. He wrote on 16 July:

How many passages of it are an insult against decency and the most salutary opinions? How often does it want precision and perspicuity? Who can hear with patience from an author who intitles himself a *Philosopher Moraliste*, that the belief of a Future State is a vain and idle dream? Such a pestilent fellow ought forever to be denied the use of pen and paper, and have his tongue cut out, or be silent.

But two years later (26 August 1777), when Robertson's *History of America* came out, Temple had the objectivity to judge it inferior to Raynal in point of style, so that it almost looks as if the diatribe just quoted was set off by the emotions aroused in him by Hume's praise of Raynal.

So much for the European Enlightenment as it features in the correspondence. In the matter of the Scottish Enlightenment, it is interesting that Temple the Englishman was more prone to praise Scottish writers

⁴See note 8 below.

and Scottish improvements than was Boswell. Thus in 1767, when he was about to visit Edinburgh after an absence of ten years (he had last seen it when he was eighteen, and he was now twenty-eight), Temple mused:

There must be a great change in Edinburgh since I left it: I hear it is much improved in it's [*sic*] buildings, entertainments and in the art of living. Undoubtedly conversation there was never so desirable. The writings of it's present illustrious authors must have a very perceptible influence on the manners of the inhabitants: indeed I should prefer Edinburgh to London: it is less expensive, the men of letters are all known to one another, their character is honourable, and their conversation the instruction and delight of the best company. In England our literati are generally pedants, ill-bred and not fit to live in society: they are therefore with reason avoided by men of the world and of common sense; for unless letters make us amiable, humane, and useful, where is their advantage?

That was on 17 June 1767. In his reply of 22 June Boswell was for once enthusiastic about Edinburgh's achievement: "We shall live entirely in the luxury of Philosophy and Friendship. We shall have the Society of Doctor Blair, Doctor Gregory, Doctor Fergusson and our other Literati. But [and this is worth quoting for what it tells us about the quality of their relationship] we shall keep the best portion of our time sacred to our intimate affection." In later years Temple wrote repeatedly for information about what the Edinburgh authors were doing, what books they were publishing, and Boswell did his best to answer these queries. Boswell's settled opinion on contemporary Scottish writers was perhaps that of a year later, when on 9 December 1768 he asserted that Temple "admired our Scottish authors too much." Among the books Temple asked about were Adam Ferguson's *History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic* (1782), Sir David Dalrymple's *Annals of Scotland* (1775) [in his reply Boswell enclosed some specimens of the emendations Dr. Johnson had made to the book], Adam Anderson's *History of Commerce* (1764), and Robert Henry's *History of England* (1771-85). Temple was interested in Sir James Steuart's *Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy* (1767), but decidedly unimpressed by *The Wealth of Nations*. "I have turned over your old professor's book," he wrote on 15 April 1776

and must own I am a good deal disappointed. It is prolix and very drily written, heavy and with little spirit. Besides, it seems to me erroneous in several of its opinions [Temple does not tell us what these were], and the information is in no proportion to the size and bulk: yet (and it could hardly be otherwise in so large a work), there are many things worthy of attention. However, perhaps I may be mistaken, for what I did read of it I read with pain and disgust and very superficially.

But Temple must have gone back to it again for he wrote five months later, on 16 November: "Oh the poverty and dulness of Smith's *Wealth!*"

The figure of the Scottish Enlightenment most prominent in the Boswell archives and the Boswell/Temple correspondence is, not unnaturally, David Hume. It is possible that Temple had known Hume even before Boswell did, and met him in Berwick, which was surely a natural shopping and market town for Ninewells. But by the time of his harvest jaunt of 1762 (he would then be 22) Boswell was able, in his very first Journal, to report a conversation of an hour and a half which he and his friend Andrew Erskine had with Hume, and at a later point on the jaunt he mimicked Hume to loud applause. ("I had not only Hume's external address, but his sentiments and mode of expression," he wrote). Hume liked Boswell—an early opinion is preserved in a letter of ? February 1766 to the Comtesse de Boufflers, where Boswell is described as "a young gentleman very good-humoured, very agreeable—and very mad." In 1771, after his marriage, Boswell rented Hume's flat in St. James's Court on the north side of the Lawnmarket between the Castle and Parliament Square, and they saw quite a lot of each other over the years. In 1776 he was even meditating a biography of Hume, though Boswell's "Life of Hume" would necessarily have been a much slenderer affair than the *Life of Johnson*. Their most celebrated encounter was of course the "last interview" of that very year, when Boswell had obviously hoped to be in at the infidel's death-bed confession, and was shocked by his levity: Hume spoke with "his usual grunting pleasantry, with that thick breath which fatness had rendered habitual to him, and that smile of simplicity which his good humour constantly produced." Boswell was truly appalled to find him, in his own words, "indecently and impolitely positive in incredulity."⁵ In *James Boswell: the Later Years* (New York and London, 1984), Frank Brady says that sex—in the sense of going with prostitutes—was "Boswell's habitual solace for unhappy events." Four days before Hume's death Boswell attempted to pay another final call—"wishing to converse with him while I was elevated with liquor," as he put it, "but was told he was very ill." So what did he do? "[I] ranged awhile in the Old Town after strumpets." The day before the funeral, even, he had a whore on Castle Hill. And seven years after this he reported a dream in which he found a diary of Hume's "which showed that his publication of sceptical treatises had sprung from vanity, and that he was really not only a Christian but a very pious man. Boswell even dreamed some beautiful religious passages Hume had written" (p. 141).

⁵"An Account of my last Interview with David Hume, Esq.," in *Boswell in Extremes 1776-1778*, ed. C.M. Weis and F.A. Pottle, (New York and London, 1970), pp. 11-15.

In the course of their correspondence we find many references to their reading Hume's *History*, and when Temple was desperately casting around for some Casaubonish project to fill his empty hours and make him famous, he more than once asked Boswell to get Hume's advice on reading. (Boswell was not to mention Temple's name, but to pretend it was for himself.) On 28 July 1769 it was the Roman historians—would Hume think it "lost labour" to read the historians of later emperors? At the end of the year—15 December—it was a plan for studying modern history that he was after: "If you do not chuse [*sic*] to ask it from him (though I can see no objection) could you ask it from Dr. Robertson?" (Temple's question surely indicates that he had no doubts as to which was the greater historian). Hume's response, not conveyed till five months later, was that one should read the best modern histories:

I would begin with England; and (here he smiled) read Mrs. Macaulay (You may guess what history of England *he really* thinks the best.) You may then read the history of France. I am told the new history by Velly and Villaret is the best, better than Père Daniel. He then said I might read the histories of the Low Countries by Bentivoglio, and those of the other parts of Europe in what order I chose, as Machiavel, Father Paul, Guicardini [*sic*], etc. (To Temple, 7 May 1770)

Temple replied that he would like a more detailed list, *in writing*, and Hume evidently obliged, though the letter containing it has not survived. It may have been at this time that Hume was told the request wasn't for Boswell at all, but for Temple; at any rate Boswell transmitted his advice a few months later that "neither King William nor Queen Anne are subjects for a country clergyman." Hume advised Venice, rather than Florence, yet seems to have said (I am deducing this from Temple's reply to a missing letter) that "the Medici afford a fine canvas to work upon. There are continual attempts to engross power, continual struggles to oppose and destroy it; frequent commotions; frequent revolutions; proscription, banishment, death. Here, as Mr. Hume says, are scenes to paint, well adapted to excite emotion, astonishment, terror" (From Temple, 26 April 1771). It is worth noting that Hume's (and Temple's) concept of history here is of an *art form* intended above all to produce an aesthetic effect. As the years wore on, Temple revised his opinion of Hume's own historical writing. Three years after his death he judged Hume "a partial, unfeeling, ungenerous historian. Indeed he gives a very unfaithful and imperfect idea of the English Constitution and of English affairs" (8 November 1779).

When it became clear that Hume was dying, Temple's first response was gentlemanly and broad-minded: "I have so much charity as to hope he will meet with a better reception in the unexpected country he is going to, than he probably deserves," though of course that last phrase is barbed (7

May 1776). But in subsequent letters his attitude hardened. Just like Boswell, Temple was convinced that on his deathbed Hume "is now sensible that his boasted incredulity had no foundation but vanity, the love of singularity, and the praise of uncommon strength of mind" (From Temple, 25 June 1776). On 25 August, the very day of Hume's death (though Temple in Cornwall could not have known it), he wrote: "If he continue obstinate and will die the death of a Dog who can help it. Let him die then and be thrown into the ditch." After his last interview with Hume Boswell read what he called "part of his worst essays" (i.e., the most sceptical) in the Advocates' Library (Journal, 10 August). By October news of the posthumously printed essays was leaking out; and Lord Lisburne, Temple's patron at Mamhead, had told him

strange things of Essays in defence of Suicide, Adultery, and against a Future State and that the brother swears by G--d he will give them to the publick! Is this possible? Did the abject slave of Vanity think he had not done mischief enough during his life-time and was he desirous of making the next generation still more dissolute and unprincipled than the present? As to *Ninewells* [Hume's brother] as he is a parent, it is to be hoped his children will profit by their uncle and father's instructions; that in case any misfortune should befall the son and nephew he will nobly hang himself, that the daughter and niece will not be a month married till she does her beloved husband the honours of cuckoldom and that both will die as gallantly as their Great Instructor. What a glorious thing is Learning when it renders itself so convenient and salutary to mankind! Who would not be a philosopher, who would not write Moral and Political Essays?-- Pray write me all you know about these pestilent Brothers and when this bare-faced attack is to be expected or rather dreaded on whatever contributes to render Life tolerable and easy. (From Temple, 22 October 1776)

Eight years later, in 1784 Temple spoke of Hume's last dialogues as "insipid" (curious, that!) and disapproved of Hume's presumption in "correcting" Providence. Four years later still, in 1788, he repeated his view (which Boswell shared) that the motive behind Hume's religious scepticism was pure vanity, and reached the conclusion:

It had certainly been better both for himself and the World had he never written a syllable; his futile metaphysick sowed the first seeds of poison in my infant mind. You ask what is he doing in the world of Spirits? I'll tell you; probably reading Beatie's [*sic*] book over and over by way of penance [*sic*]. They say it was almost a Hell to him here. (From WJT 27 November 1788)

My second set of topics I have grouped under the heads of Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy—topics which do not bulk large in the correspondence as a whole, and which are in any case difficult to separate from those just considered under the heading of "Enlightenment." And

Moral Philosophy of course shades into Religion, my third heading. The blurring of distinctions between these categories is well illustrated in Boswell's long letter from Utrecht of c. 11 June 1764. He had previously had an acute attack of melancholia, and his mind had been in "an uneasy, changeful state":

While I have been crushed with a load of gloom, I have strove with severe intensesness of thought to find out the 'Spirit of Man.' But all my thinking has been in vain. It has increast my disorder, and turned my Speculations inwards upon my own mind, concerning which distempered Imagination has formed the most wild and dreary Conjectures. I have been so cruelly [*sic*] dejected as seriously to dread Annihilation. I have found my faculties decaying gradually and have imagined that in a very little time the last spark of celestial fire would be totally extinguished. Daemon no less absurd than malevolent! Why torment me thus? *Can* celestial fire be extinguished? No, it cannot. I have thought, if my mind is a collection of springs, these springs are all unhinged and the Machine is all destroyed.⁶ or if my mind is a waxen-table, the wax is melted by the furnace of sorrow, and all my ideas and all my principles are dissolved, are run into one dead Mass. Good God! My freind [*sic*] what horrid chimaeras. Where was Manly Reason at such seasons. Reason existed but was overpowered. . . . In my last I was doubting the truth of Christianity. Shall I tell you why? Spleen brought back upon my mind the Christianity of my Nurse and of that could I *not* doubt? You know how miserably I was educated with respect to Religion. I am now again at rest. I view Deity as I ought to do, and I am convinced that Jesus Christ had a divine Commission, that thro' him the Justice of God is satisfyd, and that he has given us the most exalted Morality. To love God with all our heart, and our Neighbour as ourselves.' There is enough.

As to the accessory doctrines which have been disputed about, with holy zeal, I let them alone. My dear Temple! how great is the force of early impressions! Is it not incredible that we should think *worse* of the character of *God* than of that of a sensible worthy *Man*? And yet I have done so and shuddered with horror to think of my Benevolent Creator. You have always [*sic*] had clear and elevated sentiments of Religion. After all my struggles I am in the same happy situation.

⁶The commonplace comparison of the mind to a clock with springs and balances was daringly extended by La Mettrie during his exile in Holland. Cf. his *L'Homme Machine*, edited by G.C. Bussey (Chicago, 1912), based on the Leyden edition of 1748: "Le corps humain est une machine qui monte elle-même ses ressorts: vivante image du mouvement perpétuel" (p. 21), and "Mais puisque toutes les facultés de l'âme dépendent tellement de la propre organisation du cerveau et de tout le corps, qu'elles ne sont visiblement que cette organisation même: voilà une machine bien éclairée!" (p. 56). Presumably it was some such extension which terrified Boswell.

It seems that Boswell had been temporarily drawn to the mechanical materialism of La Mettrie—emotionally drawn to it; but had later rejected it, equally emotionally.

Boswell sometimes termed Humean scepticism "metaphysics," as on 23 July 1764—a month after the last letter—when he told Temple he had freed himself from "the uneasy scepticism into which David Hume led me, and from which I absolutely could not escape" by a reading of Thomas Reid's *Inquiry into the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense*, which had just been published. Temple, at about the same early date, declared himself opposed to all metaphysical speculation, and it is clear that he included such topics as Free Will and Necessity under that head:

A man may read of Liberty and Necessity till doom's day, and yet not be able to resolve every bodie's doubts. For my own part, I look upon myself as a free agent, and accountable to Providence for all my actions, and have always esteemed the disputes of the Schollmen [*sic*] on this subject, as little more than learned trifling. Of the nature of God we know little, let us look up to him with reverence, and adore his holy name. (From Temple 15 May 1764)

By Philosophy, Temple meant something different from Metaphysics. He considered Philosophy one of the two most useful parts of Science, because it teaches us to know ourselves. The other useful part, he tells Boswell in the same letter, is History. Yet Temple could even lean towards mechanical materialism in a casual observation nearly twenty years later. In a letter of 4 January 1786, commenting on yet another Boswellian fit of gloom, he wrote:

As to your depression of spirits at certain intervals, it seems to be constitutional, and you must guard against it as well as you can, by keeping both mind and body in action. Yet you find even *that* will not always succeed: strange that our comfort and happiness should depend so little on ourselves, and so much on the circulation of the blood and other *material* causes: indeed, it is to be feared that with all our high ideas, we are in many respects a sort of Machines, influenced powerfully by we know not what.

As to Moral Philosophy and Practical Ethics, one positive for Boswell was the sentimental one of Benevolence, particularly in his youth. Thus on the occasion of yet another attack of melancholia, on 23 September 1763:

And now that it is over there is really [*sic*] no harm done. To be sure I endured a most dreadful [*sic*] Shock. But this is a great period in my life. For it has convinced me that what I believed [*sic*] melancholy or madness or distemper was nothing else than the consequences of Idleness and Sloth. It has given me a high opinion of myself that I could not support Idleness, which a stupid being

can. I have now had the strongest proof that this intellectual Malady may be cured by a proper regimen; For I took it at it's [*sic*] worst and have entirely cured it. I prayed to the God of Benevolence to assist my endeavours and he heard my prayer.

Boswell's regimen at this point was his so-called "Inviolable Plan," involving regular study and activity: a work-ethic underwritten not by Calvin's God, but by the "God of Benevolence." Temple's position, expressed when he had begun to accept his clergymanly destiny with something like resignation, amounted to the same thing in practice: "I have always liked those moralists best who consider our state here as one of probation, and action, as I think it rouzes [*sic*] industry, and virtue, and contributes to the general happiness of mankind" (8 August 1766). In a letter of 20 November 1766 Temple, in a quotation from "a specious moralist," as Boswell sarcastically terms him, gives a slightly different emphasis: "the great truths of Morality are written in the hearts of all men [and] they find it their interest to practise them." Temple finds confirmation of his opinion in d'Alembert. Speaking about a "moral catechism," d'Alembert says: "It is not a question, in this work, of refining and discoursing on the notions which form the basis of morality; one would discover the maxims of morality even in the hearts of infants, in that heart where the passions and self-interest have not yet at all darkened the light of Nature. That is perhaps the age at which the sentiment of justice and injustice is at its keenest . . ." (From Temple, 20-27 March 1767).

In a correspondence such as this, where the friends report their various disappointments, illnesses, bereavements, and so on, and try to comfort each other, much practical moral advice is exchanged of the commonplace sort that is given in any age, but which inevitably takes a particular coloring from their own century. It, too, is part of the current of ideas—the ideas of everyday living. For an example I shall take a late pronouncement of Temple's from 3 November 1794 on the perennial question of the Origin of Evil: "It is no business of ours. Our business and duty is, to add as little to that Evil as we can and leave to dreaming metaphysicians to account for it, how they may. We are convinced that God is wise and good and that is enough for us." The attitude is completely passive; there is no suggestion that it is our duty to reduce the Evil in the world by actively fighting against it.

I shall now turn to religion and "ecclesiastical polity." As we have already seen, it was with considerable reluctance that Temple entered on the clerical profession. When the idea of the Church first occurred to him he was by no means convinced of the general truth of Christianity: his mind's garden was still full of the blossoms sprung from those "first seeds of poison" he had referred to retrospectively in 1788. The first letter in

which he stated these doubts has not come down to us, but we do have Boswell's reply to it, of 9 November 1763, in which he tells Temple how he may overcome his doubts:

You say that revelation appears to you unnecessary [*sic*] and improbable. Sure you cannot remain in that opinion after considering how dark and uncertain even the greatest Philosophers have been after their most diligent search after Religious truth. Doctor Clarke observes that Modern Deists who imagine their minds more enlightened by mere reason than those of Plato and Socrates owe their superiority to that Religion which they would reject. Would you my friend [*sic*] have had such worthy notions of the Divinity, if your Christian Grandfather had not taught you to adore Your father which is in heaven? And sure it is not improbable that our mercifull [*sic*] Creator should instruct us clearly in the way to happiness. There is certainly no merit in faith without conviction. It is certainly an impossibility. But I maintain that I have merit in being of opinion that Virtue deserves my regard; and yet my opinion is not founded on Mathematical demonstration. It is founded on a candid examination, and pious assent. Such is the faith of a Christian.

Boswell is referring to Samuel Clarke (1675-1729), whose Boyle lectures of 1704 and 1705 attempted to demolish first atheism, then deism. Clarke's position on what the deists owed to Plato and Socrates was not quite as Boswell describes it, but rather that they are "inferior" to the "Heathen Philosophers" because a consistent "Scheme of Deism" such as Socrates and Plato developed became outmoded once Revelation had occurred. Christianity has made it impossible for rational men to hold any sort of deism; they have now no option but to accept the entire Christian scheme, or embrace "absolute Atheism."⁷

Three years later, when Temple was already ordained and at Mamhead as Rector, he was overcome, not by diffidence, but by something approaching nausea at the humdrum life of a country clergyman now opening out before him. On 20 November 1766, in the letter already quoted where he says "the great truths of morality are written in the hearts of all men, they find it their interest to practise them," he goes on—in quite measured tones

but priests of all ages and nations, of every sect, have constantly and upon principle endeavored to fix their attention upon something else, by making religion consist in fopperies, absurdities and nonsense to the scandal of learning and of their character. Indeed, I am almost inclined to believe that the good folks of this world would do as well, if not better without us [*i.e.* the clergy], at least we

⁷For Clarke's doctrines, see J.P. Ferguson, *An Eighteenth Century Heretic: Dr Samuel Clarke* (London, 1976).

should not murder and eternally damn one another for difference of opinions, and there would be no more fires and faggots, no more St. Bartholomews to make one's blood run cold within one. Ecclesiastical history teaches us best what to think of all established religions.

Boswell replied in a long letter written between 1 February and 8 March 1767:

I confess that it is not in ecclesiastical History that we find the most agreeable Account of Divines. Their Politics their ambition their art and their cruelty are there displayed. But remember Temple you are there reading the vices of only Political Divines, of such individuals as in so numerous a body have been very unworthy Members of the Church, and should have rather been employed in the rudest secular concerns. But if you would judge fairly of the Priests of Jesus You must consider how many of the distressed they have comforted, how many of the wicked they have reclaimed how many of the good they have improved. Consider the lives of Thousands of worthy Pious Divines who have been a blessing to their Parishes. This is just Temple.

In his answer to that (20-27 March), Temple's disgust verged almost on the hysterical:

First then I thank you for your congratulations on my banishment hither, but not indeed for your encomiums on the Clergy. I'll allow you there are some, I hope many worthy individuals among them, but as a body of men, I should be illiterate or a bigot not to consider them as the very scourge and bane of society. Revolve for a moment, my friend, the history of Religion, falsely so called, trace her from her cradle in Egypt through Greece and Rome and at last in modern Europe, and tell me the principles upon which She has ever conducted herself with unparalleled perseverance and uniformity. Have not Power, and Riches, and the pleasures of Sense, the debasement of Reason and the glory of Ignorance in every period of time and in every country been the spring and basis of her proceedings? Shew me a barbarous people, ignorant and *brutified* where Priests are not adored? Shew me a civilized one where but the Aurora of Philosophy has begun to dawn, where they are not detested and dreaded by the wise and good? Need I enumerate their unrelenting persecutions, their unheard of cruelties, their damnable intolerant spirit? Have not talents, and virtue and the love of our Country, been the constant quarries of their hellish malice and abominable tyranny? Did they not, according to Diodorus, teach the wretched Kings of a yet more wretched People of Othiopia [*sic*], piously to hang themselves whenever they thought proper to send them a halter? Need I invoke an Anaxagoras, a Socrates, even in Athens, and do we not yet read with horror [*sic*] the sufferings of Galileo and a Servet and our own impious Burnings? Nay at this very moment, when perhaps Philosophy has almost reached her meridian of Glory, have we not reason to blush with double confusion for the monstrous

proceedings against the unfortunate families of Sirven and Calas?⁸ So baneful a weed is Superstition and Bigotry of every kind, and so deeply the enemy of merit and innocence. You see I purposely confound all religions and sects, to remind you that from the very beginning the same spirit has informed them all, and that they have concurred unanimously and with real Devotion to forward and perfect their grand Scheme of Universal Slavery and Ignorance. Here Boswell will fly to the old argument, that we are not to reason against any thing from the abuse of it; granted my friend, but the Gifts of the gods are to be excepted, and trust me, True Natural Religion never was, nor can be abused. Indeed it is my sincere opinion (and History confirms it) that what is commonly called Religion has a natural tendency to corrupt the human heart, which is a sufficient argument to me that it is of Human Invention . . . For I insist upon it that the only effectual way to render men virtuous, is by making it their interest to be so, and that is the best government where this principle operates most extensively. In short, my dear Boswell, if we must have Priests, let us have them humble and modest, at least harmless, like the good ones of Geneva, or your obscure presbyters, without any share in the Legislature, the servants of the People and paid by them. . .

And tell me one precept of the Bible that was not inculcated by Philosophy long before the Founder of Christianity was born? Nay, I dare say you will confess, that Morals are coeval with the institution of society, and do not at all depend on the belief of a Deity. We know them much earlier, because it is our interest to know them, and they were taught in their greatest purity by those who denied the existence of God; for the Stoicians you know would admit of no God but the World. Indeed, it is certain that the moral part is not the ten thousandth part of the Scripture, and that the writings of the Greek Philosophers are much more full and copious upon every part of our duty. Be then ingenuous and tell me what Christianity teaches us more than we knew before. Any thing more certain of the nature of the Great Author of the Universe, of Spirits, or of a Future State? I leave you to reply.

Besides the common argument is far from being inconclusive. Are men better or happier now than they were 3000 years ago? If not, to what purpose a Revelation? The Merciful God of human nature must have foreknown it's effect, and to give us a Revelation to damn us, could only be worthy of the Devil. I write to you freely as I think in my heart; I shall always pay all due reverence to the Religion established by the laws of my Country, but it is not in my power (and it would be criminal) to forfeit my right of private judgment. A Publick form etc. are absolutely necessary; philosophers are seldom consulted in such institutions, but they never scrupled to officiate at the Altar. Tis a sacrifice to Humanity.

⁸The Sirven and Calas families were brutally persecuted by the ecclesiastical authorities. The whole Calas family were tortured on the rack in Toulouse in 1761-62, and the father broken on the wheel and burnt to ashes. When the Bishop of Castres tried by violence to convert Elisabeth Sirven to Roman Catholicism she went mad and was found dead in a well (4 January 1762). Her parents were accused of murdering her, but they escaped to Voltaire's estate at Ferney (T.F. Besterman, *Voltaire*, London 1963, pp. 426-7, 441).

A year after this, Temple's distaste for his profession comes out in a statement like: "Sermons! of all compositions, in general the most insipid, useless and nonsensical" (10 May 1768). Twelve years later still he had the same opinion of the genre as a whole, though he was prepared to allow merit to individual sermons: "I read Blair's 1st volume carelessly and liked that on the death of Christ: but thought many of them prolix and without precision and energy. It is a difficult species of composition to excell in, and but insipid even when most excellent. An edition of Ogden's is coming out with five new ones on the Sacrament. Ogden killed himself with eating" (3 July 1780). A few years before, on 25 June 1776, he somewhat ironically put forward the trade-union argument that since in all countries the Clergy are the supporters of Government and Virtue, they should not be "left needy and despicable. No parsimony can be more impolitick." Though he was growing a little more resigned to his fate, and a little more mellow, he was still, in the year of this letter (1776), strongly condemnatory of the most reactionary and obscurantist of clerical views. In December he was "reading Hurd's Sermons to prove that the Pope is Anti-Christ in 1776. As Lord Clarendon observes, "Surely Churchmen are the most ignorant and take the worst measure of human affairs of all mankind.' What but Dotage could induce the Bishop of Gloscester [*sic*] to found such a lecture in such times as these?" By 1782 (11-16 July) Temple was extending the principle of the social utility of religion to include support of possibly irrational dogmas for secular and indeed political purposes—they are useful because they make for order in the community:

At dinner yesterday, our Bishop expressed himself very openly respecting the controversy between Bishop Bagot and Dr Bell concerning the Sacrament, approving of the opinions of the latter as more agreeable to Scripture: adding that he wished the Clergy of his Diocese would adopt them and circulate them among their people.⁹ The doctrine is Hoadly's revived, but certainly not that of the Church of England and very inconsistent with the exhortation in our Liturgy always read before the celebration of that rite. Besides is it judicious to lower it to a mere act of commemoration and divest it of its spiritual Graces? Will the Generality be thus induced to think more reverently of it? And before novel

⁹William Bell, D.D., prebendary of Westminster and rector of Christ Church, London, published in 1780 *An Attempt to ascertain and illustrate the Authority, Nature and Design of the Institution of Christ, commonly called the Communion and the Lord's Supper* (1780). His arguments were roundly opposed by Dr. Lewis Bagot, Dean of Christ Church, in *A Letter to the Rev. William Bell* (1781). For Bell, there was no sort of mystery in the rite of Holy Communion; no special benefits were attached to it; it was a mere commemoration. For Bagot, there was a mystery, even if there was no real presence, and Christ's blood and body, symbolized by the bread and wine, were only spiritually consumed by worthy recipients.

doctrines are preached should not old forms be altered and every thing be made of a piece? To dine together and drink a glass of wine in memory of Jesus may have a salutary influence on liberal and virtuous minds; but will not the old and common notion of it have a stronger and deeper effect on the generality of Communicants: but I find I am going to preach against the Bishop and Dr Bell, through I approve the candour and moderation of their sentiments.

The passage is typical of Temple's view of his role as clergyman: to strengthen and uphold society by that very preaching which, in certain moods, disgusted him so; and of course to baptize, celebrate communion, marry, and conduct the burial service—all socially necessary activities. It seems strange that nowhere in all his letters to Boswell is there a single reference to his visiting parishioners or comforting the sick or the dying, nor is there any mention of such activities in his own journal,¹⁰ though he did note many tea-parties and other purely social gatherings with people of his own class, almost always to dismiss them as "tedious." He specifically says that "it is not the custom" for the clergy to "visit and instruct" in Cornwall, so what he does is to give his flock "plain practical discourses, which would make them better if they would attend and observe them: and indeed I am persuaded that considering the manners of our common people, there is no other method of improving them" (From Temple, 2-3 August 1784). A more committed pastor, one feels, would have made it his business to change the custom.

Boswell's religious development is much better documented than Temple's. We know from the autobiographical letter to Rousseau that his mother taught him what he termed "the gloomiest doctrines" of Calvinism: that at sixteen he became a methodist, and shortly after that a misanthropic vegetarian. At eighteen he flirted with Catholicism, under the influence of an English actress whom he had fallen in love with in Edinburgh, then fled to London "with the intention of hiding myself in some gloomy retreat to pass my life in sadness." There Lord Eglinton made him a deist. Back in Edinburgh again, he told Rousseau, his next stage was complete scepticism. During his second London visit he met Dr. Johnson, "who proved to me the truth of the Christian Religion, though his variety of Christianity was a little severe."¹¹ We have seen him by 1766-67 converted to the Anglican kind of orthodoxy which he urged on the reluctant and newly ordained Temple, and which remained his position till the end of his life, though he attended the services of the Scots Kirk in Edinburgh

¹⁰*Diaries of William Johnston Temple*, edited by Lewis Bettany (Oxford, 1929).

¹¹Frederick A. Pottle, *James Boswell: The Earlier Years* (New York and London, 1967), pp. 1-6.

and Ayrshire, and experimented in London with such forays as attending Mass at the Portuguese Chapel, or debates at a "religious Robin Hood" (debating society) of the "lower orders" at which were discussed such topics as "And many bodies of the saints which slept arose" (Journal, 15 April 1781). Curiously enough there is no sign on Temple's side of the correspondence of any intense spiritual experience. But Boswell seems to have sensed, or wished to sense, in Temple emotions of which we have no other record, imputing to him a religiosity similar to his own—the religiosity of the Sentimental Era, rooted in permanent obsession with life after death:

Were there not hope of a more perfect world, would it not be an advantage to be less feeling in every respect than either you or I am in this? But there *is* hope of a world where we shall be happy in proportion to our refined faculties. My dear friend! from the first dawn of our intimacy, from our worshipping in Porter's Chapel on Christmas day, all through life, religion has been our chief object, however smaller objects coming close to us may have at times obscured our view of it. (To Temple, 6-8 July 1784)

In his reply, Temple shifted Boswell's meaning by replacing "object" with another word: "In these times of incredulity it may be our boast that Religion has always been our chief consolation: but how often has your practice been at variance with your Belief, and as to myself, though my propensities are not so violent, yet I have sufficient to deplore in other respects . . ." (2-3 August 1784). By substituting "consolation" for "object" Temple reduces religious experience to a passive acceptance of comfort, with activity centered on right conduct ("practice . . . Belief"). A rare glimpse of religious emotion is provided by an entry in Temple's Diary of a visit to Oxford in May 1790: "Our Lord bearing his Cross by Reubens at Magdalen, the finest picture I ever saw. The meekness, the resignation, the fatigue, the flesh and blood are astonishing!"¹² Both men believed in the efficacy of prayer (e.g. From Temple, 20 June 1789, after Margaret Boswell's death: "I fervently prayed God to give you fortitude and resignation to support this heavy calamity"), but only Boswell seems much exercised by its theoretical implications, as on a night of storm between Mull and Coll on 30 October 1773:

Piety afforded me comfort; yet I was disturbed by the objections that have been made against a particular providence, and by the arguments of those who maintain that it is in vain to hope that the petitions of an individual, or even of con-

¹²Bettany, p. 72.

gregations, can have any influence with the Deity. . . . but Dr Ogden's excellent doctrine on the efficacy of intercession prevailed.¹³

The divine referred to is Samuel Ogden, a copy of whose *Sermon on Prayer* Boswell took with him on the Hebridean tour. Similar worries recurred: seven years later, when reading Hugh Blair's sermons, he was disturbed that "Blair in his sermon on God's unchangeableness showed his opinion that prayer *doth not avail* with our Heavenly Father, and that man is indeed fatally carried on. Such a system is dreary and dispiriting, and I am convinced is not true" (Journal, 20 April 1780).

Many years ago now, when writing about Burns, I said that his "letters and . . . political poems give us the thoughts of which an Average Man is capable in a period of political change; the best of the songs embody the intensified feelings of such a Jock Tamson."¹⁴ Boswell was even more ordinary than Burns as a thinker, and Temple—as his essays show—less distinguished still. Whatever may be true of professional philosophers, the ideas of ordinary people are inseparably bound up with sentiment and passion; they are not so much the concepts of pioneers and trail-blazers as the outmoded ideas that the vanguard are intent on negating and transforming. For ordinary people—and, surely, for creative writers and other artists, however extraordinary, reason *is* almost necessarily the slave of the passions; and it is not only reason that is in bondage, but concepts and clichés they may not have thought about in any coherent way, having absorbed them with the very air they breathe.

In this paper I have shown how certain philosophical and religious ideas, many of them the veriest platitudes, interacted with feelings and sentiments in the lives of two "average" thinkers. Theirs are conventional structures of thought which shade into structures of feeling that are partly conventional and, on Boswell's side rather than Temple's, partly innovative. At the ideational level the letters between the two friends are the same sort of thing as the debates in, say, the novels of Aldous Huxley: they adopt the ideas they have inherited and the new ones that happen to be around, weaving them into the feeling-structure, or should one say the feeling-texture, of their lives as people have always done. One need only think of the interplay of liberalism, Zen Buddhism, monetarist conservatism, social democracy, Trotskyism, Christian fundamentalism and neo-

¹³Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, edited by G.B. Hill, revised by L.F. Powell (Oxford, 1950), V, 282.

¹⁴Burns: *A Study of the Poems and Songs* (Edinburgh and Stanford, 1960), p. 341.

Catholicism in English-speaking countries at the present day, to appreciate that.

Boswell wrote to Temple towards the end of their lives, on 22 May 1789: "You have told me that I am the most thinking Man you ever knew." It is a remark that brings us up sharp: whatever can Temple have meant? Not, it is clear, thinking about enlightenment philosophers or metaphysics or religion, but—as Boswell's next sentences show—about how to make his daily living into a work of art in progress. "It is certainly so as to *my own life*. I am continually *conscious* continually *looking back* or *looking forward* and wondering how I shall feel in situations which I anticipate in fancy. My Journal will afford Materials for a curious Narrative, I assure you. I do not now live with a view to have surprising incidents; though I own I am desirous that my Life should *tell*." If art is thinking by means of images, and the situations Boswell remembered, or anticipated so vividly in fancy, are not different in principle from the images of art, then it is plain in what respect he was a thinking man: he arranged, organized, selected, recreated, reflected in order to make his life "tell" in the way that a great poem, play, painting or work of music "tells." Interaction with enlightenment thinkers and speculation about metaphysics and religion played some part in this: but Boswell's real thought was of a different kind, a thought that "told" as Blake's does in the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, or Burns's does in "Tam o' Shanter."

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