

The Fate of a Lexicographer

System and History in
Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary*

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Introduction SYSTEM AND HISTORY

The so-called “double tradition” of Samuel Johnson—the popular and the learned, the man and the author—¹ could be easily transposed in equally unwholesome oversimplification, within “the learned Johnson” himself. Johnson would then be either a self-righteous, over-confident opinionated reactionary, or a morose and monotonous pessimistic preacher of human nature. Given the persistence of the double tradition, whether in the original or transposed version, it is a fresh surprise to find the author of “The Vanity of Human Wishes” turning to applaud a Dutch physician Herman Boerhaave thus:

[Public lectures] he undertook, not only to the great advantage of his pupils, but to the great improvement of the art itself, which had, hitherto, been treated only in a confused and irregular manner, and was little more than a history of particular experiments, not reduced to certain principles, nor connected one with another: this vast chaos he reduced to order, and made that clear and easy, which was before, to the last degree, difficult and obscure.²

Johnson sees in Boerhaave the hallmarks of a scientist-hero within the

Baconian scheme for the Great Instauration of a true system of knowledge: the notion of progress through empirical/experimental method ("the slow methods of obtaining true notions by frequent experiments" and "by a long and unwearied observation of nature"), the pragmatic standard of value of "usefulness" ("for the common interest of mankind"), and above all, the faith in man's basic capacity for knowledge ("none may hereafter excuse his ignorance, by pleading the impossibility of clearer knowledge") (VI, 281, 285-6).³ However, this defender of the new science, who dreamt of seeing a true system of human knowledge steadily raised on earth, was also an arch-enemy of a herd of intellectual system-builders of his age. His main targets were Bolingbroke, Pope, and especially Soame Jenyns, with their cosmological systems of "the *Arabian* scale of existence." His attack was scrupulous, and his victory easy: "A system has been raised, which is so ready to fall to pieces of itself, that no great praise can be derived from its destruction. To object is always easy, and it has been well observed by a late writer, that *the hand which cannot build a hovel, may demolish a temple*" ("Review of Soame Jenyns' *Free Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of the Evil*").⁴ Their cardinal sin is in their presumption to knowledge:

Though [Jenyns] is far from the contemptible arrogance, or the impious licentiousness of *Bolingbroke*, yet he decides too easily upon questions out of the reach of human determination, with too little consideration of mortal weakness, and with too much vivacity for the necessary caution. (No. XIII, 171)

The fault is not one in specific methodology or enthusiasm, but a radical one: "To these meditations humanity is unequal. . . . We may

ask; but I believe no created wisdom can give an adequate answer" (*ibid.*, 173). Now the preacher of the unchangeable human condition asserts that no man will ever be able to know, that no "history of particular experiments" or of any other human endeavors will ever culminate in a true system of knowledge, but only will grope round and round endlessly in ignorance. History is a maze, an unmapped ocean where a straight line of progress is impossible to draw:

In our passage through the boundless ocean of disquisition we often take fogs for land, and after having long toiled to approach them, find instead of repose and harbours, new storms of objection and fluctuations of uncertainty (*ibid.*, 173).

and we are doomed to find "*no end in wand'ring mazes lost*" (No. XV, 305).

The contrast made above between Johnson on Boerhaave on one hand and on Jenyns on the other is obviously partial and unfair, in taking the passages out of their overall contexts as well as in obscuring the original distinction Johnson made between natural and moral knowledge. The partiality of the contrast, however, is intentional, for, first, each one of the two facets—two "traditions"—is in itself a just and significant pointer toward a perspective in which to place Johnson, and secondly and more importantly, it reminds us all the more of the necessity to consider the possible Johnsons in the two possible perspectives together. Johnson the defender of the new science and Johnson the preacher of eternal human condition have to be set before us side by side. System and history have to be understood in their dynamic relationship, in which, in fact, they always were in Johnson's mind.

I SYSTEM

Within the Academic Tradition

As a lexicographer Johnson himself set out to construct a system of language on the "vast sea of words."⁵ From the first declaration of his intention to compile a dictionary of the English language in 1746 to the assessment of his own achievement in 1756, his aim seems unwavering, and his confidence unflagging. In the Preface to the octavo edition of the *Dictionary* he confidently professes that "as I may without arrogance claim to myself a longer acquaintance with the lexicography of our language than any other writer has had, I shall hope to be considered as having more experience at least than most of my predecessors."⁶ His long experience only confirmed the justness of his original intention first expressed in "a Short Scheme for compiling a new Dictionary of the English Language":

Thus may a Dictionary be compiled by which the pronunciation of the Language may be fixed, and the attainment of it facilitated, by which its purity may be preserved and its Use ascertained, its Reputation encreased, and its duration lengthened, and to which therefore the Authors of this Nation may perhaps owe part of the Praises that they shall receive from Posterity.⁷

The plea for such a dictionary, of course, speaks of his sense of the ruinous state of language, the sense that language is fluctuating, adulterated with impure dictions and unascertained uses and innovations, thus endangering its reputation and its intelligibility for posterity as well as for contemporaries—the sense, in short, that "our Language . . . now stands in our Dictionaries a confused heap of words

without dependance and without relation" ("Short Scheme," p. 271).

Both in his recognition of the deplorable state of language and in his call for an authoritative prescriptive dictionary, Johnson was, as he was fully conscious, in the tradition of linguistic academism. Accademia della Crusca, founded in Florence in 1582 with the objective of purifying the Italian language as one refines flour by sifting bran ("crusca"), published *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* in 1612, whose subtitle said that "It collects the finest flower" ("Il più bel fiori ne coglie"). that is, the standard Italian in Toscani used by Dante and Petrarch. L'Académie française was founded in 1634 by Cardinal Richelieu, who was intent on linguistic as well as political hegemony of France; one of its Statutes and Regulations stated that "la principale fonction de l'Académie sera de travailler, avec tout le soin et toute la diligence possible, à donner des règles certaines à notre langue et à la rendre pure, éloquente et capable de traiter les arts et les sciences." In Britain, the Royal Society of London for the Improvement of Natural Knowledge, chartered in 1662 and 1663, "exacted from all their members, a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions; clear senses; a native easiness: bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness, as they can," and it lost no time to appoint for this purpose a "Committee for Improving the English Language" in 1664. John Evelyn, one of the twenty-two nominated members of the committee, after having enumerated various causes of "additions to, and the corruption of, the English language"—such as "victories, plantations, frontieres, staples of com'erce. pedantry of schooles, affectation of travellers, translations, fancy and style of Court, vernility & mincing of citizens, pulpits, political remonstrances, theaters, and shoppes, &c."—

pointed out an urgent need for "a Gram'ar for the præcepts . . . the rules, the sole meanes to render it [English] a learned & learnable tongue," and for "a Lexicon or collection of all the pure English words." The concern of Evelyn and the Royal Society with the state of the English language and their enthusiasm for its reform had been shared by a large number of men of letters, prominent or not. Dryden had deplored the absence of "a tolerable dictionary, or a grammar; so that our language is in a manner barbarous," and called for "a more certain measure" which might be established by an academy (Dedication to *Rival Ladies*, 1664; "A Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire." 1693); Defoe had proposed a British Academy to "encourage Polite Learning, to polish and refine the *English Tongue*, and advance the so much neglected Faculty of Correct Language, to establish Purity and Propriety of Stile, and to purge it from all the Irregular Additions that Ignorance and Affectation have introduc'd" (*An Eassy upon Projects*, 1697); Swift had reproved "*the continual Corruption of our English Tongue*" and its "natural Tendency towards relapsing into Barbarity," saying it needed authoritative censorship and an "annual *Index Expurgatorius*," and calling for some method for "*Ascertaining and Fixing* our Language for ever," because, he states, "if it were once refined to a certain Standard, perhaps there might be Ways found out to fix it for ever; or at least till we are invaded and made a Conquest by some other State; and even then our best Writings might probably be preserved with Care, and grow into Esteem, and the Authors have a Chance for Immortality" (*The Tatler*, No. 230, 1710; "A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue," 1712)⁸; Addison had suggested an idea of "something like

an Academy, that by the best Authorities and Rules drawn from the Analogy of Languages shall settle Controversies between Grammar and Idiom," proposing the publication of "a Complete and Standard English Dictionary of the whole English Language. . .[compiled] according to the Method of the celebrated one of the French Academy" (*The Spectator*, No. 135, 1711; an anonymous advertisement in *The Postboy*, June 1-4, 1717, attributed to Addison by M. Segar); Smollett had lamented the irregularity and mutability of the English language, concluding that "it were to be wished for the honour of this country, that an academy were established. and vested with full power and authority to reform these abuses. and fix the volatility of the English tongue, which is so fluctuating and mutable" (*Critical Review*, 8, 1759). Allen W. Read concludes his long list of the favorable (and some unfavorable) comments on the idea of an academy by minor figures—ranging from George Harris, John Rice, and Robert Baker to the Rev. W. Tremayne, James Anderson, and Herbert Craft—by saying that "the consensus of stated opinion during this period was clearly in favor of an academy. . . . the desirability of regulating and 'ascertaining' language was a fundamental tenet in their [projectors'] linguistic outlook."⁹

Normative Etymology

It is within the framework of such tradition of linguistic academism that Johnson tries to reduce "a confused heap of words" to an order by "ascertaining"—defined in the *Dictionary* as "1. To make certain; to fix; to establish"¹⁰—the usage and fixing the language. The methodology he employs is a normative, anti-historical etymology. First he introduces the norm of an original, that is, uncorrupted, state of the

English language—"the wells of *English undefiled*" and "the pure sources of genuine diction"—which he specifies as a period after the accession of Elizabeth I (1558) ("Short Scheme" and "Plan") and before the Restoration (1660) ("Preface"). This period of perfection between "a time of rudeness" on one end and a time of "false refinement and declension" on the other presents a closed, complete and self-sufficient system of verbal expressions "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 phrase 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. ("Preface")

The norm being thus clearly defined, etymology is expected to perform the regulative function of "tracing back" the corrupted language to its pure original state:

By tracing in this manner every word to its original, and not admitting, but with great caution, any of which no original can be found, we shall secure our language from being over-run with *cant*, from being crouded [*sic*] with low terms, the spawn of folly or affectation, which arise from no just principles of speech, and of which therefore no legitimate derivation can be shewn. ("Plan")¹¹

Just as the decline from the perfect state of a complete verbal system was caused by "spawning" of illegitimate "low" words, so the recovery of "the golden age" of language was to be done through a science of

legitimate derivation. His etymology is rational rather than historical. The quest for the origin of words allows him to go back as far as reason permits, and no further: English words only to their known Saxon originals—"since we know not the parent of the Saxon dialect" ("Plan," p. 15)—and foreign words to their Latin original with or without some intermediate forms in Romance languages. In the "Preface" written after the completion of the dictionary, he betrays his basic scepticism of the discipline, and even adds a footnote to give "a few Specimens of etymological extravagances" of Junius who had gone further beyond sure reasonable ground. Moreover, etymology in the sense of an objective study of historical linguistic changes is essentially a negative science dealing with linguistic degeneration, a mere record of corruption of pure, original, legitimate meanings:

The words which are represented as thus related by descent or cognation, do not always agree in sense; for it is incident to words, as to their authors, to degenerate from their ancestors, and to change their manners when they change their country. It is sufficient, in etymological enquiries, if the senses of kindred words be found such as may easily pass into each other, or such as may both be referred to one general idea. ("Preface")

Rather, etymology for him has another, nobler function: it is a science of distinction between legitimate and illegitimate derivations of words. He defines "etymology" in the *Dictionary* as "1. The descent or derivation of a word from its original; the deduction of formations from the radical word; the analysis of compound words into primitives. 2. The part of grammar which delivers the inflections of nouns and verbs." He uses the terms "original," "radical" and "primitive" as synonymous,

all representing the origin of logical derivation rather than mere historical anteriority. Etymology is that part of grammar which establishes and governs synchronic relations among words, and organizes "a confused heap of words" into a rational, well-regulated, and inter-related system. It is no wonder, then, that he uses the term "etymology" as synonymous with "analogy," which is defined as "3. By grammarians, it is used to signify the agreement of several words in one common mode; as. from *love* is formed *loved*, from *hate*, *hated*, from *grieve*, *grieved*." To use an example in "the Plan," the foundation of a system does not reside in such temporal derivations as the English derivative *act* from the Latin original *ago*, *actum*, but rather in the logical derivation of the derivative *action*, *actionable*, *activity* from their primitive *to act*. The "original," the "radical," the "primitive" are all detemporalized. An "etymological extravagance"—or a "grammatical exuberance"—understood in this sense he is quite ready to defend, and even to promote for the sake of "systematical works":

who does not see that *remoteness* comes from *remote*, *lovely* from *love*, *concavity* from *concave*, and *demonstrative* from *demonstrate*? but this grammatical exuberance the scheme of my work did not allow me to repress. It is of great importance in examining the general fabrick of a language, to trace one word from another, by noting the usual modes of derivation and inflection; and uniformity must be preserved in systematical works, though sometimes at the expense of particular propriety. ("Preface")

The "time" such etymology discovers in the history of words is "time" that "passes" in an orderly, logical, that is, atemporal, progression from the primitive to the derivative, a time of rational and

meaningful concatenation in *kairos*, as opposed to mere blind succession in *chronos*. It is a similar kind of time that is to "flow" in definition of various uses and significances of each word as well as in the "chronological" arrangement of illustrative citations. In definition or what he calls "explanation" or "interpretation,"

it was requisite to mark the progress of its meaning, and show by what gradations of intermediate sense it has passed from its primitive to its remote and accidental signification; so that every foregoing explanation should tend to that which follows, and the series be regularly concatenated from the first notion to the last. ("Preface")

In sorting the several senses of each word, the definition must proceed logically from its "natural and primitive signification" to its "accidental or consequential" and to "the remoter or metaphorical," and then to "the poetical" and "the familiar," through "the burlesque" and finally to "the peculiar" (idiosyncratic). The apparent irrationality of the accidental or peculiar signification of a word, inexplicable in itself, would be at least mitigated thus, if not by its original natural significance, but by "an account of the means by which they were introduced" ("Plan," p. 26), by the very existence of "the gradations of intermediate sense." If any weakness should be found in such genealogy of signification, it is to be supplied by collateral supports of synonyms and antonyms. Similarly, in the description of levels of usages of each word or "the DISTRIBUTION of words into their proper classes, or that part of lexicography which is strictly critical" (*ibid.*, p. 27), the order should be from "the general," through "the poetic" and "the antiquated or obsolete" and "the particular," to "the burlesque and

familiar" and "the barbarous or impure." The *chronos* in the chronological arrangement of illustrative citations is to be overcome likewise by the notion of genealogy and accumulation. The chronological arrangement will reveal the bare facts of "the rise of some words, and the fall of others," and show that inevitably "every word will have its history" (*ibid.*, p. 32). However, each citation is designed to give, besides its immediate use, "pleasure or instruction by conveying some elegance of language, or some precept of prudence, or piety" (*ibid.*, p. 31). Employment of the same word by different writers at separate instance in time are brought and linked together in the same *space* of a dictionary's pages and formed into "a genealogy of sentiments" or "a kind of intellectual history" ("Preface"), so that the body of citations in its entirety will present the "accumulation of elegance and wisdom [in] an alphabetical series" (*ibid.*).

As a norm, Johnson's "retrospective" etymology is equally operative as its "progressive" counterpart. His attempt to restore the confused heap of the English language to its former golden age can be re-defined in the opposite direction as an attempt to refine and civilize the current barbarous language toward a second golden age. For the sake of literary protocol or good manners, he would minimize the value of his undertaking and characterize lexicography as "drugery for the blind" and "the proper toil of artless industry," which does not require "any higher quality than that of bearing burthens with dull patience, and beating the track of the alphabet with sluggish resolution" ("Plan," p. 1). Near the conclusion of his proposal, however, he finds himself excited, almost in spite of himself, with the prospect of his glorious conquest as a lexicographical cæsar:

When I survey the Plan which I have laid before you [Lord Chesterfield], I cannot, my Lord, but confess, that I am frighted at its extent, and, like the soldiers of Cæsar, look on Britain as a new world, which it is almost madness to invade. But I hope, that though I should not complete the conquest. I shall at least discover the coast, civilize part of the inhabitants, and make it easy for some other adventurer to proceed farther, to reduce them wholly to subjection, and settle them under law. (*Ibid.*, p. 33)

Eight years after the perusal of the "Plan" in manuscript, Chesterfield was merely repeating and varnishing Johnson's original fervor when he said in the pre-sale advertisement notice for the nearly completed dictionary that

Good order and authority are now necessary. . . . We must have recourse to the old Roman expedient in times of confusion, and chuse a dictator. Upon this principle I give my vote for Mr. Johnson to fill that great and arduous post. And I hereby declare that I make a total surrender of all my rights and privileges in the English language, as a free-born British subject, to the said Mr. Johnson, during the term of his dictatorship. Nay more: I will not only obey him, like an old Roman, as my dictator, but, like a modern Roman, I will implicitly believe in him as my pope, and hold him to be infallible while in the chair.¹²

Chesterfield was quite perceptive in sensing the political relevance for "the glories of the reign of Lewis the fourteenth" (and for Cardinal Richelieu) of the linguistic hegemony on the Continent of the French language which the Académie française was intent on purifying and perfecting. And he hails Johnson's purely philological—non-political—conquest as "a nobler sort of conquest, and a far more glorious

triumph, since graced by none but willing captives" (*ibid.*). The famous ensuing quarrel between Johnson and Chesterfield could be explained in various ways, but, it seems, one of the clear *internal* reasons is that Chesterfield did not truly share Johnson's sense of mission nor could he understand the very nature of "a nobler sort of conquest." He accuses Johnson of not paying due attention to "the genteeler part of our language"—"the fair mint"—which no true gentleman would dare to neglect. He defends the verbal "enrichment" by feminine "happy redundancies and luxuriances of expression" against the "tyranny" of an authoritative grammarian-dictator; he tacitly puts a higher value on the "polite" orthography for its "justness and delicacy to the ear" than on the "pedantic"—Johnson's primary concern—with "certain dry and crabbed rules of etymology and grammar"; he suggests with apparent modesty as an appendix to the *Dictionary* "a genteel Neological dictionary" of "those polite, though perhaps not strictly grammatical words" used in the "Beau Monde," and derisively concludes that "under the protection of that little work, the great one [i.e. Johnson's *Dictionary*] will be received in the genteelest houses . . . in ladies dressing-rooms . . . and even sometimes in the powder-rooms of our young nobility, upon the same shelf with their German-flute, their powder mask, and their four-horse whip."¹³ In the final analysis, Chesterfield's concept of language is a frivolous one: language was merely a "province of the fair sex" and a dictionary a formidable weapon for an amorous coquetry and conquest. Johnson's letter to Chesterfield, which is usually read as one of the earliest documents of the declaration of a writer's independence from a patron, was in its specific context, a document of his firm rejection of the patron's

fundamentally depreciatory notion of language. Johnson had a different, "nobler" concept; he envisioned a different "new world" beyond the "vast sea of words," a different conquest.

From Dictionary to Encyclopedia

Johnson's *Dictionary* was at first less, and eventually more, than a dictionary in his own estimation. In his original design for a dictionary of the English language, it was to comprise only those genuine English words that were in use in "the general intercourse of life" and in the "polite" writings, at the exclusion of loan words of foreign origins, and terms of particular arts and professions. That was according to "the exact and pure idea of a grammatical dictionary" ("Plan," p. 4), which alone would satisfy learned critics and philosophers. However, he immediately adds, "in lexicography, as in other arts, naked science is too delicate for the purposes of life. The value of a work must be estimated by its use" (*ibid.*, pp. 4-5). By his idea of "usefulness" as a standard of value he finds himself required to compromise his "naked science" for the prospective readers and purchasers of the *Dictionary*. And they expected to find in an English dictionary such foreign words as *zenith*, *meridian*, *cynosure*, *equator*, *satellites*, *category*, *cachexy*, *peripneumony*, all mistaken for English or illegitimately naturalized through "long intermixture and frequent use"; they wanted to know the meanings of such technical terms as *capias*, *habeas corpus*, *præmunire*, *nisi prius* in law, *hypostasis* in divinity; they desired to be enlightened by the dictionary with "the peculiar words of every profession," "the terms of war and navigation." "those of law, merchandise and mechanical trades"; they needed to know names of animals, plants, metals, diseases,

etc. It is only with a strong sense of compromise on his part that he agrees to let all those words enter his English dictionary. He was sagacious enough to learn the lesson from the French: in the face of "pompous luxuriance" of words useful for the readers, even the French Academy fell, and admitted "the necessity of relaxing the rigour of [its] determination" and its "naked science" (*ibid.*, p. 5). The reader's desire for knowledge is insatiable, and "who shall fix the limits of the reader's learning?" (*ibid.*, p. 8)

However, it was first of all Johnson himself that had an insatiable desire to know. His attitude gradually changes from that of reluctant compromise to that of total commitment. His system of verbal knowledge gradually transforms itself—lapses or enhances itself—toward a system of real knowledge; knowledge about words comes to be subsumed within knowledge about things: in a word, a dictionary becomes an encyclopedia. It may still be for the sake of "common readers" and "common use" that he says he has "determined to consult the best writers for explanations real as well verbal . . . [so] that [his] book is more learned than its author" (*ibid.*, p. 21). However, his strongest motive for the determination lies elsewhere, in his awareness that matter is the paragon of word for its solidity and permanence as a building block of an eternal system of knowledge. Word aspires to the condition of matter; matter lays the foundation for word: "who upon this survey [of the "elemental principles" of language] can forbear to wish, that these fundamental atoms of our speech might obtain the firmness and immutability of primogenial and constituent particles of matter, that they might retain their substance while they alter their appearance, and be varied and compounded, yet not

destroyed" (*ibid.*, p. 18). Chemistry, the natural science, supplied the model for lexicography as well: just as chemistry dresses a table of elements which retain their identity and permanence through all their chemical compositions, so lexicography has to give a list of words which remain identical all through their compositions into phrases and sentences. The analogy of atomism is more than metaphorical here. In a peculiar way, one cannot speak of the "substance" of a word as one can of the substance of matter. Word is a substance only in so far as it *reflects* the material substance. Word reflects matter by being used as its substitute, by "representing" it or "referring" to it. By its very insubstantiality, a word performs its sole function as a mirror; it effaces itself into pure instrumentality before the world of things. A word wants to annul itself; the earth aspires to the condition of heaven:

I am not yet so lost in lexicography, as to forget that *words are the daughters of earth, and that things are the sons of heaven*. Language is only the instrument of science, and words are but the signs of ideas; I wish, however, that the instrument might be less apt to decay, and that signs might be permanent, like the things which they denote. ("Preface")

The ultimate foundation of a dictionary is an encyclopedia. It is within the system of real knowledge that the system of verbal knowledge is to be "fixed and ascertained." The completeness of system in the Elizabethan age was that of real as well as verbal knowledge: stylistic *variety* of the English language in Sidney, Hooker, Bacon, Raleigh, Spenser, Shakespeare was essentially a result of the *exhaustiveness* of the system of real knowledge of the period—"adequate to all purposes"—comprising theology, religion, natural knowledge, policy, war,

navigation, poetry, fiction, and common life. Illustrative citations as a whole were designed to be an alphabetized accumulation—a system transcending time—of verbal elegance and real wisdom. Fixture of pronunciation and orthography was instrumental to the stability and duration of a system of knowledge, including the verbal one. Chesterfield was deceived, obviously by Johnson's own comment on his unwilling "compromise," into setting up a distinction between "word books" and "dictionaries in the superior sense of that title"¹⁴—a distinction virtually unreal to Johnson himself. As a matter of fact, so-called "dictionaries of hard words" were essentially intended to supply possible lacunae in the reader's system of knowledge and to render it more complete and "general." For example, John Kersey's *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum: or, a General English Dictionary*, published in 1708, stated in its long subtitle that it comprehends

a Brief, but Emphatical and Clear Explication, of all sorts of difficult WORDS, that derive their Original from other Ancient and Modern Languages; as also, of all Terms relating to Arts and Sciences, both Liberal and Mechanical, viz. Divinity, Law, Philosophy, Physick, Surgery, Anatomy, Chymistry, Pharmacy, Botanicks, Mathematicks, Grammar, Rhetorick, Logick, Musick, Heraldry, Maritime Affairs, Military Discipline, Traffick, Husbandry, Gardening, Handicrafts, Confectionery, Coochery, Horsemanship, Hunting, Hawking, Fowling, Fishing, &c.,

to which are added "a Large Collection of WORDS and PHRASES, as well *Latin* as *English*, made use of, in our *Ancient Statutes. Old Records, Charters, Writs, and Processes at Law*," along with "an Interpretation of the proper Names of Men and Women, and several other remarkable

Particulars," the whole work being "Compil'd, and Methodically Digested, for the Benefit of *Young Students, Tradesmen, Artificers, Foreigners*, and others, who are desirous thoroughly to understand what they *Speak, Read, or Write*."¹⁵ In his preface Kersey refers those who are for "*making a more strict Search into the inmost Recesses of this Imperial Mine [the vast treasures of our English Tongue]*" to "*the last Edition of PHILLIPS'S DICTIONARY*"—Edward Phillips's *The New World of English Words* first published in 1658. Edward Phillips, having expressed its design as "*the General advancement of Learning and Arts*"—which inevitably brings to mind the ideal of Francis Bacon and the Royal Society—elaborates in his preface on the relationship between words and things in the total framework of knowledge thus:

The very Summe and Comprehension of all Learning in General, is chiefly reducible into these two grand Heads, *Words* and *Things*; and though the latter of these two be, by all men, not without just cause, acknowledged the more solid and substantial part of Learning; yet since, on the other side, it cannot be denied but that without *Language* (which is as it were the *vehiculum* or conveyancer of all good Arts) *things* cannot well be expressed or published to the World, it must be necessarily granted, that the one is little lesse necessary, and an inseparable concomittant of the other.¹⁶

If Phillips is somewhat apologetic for including English words in his "General Dictionary" of universal knowledge, Johnson is openly enthusiastic about enlarging a mere dictionary of the English language—and thus "compromising" its "naked science"—with so much information about things as to reach an encyclopedic magnitude:

When first I engaged in this work, I resolved to leave neither words nor things unexamined, and pleased myself with a prospect of the hours which I should revel away in feasts of literature, the obscure recesses of northern learning, which I should enter and ransack, the treasures with which I expected every search into those neglected mines to reward my labour. and the triumph with which I should display my acquisitions to mankind. When I had thus enquired into the original of words. I resolved to show likewise my attention to things; to pierce deep into every science, to enquire the nature of every substance of which I inserted the name, to limit every idea by a definition strictly logical, and exhibit every production of art or nature in an accurate description, that my book might be in place of all other dictionaries whether appellative or technical. ("Preface")

(Note here in particular the mining and conquest imagery in the second half of the first sentence carried over from Kersey and from his own "Plan.") His final goal is no less than to compile a dictionary of dictionaries "appellative or technical," the ultimate dictionary which will comprise the complete knowledge about words and things, a truly universal system of knowledge about the whole human universe.

II HISTORY

Follies of System-Building

Silently, history sneaks into the system. History cracks the system and opens it up, and then the system is unclosable for ever. The *kairos* of orderly accumulative construction of the eternal edifice of human knowledge begins to drift astray, like any other human project, through

the *chronos* of rise and fall, vicissitudes and decay. The ascent toward a heavenly system is curved down by the burden of humanity toward an earthly history. The vision of a glorious conquest is darkened, and the fate of a lexicographer is clouded:

But these were the dreams of a poet doomed at last to wake a lexicographer. I soon found that it is too late to look for instruments, when the work calls for execution, and that whatever abilities I had brought to my task, with those I must finally perform it. To deliberate whenever I doubted, to enquire whenever I was ignorant, would have protracted the undertaking without end, and, perhaps, without much improvement; for I did not find by my first experiments, that what I had not of my own was easily to be obtained: I saw that one enquiry only gave occasion to another, that book referred to book, that to search was not always to find, and to find was not always to be informed; and that thus to pursue perfection, was, like the first inhabitants of Arcadia, to chase the sun, which, when they had reached the hill where he seemed to rest, was still beheld at the same distance from them. ("Preface")

The time of constructing a system and the time of living a history never coincide: it is always either too late or too early. To pursue perfection which is forever unattainable is end-less. If ever a system can be raised at all, it can only be "in time finished, though not completed" (*ibid.*). The system of human knowledge never reaches its goal: the history of human endeavor never attains its end to rest in peace; system is forever unclosable, and history unstopable. And this is the eternal state for humanity in time. The "rest" is "folly, vanity, and affectation":

With this consequence [i.e. to "fix our language, and put a stop

to those alterations which time and chance have hitherto been suffered to make in it without opposition"] I will confess that I flattered myself for a while; but now begin to fear that I have indulged expectation which neither reason nor experience can justify. When we see men grow old and die at a certain time one after another, from century to century, we laugh at the elixir that promises to prolong life to a thousand years; and with equal justice may the lexicographer be derided, who being able to produce no example of a nation that has preserved their words and phrases from mutability, should imagine that his dictionary can embalm his language, and secure it from corruption and decay, that it is in his power to change sublunary nature, or clear the world at once from folly, vanity, and affectation. (*ibid.*)

And Johnson found around him countless systems, lexicographical, linguistic, theological, raised by human follies and vanities. One such system is found, quite appositely for the implication of its vanity and folly, at the grand Academy of Lagado in *Gulliver's Travels* (1724). Professors of language there pursue the project of constructing "an universal Language" or a "kind of artificial Converse," first by "leaving out [of language all] Verbs and Participles; because in Reality all things imaginable are but Nouns," and then secondly by "entirely abolishing all Words whatsoever . . . since Words are only Names for *Things*."¹⁷ They attempt to establish a *necessary* communicative system: nouns are in a more necessary relationship with things than verbs or participles because they represent things; things are in an absolute necessary relation—identity—with themselves, unlike words which merely represent or reflect them¹⁸. Such "universal Language" or "artificial Converse" is supposed to eradicate the defects of traditional,

conventional language—unavoidable ambiguity and miscommunication on one hand and the plurality of human languages on the other. The return to the origin of words in things and the ascent to an artificial system of necessary communicative signs are the two inseparable aspects of one and the same project to redeem the human language. In order to cure the “cheats of words,” and to repair the ruins of words after Babel, the zealous humanists either long for the original state of human language before the Fall, or seek for a future state after the Redemption. Both attempts aim to annihilate history, the one by tracing history back to its immobile origin where history did not yet exist, and the other by emancipating itself from history into a timeless artificial paradise. Both “etymological metaphysics” and “philosophical discourse,” both the quest for the Adamic language and the project for an artificial universal language are all trying to construct a natural language, a *necessary* language, in a heroic and hubrious defiance of human language, which is arbitrary, conventional, and profoundly historical.

Although justly reproved by Johnson for his “etymological extravagances,” Junius was only trying to point out, or rather invent, a semantic necessity or naturalness, in human language and thereby to rationalize and humanize it, when he “seriously derive[s] *dream* from *drama*, because *life is a drama*, and *a drama is a dream*; and . . . declares with a tone of defiance, that no man can fail to derive *moan*. from *μόνος*, *monos*, who considers that grief naturally loves to be *alone*” (“Preface”). John Wallis, whom Johnson quotes at length justly, again, with a grain of salt, asserted a total phonetic necessity operative between sounds and words: “In the native words of our tongue is to be found a great

agreement between the letters and the thing signified; and therefore the sounds of letters smaller, sharper, louder, closer, softer, stronger, clearer, more obscure, and more stridulous, do very often intimate the like effects in the things signified" ("Grammar").¹⁹ What John Horne Tooke tried to do in his *Diversions of Purley* (1786, 1798) was to remove the apparent irrationalities of language and to rediscover its original, purely rational structure by means of etymology (or, in Dugald Stewart's pejorative naming, "etymological metaphysics"). He places the origin of rationality not in things themselves nor in the operation of the mind, but in the historical etymons, or, in Johnson's phrase, "atoms of speech." He believed that truth "has been improperly imagined at the bottom of a well: it lies much nearer to the surface" (I, 10)—the surface which is specifically and exclusively linguistic; "what are called [the mind's] operations, are merely the operation of Language" (I, 51). The purely rational operations of language have been overlooked because the second aim of language—to "do it [i.e. the first aim to communicate our thoughts] with *dispatch*"—was neglected, and abbreviations as a sort of philosophical shorthand for a full rational operation were not regarded as such. By reducing the ramification of separate denotations of a word to its etymon which "continues to retain invariably one and the same single meaning" (I. 346-7), etymology reveals language as a rational and necessary system in which "there is nothing strictly arbitrary."²⁰ The effort of John Wilkins—an unofficial president of the Royal Society in its formative days in the late 1650s, and an official supervisor of Thomas Sprat's *History of the Royal Society* (1667)—was aimed at creating an artificial language which is in itself an encyclopedia of the universe. His *Essay Towards a Real Character, and a Philo-*

sophical Language (1668) set out to construct a new system of "real characters," or signs which are, unlike conventional verbal signs, in natural and necessary connection with things. Those "real characters," which, he says, "signify *things*, and not *words*," are governed by "certain invariable *Rules* for all such Grammatical *Derivations* and *Inflexions*, and such onely, as are natural and necessary," and therefore are "to have such *dependance* upon, and relation to, one another, as might be suitable to the nature of the things and notions which they represented." The "characters," "real" in the sense that they represent directly the nature of things, are also "universal" in that they signify in terms not of conventional signs of each separate national language, but of things themselves which are identical all over the world, that is, all through our "internal notion or apprehension" of things in the world. The introduction of his new characters may cause confusion in established orthographical systems, but Wilkins is convinced that these characters, being *real* and *universal*, are entitled to supplant all other "false" characters and to create anew a unified, solid system of true knowledge: "It cannot be denied, but that the *variety* of *Letters* is an appendix to the Curse of *Babel*, namely, the multitude and variety of *Languages*, . . .but this Consideration ought to be no discouragement: For supposing such a thing as is here proposed, could be well established, it would be the surest remedy that could be against the Curse of the Confusion, by rendring [*sic*] all other *Languages* and *Characters* useless."²¹

Leibniz vs. Locke

The archetypal opposition between the naturalist and the conventionalist conceptions of human language can be found between Locke and

Leibniz.²² For Leibniz the relation between thing and idea and the relation between idea and word are both natural and necessary. His notion of innate ideas provides a necessary link between thing and idea, and his notion of natural language does the same between idea and word. It is this unbroken chain of necessity that enables etymology to trace back the history, as philosophy once did, in quest of the origin of word in idea, and of idea in thing. By tracing back separate national languages, etymology finds a single "common origin for all nations" and a single "primitive root-language" (III. ii, 1). "There is something natural in the origin of words" (*ibid.*). For him as for Bacon and Wilkins, language is natural in the proportion that it directly represents natural objects; Leibniz praises German as a language "very rich and complete in real terms, to the envy of all other languages," and hence, "incompatible, not with philosophy, but with barbarous philosophy." Language is natural, also, as for Wallis, in the proportion that it retains a strict natural "analogy of sound with the disposition ["affections"] of the mind that accompanied the perception of the thing." Such a single radical language was a language spoken by Adam. Adam named things according to their nature. As the founder of the origin of words, he was the first etymologist, and as the discoverer of the nature of things, he was the first philosopher. As Bibliander says in *De ratione omnium linguarum et literarum* (1548), "that language is the most perfect whose words explain the natures of things. Such as that language is believed to have been, in which Adam imposed names on individual things." And as Robert South says in his sermon on Genesis (1662), Adam "came into the world a philosopher, which sufficiently appeared by his writing the nature of things upon their

names; he could view essences in themselves, and read forms without the comment of their respective properties. . . . An Aristotle was but the rubbish of an Adam, and Athens but the rudiments of Paradise." Adam could view essences in themselves, because, as Leibniz argues, "ideas and truths are innate in us" ("Preface") —perfectly knowable for the human understanding, at least before his Fall and exile from his epistemological paradise. Ultimately the study of language is a study of the human mind: "I truly believe that languages are the best mirror of the human mind, and that a precise analysis of the significations of words would tell us more than anything else about the operations of the understanding" (III, vii, 6). Etymology as an exact science of the origin of words is not only a study of their origins, but essentially an ambitious philosophical project to restore the human understanding to its *original* and *natural* state of perfection before the Fall. Just as Bacon's scheme for a Great Instauration—restoration—of man's past perfection is simultaneously a blueprint for progressive construction of a New Atlantis in the future, so does Leibniz's philosophy of language belong at once to the mystical tradition of an Adamic language before the Fall, and to the modern attempt to create a philosophical language after the Redemption.

John Locke, on the other hand, began by severing the relation between word and idea, and the relation between idea and thing. He separated word from idea by regarding language as a man-made arbitrary convention, and idea from thing by denying the doctrine of innate ideas. "Words . . . came to be made use of by men as the signs of their ideas; not by any natural connexion that there is between particular articulate sounds and certain ideas, for then there would be but one

language amongst all men; but by a voluntary imposition, whereby such a word is made arbitrarily the mark of such an idea" (III, ii, 1). Thereby Locke rejects Wallis's theory of natural phoneticism (expressiveness) ("since sounds have no natural connexion with our ideas . . . they are all equally perfect" as arbitrary signs for ideas [III, ix, 4]), and, more importantly, he also rejects the doctrine of the Adamic language as a natural language, and the Adamic knowledge as a natural knowledge: "what liberty Adam had at first to make any complex ideas of *mixed modes* by no other pattern but his own thoughts, the same have all men ever since had. And the same necessity of conforming his ideas of *substances* to things without him, as to archetypes made by nature, that Adam was under, if he would not wilfully impose upon himself, the same are all men ever since under too. The same liberty also that Adam had of affixing any new name to any idea, the same has any one still" (III, vi, 51). Locke democratizes the human language: he dismisses an illustrious ancestor—the first man—from whom we might be accused of having fallen away. Locke may even seem to have done away with human history itself, declaring the same liberty, the same necessity, the same condition for all humanity. However, quite paradoxically, he actually rescued thereby the concept of history which was totally denied in Leibniz's philosophy of "historical" etymology. It is Leibniz who was determined to overcome and annihilate the reality of human history by tracing it backward to its immobile natural origin or by accelerating it forward to its equally immobile ultimate goal. Locke refuses to abolish history. Just as words only gradually "came to be made use of by men" as arbitrary signs for ideas, so ideas themselves are not innate, but only gradually come to an empty "*dark room*"

of the human mind, which is "not much unlike a closet wholly shut from light, with only some little openings left. to let in external visible resemblances. or ideas of things without" (II, xi, 17). The mind is a blank place in which takes place a gradual *process* of reception, accumulation and formation of externally derived ideas into a system of knowledge. Understanding for Locke is not a static, *a priori* given, rational faculty, but a dynamic process man experiences in time. His epistemology is as profoundly historical as Leibniz's was anti-historical. His method was professedly a "historical, plain method," which will "give [an] account of the ways whereby our understanding *comes to attain* those notions of things we have" (Introduction, 2; italics mine). Even Adam had to experience the gradual process of coming to know things and name them, like all other human beings must do in time. Human understanding as an ongoing activity, knowledge as a process of accumulating ideas, never ends as long as it remains as such: it is always in history, in time. Knowledge is an act, not an end-product. The process never ends—therefore, an absolute truth is never achieved.²³

To recognize a history is to mistrust a system. Recognition of the temporal process in which human knowledge is always a half-knowledge and a half-truth, restrains us from the folly of dreaming of a complete system, finished, self-enclosed, eternal. Instead of a single radical language, whether natural or artificial, Locke acknowledges the reality of the multiplicity of human languages; he speaks not of a moment of the birth of a language, but of an already established linguistic order into which man is born. The only difference he sees between Adam's language and ours is that "in places where men in society have already established a language amongst them, the significations of words are very

warily and sparingly to be altered. . . . in communication with others, it is necessary that we conform the ideas we make the vulgar words of any language stand for to their known proper significations, (. . .) or else to make known that new signification we apply them to" (III, vi, 51). Because of the absence of any natural connexion among words, ideas, and things, their "unnatural" connexions, inherited conventional ones or individually established ones, should all the more be rigorously defined and observed. Double conformity between word and idea, and between idea and thing is the essential condition for entering into the "common tie of society" (III, i, 1), the "knot" of verbal communication and mutual understanding. After all, human language as well as human knowledge are confined within history, which is circumscribed by the Fall on one hand and by the Redemption on the other. The malady of words—arbitrariness of language—is greater than any possible artificial cures; one's duty to one's fellow social beings in time is greater than any personal despair over a lost paradise or prophesy of a paradise regained. "Our business here," Locke reminds us, "is not to know all things, but those which concern our conduct"; "we may learn to content ourselves with what is attainable by us in this state" (Introduction, 6, 5)—in the eternal state of human conditions within the cosmic framework of "the vast ocean of Being" and of words, without presuming to know more than we can nor despairing over the little that we do know. As he firmly believes, "the Candle that is set up in us shines bright enough for all our purposes" (Introduction, 5).

When applied to linguistics and lexicography, Locke's epistemology meant a denial of the possibility of radical linguistic reform, a plea for respect for common usage. Locke sharply distinguishes the natural

imperfections in language and its unnatural abuses, saying that "Besides the imperfection that is naturally in language, and the obscurity and confusion that is so hard to be avoided in the use of words, there are several *wilful* faults and neglects which men are guilty of in this way of communication, whereby they render these signs less clear and distinct in their signification than naturally they need to be" (III, x, 1). Setting up a similar distinction, Johnson defines the limits in which the lexicographer is to be given the authority to "fix and ascertain":

Every language has its anomalies, which, though inconvenient, and in themselves once unnecessary, must be tolerated among the imperfections of human things, and which require only to be registered; that they may not be increased, and ascertained, that they may not be confounded: but every language has likewise its improprieties and absurdities, which it is the duty of the lexicographer to correct or proscribe. ("Preface")

Where Locke has said that the abuses should be "remedied by definitions, setting down that collection of simple ideas, which they shall stand for; and then using the terms steadily and constantly for that precise collection" (IV, iii, 20), Johnson speaks of the necessity to "limit every idea by a definition strictly logical, and exhibit every production of art or nature in an accurate description" (*ibid.*). The *Dictionary* defines *sign* as "1. A token of any thing; that by which any thing is shown," and actually quotes Locke: "When any one uses any term, he may have in his mind a determined idea which he makes it the *sign* of, and to which he should keep it steadily annexed." The *Dictionary* definition of *word* quotes Locke again on the abuses of words ("Among men who confound ideas with words. there must be endless

disputes, wrangling, and jargon"), and makes clear his implied notion of correct usage by way of quoting South: "As conceptions are the images of things to the mind within itself, so are *words* or names the marks of those conceptions to the minds of them we converse with."²⁴ Linguistic anomalies, which may have been "once unnecessary" in a paradise without history, are ineradicably ingrained in the human condition, in man's "sublunary nature." All the more for that reason, arbitrary connexions among thing, idea and word, which are also the vital "common tie of society," should be strictly conserved as the only possible basis of constancy and stability available to man.²⁵ That is to say, the notion of constancy and stability is historical: they do not belong to any absolute permanence of essence nor to man's universal rational faculty, but rather to the collective will and commitment to preserve a tradition, a society. The conformity of word to idea necessary in communication is homologous to that conformity of individual members to their community necessary in spiritual social communion. Usage, or historical codification of innumerable individual discourses, is the only "fixed" and fixable standard of human language.

Against the Academic Trend

In spite of Johnson's sense of "compromise" and sacrifice of "naked science" of lexicography for the sake of common "usefulness," and also in spite of his conscious emulation of the continental academies, it is by his notion of usage that he, somewhat unexpectedly and consistently, opposes the idea of a British academy.²⁶ Not to mention John Wilkins, who was so sanguine about his plan for a universal and philosophical language that he concluded that "Though I have not as yet had

opportunity of making any tryals, yet I doubt not, but that one of a good Capacity and Memory, may in one Months [*sic*] space attain to a good readiness of expressing his mind this way [in his philosophical language], either in the *Character or Language*" (*An Essay*, p. 454), the supporters of the project for a British Academy were, quite naturally, optimistic about the feasibility of the project. Dr. George Harris, for instance, voiced his opinion in 1752 that the "Uniformity in Spelling might easily be effected . . . [which] would alone be sufficient to preserve our Language intire to the most distant Times." Having in mind the existence of the continental academies, and being excited about what a "one-man academy" like Johnson's could do to equal the achievement of those academies,²⁷ Robert Nares could not resist asking in 1781, "had these authors [i.e. Dr. Johnson, Bishop Lowth, Joseph Priestly, and James "Hermes" Harris], who have separately endeavoured to promote the study of the English tongue, united themselves into a Society for that purpose, what might we not have expected from their combined genius and industry?" Nares's sentiment was largely shared in the period, and the Rev. W. Tremayne's modest estimate in 1785 of the time required for a total reform of the English language initiated by an academy and diffused to the lowest class was only "half a century" at most.²⁸ Johnson's comments on the plan for a British academy were rather exceptional for their persistent negativity against such a generally favorable consensus of stated opinions during the period. In the first version of "Life of Roscommon" in 1748, Johnson refers to Roscommon's "design of instituting a society for the refinement of the *English* language," in which "*Mr Dryden* was a principal assistant," and ascribes its failure to "the commotions which

were produced by *King James's* endeavours to introduce alterations in religion." He also mentions a similar design, obviously by Swift, under the ministry of the Earl of Oxford, which turned out to be equally unsuccessful owing to his "necessity of attending only to political disquisitions, of defending the conduct of the administration, and forming parties in the parliament." Such a design was, Johnson quotes Fenton approvingly, "a design, of which it is much easier to conceive an agreeable idea, than any rational hope ever to see it brought to perfection."²⁹ In the second enlarged version of the "Life of Roscommon" in *The Lives of the English Poets* in 1779, Johnson restates the reason for the impracticability of the scheme on a broader, more general and "rational" basis: besides "the contentious turbulence of King James's reign," he now points out the difference in national character and political temperament between the French and the English:

In this country an academy could be expected to do but little. If an academician's place were profitable, it would be given by interest; if attendance were gratuitous, it would be rarely paid, and no man would endure the least disgust. Unanimity is impossible, and debate would separate the assembly.

But suppose the philological decree made and promulgated, what would be its authority? In absolute governments, there is, sometimes, a general reverence paid to all that has the sanction of power, and the countenance of greatness. How little this is the state of our country needs not to be told. We live in an age in which it is a kind of publick sport to refuse all respect that cannot be enforced. The edicts of an English academy would, probably, be read by many, only that they might be sure to disobey them.

That our language is in perpetual danger of corruption cannot

be denied; but what prevention can be found? The present manners of the nation would deride authority; and, therefore, nothing is left but that every writer should criticize himself. (VII. 167)

In the "Life of Swift" it is by his criterion of experience, and, more importantly, his knowledge of human nature or general (as opposed to national) psychology that Johnson dismisses Swift's *Proposal* (a "petty treatise" as it is called in the "Preface"), which was "written without much knowledge of the general nature of language, and without accurate inquiry into the history of other tongues. The certainty and stability which, contrary to all experience, he thinks attainable, he proposes to secure by instituting an academy; the decree of which every man would have been willing, and many would have been proud to disobey, and which, being renewed by successive elections, would, in a short time, have differed from itself" (VIII. 202). In an earlier satiric portraiture of an archetypal literary critic, a Dick Minim (*The Idler*, Nos. 60-61, June 1759), the scheme for an academy had been reduced to nothing more than a form of human folly and vanity, a dream that will never come true "till some happy conjunction of the planets shall dispose our princes or ministers to make themselves immortal by such an academy" (IV, 330).³⁰ In the "Preface" to the *Dictionary* itself, an immediate cause for his anti-academism is given in the form of linguistic nationalism; emulation and aggressive rivalry with the continental academies for the same worthy cause are overruled for the principle of English liberty and independence from any form of absolute authority: "If an academy should be established for the cultivation of our stile . . . I, who can never wish to see dependance multiplied, hope

the spirit of *English* liberty will hinder or destroy [it]" ("Preface").

Rediscovery of History

The ultimate reason, however, lies much deeper. Academism with its unanimous attempt to "fix and ascertain" a human language—which was originally Johnson's own lofty aim—was essentially an attempt to deny the reality of human history. In trying to overcome history, it is trying at the same time to deprive man of his human condition, time, and thereby to make him some other being than himself. It is an impossible attempt, and an immoral act; it cannot transcend humanity in history, and it should not. A transvaluation takes place: history, which has been the distress of humanity, is now its proof. Life passes in time until it stops and "fixes" itself in death; it is human life only in so far as it is always passing in time before it is "fixed" by death. Human impermanence and imperfections have placed us below a state of divine permanence and perfection; now, the permanent mobility of human life raises us above the permanent immobility of death. It is impossible to salvage humanity from history:

If the changes that we fear be thus irresistible, what remains but to acquiesce with silence. as in the other insurmountable distresses of humanity? it remains that we retard what we cannot repel, that we palliate what we cannot cure. Life may be lengthened by care, though death cannot be ultimately defeated: tongues, like governments, have a natural tendency to degenerate; we have long preserved our constitution, let us make some struggles for our language. ("Preface")

And it is immoral to sever humanity from history, for the "internal

causes" of historical changes are inherent in human beings, and history is in fact none other than their fullest self-expression and self-embodiment:

There are likewise internal causes [for linguistic changes] equally forcible. The language most likely to continue long without alteration, would be that of a nation raised a little, and but a little, above barbarity, secluded from strangers, and totally employed in procuring the conveniencies of life; either without books, or, like some of the *Mahometan* countries, with very few: men thus busied and unlearned, having only such words as common use requires. would perhaps long continue to express the same notions by the same signs. But no such constancy can be expected in a people polished by arts, and classed by subordination, where one part of the community is sustained and accommodated by the labour of the other. Those who have much leisure to think, will always be enlarging the stock of ideas, and every increase of knowledge, whether real or fancied, will produce new words, or combinations of words. When the mind is unchained from necessity, it will range after convenience; when it is left at large in the fields of speculation, it will shift opinions; as any custom is disused, the words that expressed it must perish with it; as any opinion grows popular, it will innovate speech in the same proportion as it alters practice. (*ibid.*)

The "constancy" is monotony of life chained to unchangeable necessities, and the "change" is variety in life freed from them. It is important to note that Johnson is *not*, after all, setting up here an opposition between the barbarous necessity and the civilized leisure, nor is he voicing an optimistic belief in progress from the one toward the other. Mobility in time, and concomittant changes are the universal condition

of being for the barbarous and the civilized alike. Inevitable changes in the macroscale of human history are only a result of the microscale mobility of the human mind from one moment to another. The reality of human history is finally reducible to the reality of the movement of the mind, its irrepressible commotions and agitations. Thus, history is a branch of general psychology of the human race. Negation of history means negation of the life of the human mind. Immobility, whether fixure or constancy, is a death to the mind defined as a motion, as an activity, as a life. For, as Imlac says in *Rasselas*, "Our minds, like our bodies, are in continual flux; something is hourly lost, and something acquired. . . . while we glide along the stream of time, whatever we leave behind us, is always lessening, and that which we approach increasing in magnitude. Do not suffer life to stagnate; it will grow muddy for want of motion: commit yourself again to the current of the world." The apparent opposition between the barbarous and the civilized is in truth one between the biological and the psychological, the animal and the human. Rasselas, in the happy valley where his biological needs are fully met, has yet to supplicate: "I fancy, that I should be happy, if I had something to pursue. . . . I have already enjoyed too much; give me something to desire," something for the mind to move toward in order to stay alive in that unfinishable process (I, 275-6, 205).

The implication of all this for the lexicographer? That "no dictionary of a living tongue ever can be perfect." While "it is hastening to publication," while the dictionary glides along the stream of language in time, "some words are budding, and some falling away" ("Preface"). The dictionary could only "in time be finished, though not completed";

by the same token, the history of Rasselas could only end with "the conclusion, in which nothing is concluded" (I. 309). Johnson admits his defeat: "I have only failed in an attempt which no human powers have hitherto completed." His failure is predestined, and secretly intentional. The "powers" that could complete the attempt would be inhuman; language immutably fixed would only be a dead one. Man moves, language moves, in time, perhaps toward some distant end, but that end can, and must, never be attained, for then it would be an end to the process of moving which has defined human existence in time, human history and human language as they are lived in the only way they are livable for man, end-lessly. Time is both man's misery and glory. Human beings live their history as forever unfinishable, in pursuit of a system as forever unclosable, and in that unstoppable process can humanity be human. The lexicographer's stupor under "unenvied drugery" has been animated, but his fervor for a "glorious conquest" has been abated, and both extremes of hope and despair finally subside into a calm acceptance of "what is attainable by us in this state":

I have protracted my work till most of those I wished to please, have sunk into the grave, and success and miscarriage are empty sounds: I therefore dismiss it with frigid tranquillity, having little to fear or hope from censure or from praise. ("Preface")

Conclusion SYSTEM OF HISTORY

That we cannot perfect a system, that we are forever situated within the ongoing process of history, is for Johnson another system of different order—that is, a moral system of human history. In 1738, writing to

Edward Cave about his English translation of Jean Pierre Crousaz's critique of Pope's "Essay on Man"—*A Commentary on Mr. Pope's Principles of Morality, or, "Essay on Man"* (1742)—and of Crousaz's examen, "a thing distinct from the Commentary," Johnson gives his assessment: "I think the Examen should be push'd forward with the utmost expedition. Thus, This day &c. An Examen of Mr. Pope's Essay &c. containing a succinct account of the Philosophy of Mr. Leibniz or the System of the Fatalists, with a confutation of their Opinions, and an Illustration of the doctrine of Freewill."³¹ The cosmic "chain of being" of optimistic deists such as Bolingbroke, Pope, and Jenyns is an inhumane fatalistic system of fixed appointment which denies the possibility, and therefore the very basis for moral obligation, to change for the better one's condition on earth. Such a system is opposed to the fundamental belief of orthodoxy: one was once free to fall, and for that very reason is now one able and morally bound to save one's self. The fatalistic system fixes and freezes to death the human freedom and necessity to move, in a journey through the realm of economic and social activities as well as in a pilgrimage through the realm of religious duties. The traveller overcomes cruel fixture, changing his state through education in the secular world:

To entail irreversible poverty upon generation after generation only because the ancestor happened to be poor, is in itself cruel, if not unjust, and is wholly contrary to *the maxims of a commercial nation*, which always suppose and promote *a rotation of property*, and offer every individual a chance of mending his condition by his diligence. Those who communicate literature to the son of a poor man, consider him as one not born to poverty, but to the necessity

of deriving a better fortune from himself. In this attempt, as in others, many fail, and many succeed. Those that fail will feel their misery more acutely; but since poverty is now confessed to be such a calamity as cannot be born without the opiate of insensibility, I hope the happiness of those whom education enables to escape from it, may turn the balance against that exacerbation which the others suffer. ("Review of Soame Jenyns' *Free Enquiry*," p. 175; italics mine)

(Note that the maxim of "a civilized nation"—the "progress" in knowledge and concomitant inevitable linguistic changes—is here transferred unto an economic plane of "a commercial nation" with its fundamental maxim of "rotation of property.") Likewise through education in holy revelation, the pilgrim resists the sort of sacrilege which deists practice of regarding humanity as a mindless puppet at the mercy of cruel sportings of a superior being, and rather sets out on a pilgrimage, waiting for the ultimate time of God's judgment:

That every man to whom those instructions shall be imparted may know, that he can never ultimately injure himself by benefiting others, or ultimately by injuring others benefit himself; but that however the lot of the good and bad may be huddled together in the seeming confusion of our present state, the time shall undoubtedly come, when the most virtuous will be most happy. (*ibid.*, p. 305)

That ultimate time may or may not come, but the vision of an ultimate time is enough to sustain us through "the seeming confusion of our present state." The vision of a goal directs one toward itself; it rationalizes one's motion in time, and moralizes it into a spiritual pilgrimage. However, when seen from within history, the vision of a goal is recipro-

cally sustained by human motion itself. One is always moving in time; therefore, one must be moving toward something, toward some distant goal which one is bound to reach in the end. The existence of an end is rationalized by the reality of the human movement in time; it is moralized by the human need for a meaningful end. Reciprocal rationalization and moralization of human history and its end is the essence of the reality of human being in time. Just as the temporality of human existence necessitates and is necessitated by the notion of, and the faith in, a final goal, the Redemption of humanity out of time, so it necessitates and is necessitated by the notion of an origin of a journey, the Fall of humanity into time. Human history is a moral history which began with the fall in time and shall end with the salvation out of time. *In the meantime*, in the middle of a pilgrimage, one moves, one lives, enjoying some freedom, accumulating some knowledge, entertaining some dream of constructing an eternal system, imagining a distant goal, believing in an ultimate moment when at long last one can stop and rest in peace. Such is the way human beings have always been living their history: this is the eternal condition of human existence in time, the eternal order of things for humanity on earth. It is, in short, an eternal moral system of human history.

NOTES

- 1 Bertrand H. Bronson, "The Double Tradition of Dr. Johnson," *ELH*, XVIII, no. 2 (1957), 90-106.
- 2 "Boerhaave" in Vol. VI of *The Works of Samuel Johnson* (Oxford, 1825; AMS Press, n. d.), 280. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations hereafter from Johnson are from this edition with the volume and page numbers in parentheses.
- 3 For an excellent detailed discussion of the topic, see Richard B. Schwartz,

- Samuel Johnson and the New Science* (Madison, Milwaukee: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1971), to which I am much indebted in this study.
- 4 *The Literary Magazine*, No. XV (June 15—July 15, 1757), 306, in Vol. II of the facsimile edition, ed. by Donald D. Eddy (New York: Garland, 1978).
 - 5 Johnson's letter to Thomas Warton, dated Feb. 1, 1755, quoting from the Preface to Warburton's edition of Shakespeare, in *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, collected and ed. by R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), Vol. I, 58. In fact Johnson misquotes Warburton's "this wide sea of words." Warburton's passage is given below, which shows a close interrelationship perceived by him (and by Johnson) among the establishment of literary texts, the logical and philosophical reason, the usages of authorized writers as a basis for grammar and dictionary, and the function of an academy for establishing purity and stability of language: "its [i.e. the English language's] being yet destitute of a Test or Standard to apply to, in cases of doubt or difficulty, shews how much it wants that [critical] attention. For we have neither GRAMMAR nor DICTIONARY. neither Chart nor Compass, to guide us through this wide sea of Words. And indeed how should we? since both are to be composed and finished on the Authority of our best established Writers. But their Authority can be of little use till the Text hath been correctly settled, and the Phraseology critically examined. As, then, by these aids, a *Grammar* and *Dictionary*, planned upon the best rules of Logic and Philosophy, (and none but such will deserve the name) are to be procured; the forwarding of this will be a general concern: For, as *Quintilian* observes, 'Verborum proprietas ac differentia omnibus, qui sermonem curæhabent, debet esse communis.' By this way, the *Italians* have brought their tongue to a degree of Purity and Stability which no living Language ever attained unto before" (*The Works of Shakespeare*, ed. by Alexander Pope and William Warburton [1747; AMS Press, 1968], Vol. I, xxv-xxvi).
 - 6 The octavo edition of *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1756; Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1985).
 - 7 "A Short Scheme for compiling a new Dictionary of the English Language"—hereafter "Short Scheme" in reference—in *The R. B. Adam Library Relating to Dr. Johnson and His Era*, Vol. II, reproduced in Daisuke Nagashima, *Johnson's "Dictionary of the English Language"—its Historical Significance* (Tokyo: Taishukan, 1983), Appendix i, p. 278.

- 8 Swift's attitude toward the project of linguistic reform is much more complex than it seems. Indeed his "Proposal" seems to be completely undermined by the ironic description in *Gulliver's Travels* of "an Academy of Projectors" with their "Schemes of putting all Arts, Sciences, Languages, and Mechanics upon a new Foot." However, it is quite significant that Swift's attack is specifically and almost exclusively aimed at the project pursued at the School of Languages to purify language into a system of nouns and nothing else, or, better still, to "entirely abolish all Words whatsoever," and thus to create "an universal Language" of things—that is, the project for a "natural" language of things or the Adamic language, which is to be discussed below, pp. 76–77.
- 9 Allen Walker Read, "Suggestions for an Academy in England in the Latter Half of the Eighteenth Century," *Modern Philology*, Vol. 36 (1938–9), 156. For this paragraph on the tradition of linguistic academism, I consulted—besides the original works cited—the following: "Académie," *Grand dictionnaire encyclopédique* (Larousse); Tetsuro Hayashi, *A History of English Lexicography* (Tokyo: Kaibunsha, 1968), Chap. VII; Daisuke Nagashima, *ibid.*, Chap. III; Allen Walker Read, *ibid.*, which is designed to be a supplement to H. M. Flasdieck, *Der Gedanken einer englischen Sprachakademie in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Jena, 1928); O. F. Emerson, "John Dryden and a British Academy," *Proceedings of the British Academy*. Vol. X (1921–23), 45–58; James G. Basker, "Minim and the Great Cham: Smollett and Johnson on the Prospect of an English Academy," *Johnson and his Age*, ed. James Engell ("Harvard English Studies" 12; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 1984). 137–161; A. S. Collins, "Language 1660–1784," *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*, Vol. IV, *From Dryden to Johnson*, ed. Boris Ford (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1982). 165–181; J. Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish, *The Western Intellectual Tradition: From Leonardo to Hegel* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), Chap. 10; Shoichi Watanabe, "English Academy and the Eighteenth Century," *The Rising Generation*, Vol. CXVII, No. 8 (Nov. 1, 1971), 13–4.
- 10 *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755; Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968).
- 11 *The Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language* (1747); the facsimile edition ed. by R. C. Alston ("English Linguistics 1500–1800," No. 223; Menston, England: The Scholar Press, 1970), p. 16.
- 12 *The World*, No. 100 (Nov. 28, 1754) in *Johnson: the Critical Heritage*, ed. James

Boulton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 97

- 13 *The World*, Nos 100, 101 (Dec. 5, 1754) in *Johnson: the Critical Heritage*, pp. 95-102.

- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 96.

- 15 John Kersey, *Dictionarium Anglo-Britanicum* (1708), No. 156 of *English Linguistics 1500-1800*, ed. R. C. Alston (Menston, England: The Scholar Press, 1969). Here it is inevitable that one should be reminded of another, somewhat more illustrious, system-builder of human knowledge—Walter Shandy in *Tristram Shandy*, with his equally formidable list of arts and sciences:

Thus,—thus my fellow labourers and associates in this great harvest of our learning, now ripening before our eyes; thus it is, by slow steps of casual increase, that our knowledge physical, metaphysical, physiological, polemical, nautical, mathematical, ænigmatical, technical, biographical, romantical, chemical, and obsterical, with fifty other branches of it, (most of 'em ending, as these do, in *ical*) have, for these two last centuries and more, gradually been creeping upwards towards that *Ακμή* of their perfections, from which, if we may form a conjecture from the advances of these last seven years, we cannot possibly be far off (*Tristram Shandy*, I, xxi).

Anticipating the fate of Johnson's system, and the argument of the present essay, Walter Shandy finds to his distress that

the proudest pyramid of them all, which wealth and science have erected, has lost its apex, and stands obtruncated in the traveller's horizon. . . . The fairest towns that ever the sun rose upon, are now no more: the names only are left, and those (. . .) are falling themselves by piece-meals to decay, and in length of time will be forgotten, and involved with every thing in a perpetual night: the world itself, brother Toby, must—must come to an end (V, iii).

Cf. My essay, "The Sense of a Middle: a Study of *Tristram Shandy*," *Doshisha Studies in English*, No. 36 (September 1984), 1-56

- 16 Edward Phillips, *The New World of English Words*, No. 162 of *English Linguistics 1500-1800* (1969).
- 17 Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* in *The Writings of Jonathan Swift*, ed. R. A. Greenberg and W. B. Piper ("Norton Critical Edition"; New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), pp. 158-9.

18 Cf. Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, Aphorism, Book I, chap. 1x: "There are, however, in words certain degrees of distortion and error. One of the least faulty kinds is that of names of substances, especially of lowest species and well-deduced (for the notion of *chalk* and of *mud* is good, of *earth* bad); a more faulty kind is that of actions, as *to generate*, *to corrupt*, *to alter*; the most faulty is of qualities (except such as are the immediate objects of the sense) as *heavy*, *light*, *rare*, *dense*, and the like. Yet in all these cases some notions are of necessity a little better than others, in proportion to the greater variety of subjects that fall within the range of the human sense" (ed. Fulton H. Anderson ["The Library of Liberal Arts"; Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill, 1960], p. 58); *The Advancement of Learning*, I, iv, 3: "It seems to me that Pygmalion's frenzy is a good emblem or portraiture of this vanity: for words are but the images of matter; and except they have life of reason and invention, to fall in love with them is all one as to fall in love with a picture" (ed. Arthur Johnson [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974], p. 26).

19 To give an example of Wallis's etymological practice:

St in like manner implies strength, but in a less degree, so much only as is sufficient to preserve what has been already communicated, rather than acquire any new degree; as if it were derived from the Latin *sto*: for example, *stand*, *stay*, that is, to remain, or to prop; *staff*, *stay*, that is, to oppose; *stop*, *to stuff*, *stifle*, *to stay*, that is, to stop; *a stay*, that is, an obstacle; *stick*, *stut*, *stutter*, *stammer*, *stagger*, *stickle*, *stick*, *stake*, a sharp pale, and any thing deposited at play; *stock*, *stem*, *sling*, *to sting*, *slink*, *stich*, *stud*, *stanchion*, *stub*, *stubble*, *to stub* up, *stump*, whence *stumble*, *stalk*, *to stalk*, *step*, *to stamp* with the feet, whence *to stamp*, that is, to make an impression, and a stamp; *stow*, *to stow*, *to bestow*, *steward* or *stoward*, *stead*, *steady*, *steadfast*, *stable*, *a stable*, *a stall*, *to stall*, *stool*, *stall*, *still*, *stall*, *stallage*, *stall*, *stage*, *still* adj. and *still* adv. *stale*, *stout*, *sturdy*, *steed*, *stoat*, *stallion*, *stiff*, *stark-dead*, *to starve* with hunger or cold; *stone*, *steel*, *stern*, *stanch*, *to stanch* blood, *to stare*, *steep*, *steeple*, *stair*, *standard*, a stated measure, *stately*. In all these, and perhaps some others, *st* denotes something firm and fixed. (Quoted in "Grammar")

For Johnson, Wallis's remarks are "ingenious, but of more subtlety than solidity, and such as perhaps might in every language be enlarged without end," and Wallis simply "goes too far in quest of originals" (*ibid.*). Johnson himself would never go

"too far in quest of originals." Quite significantly, the section on etymology—the longest section taking up nearly half the space of the whole "Grammar"—is divided between the two sharply contrasted parts: the second half quoting Wallis's theory with occasional brief negative comments is preceded by the first half in which Johnson first pronounces that "etymology teaches the deduction of one word from another, and the various modifications by which the sense of the same word is diversified; as *horse, horses; I love, I loved*," and proceeds to treat articles, noun cases and numbers, pronoun, verbs (active, neuter, passive modes; regular and irregular inflections), and "derivation" of nouns from verb (*love* from *to love*), of verbs from noun (*lengthen* from *length*), of adjective from noun (*wealthy* from *wealth*), of noun from adjective (*whiteness, falsehood, warmth, freedom*, etc.). That is to say, Johnson's etymology is, here again, a science of "derivation" of one word from another through the rational system of grammatical regularity.

- 20 In the *Dictionary* entry of *from* Johnson lists twenty different meanings (privation, reception, procession, transmission, abstraction, etc.) plus twenty-two examples of "syntactic"—idiomatic—combinations with other words such as *above, afar, behind*, etc. (which incidentally Tooke quotes in I, 345-6). Tooke asserts, on the other hand, that "I take the work FROM (preposition, if you chuse to call it so)—to have as clear, as precise, and at all times as uniform and unequivocal a meaning, as any word in the language. FROM means merely BEGINNING, and nothing else"—which original meaning is preserved in its purity in its etymon, "the Anglo-saxon and Gothic Noun *Fram, FROM, Beginning, Origin, Source, fountain, author*" (I, 341-2). Quotations from *The Diversions of Purley* are from The Scolar Press facsimile in two volumes, No. 127 of *English Linguistics 1500-1800* (1968).

W. K. Wimsatt establishes an intellectual kinship between Johnson and Tooke for their shared attitude, "general among eighteenth-century grammarians, that language is a logical institution, pristinely perfect but debased through usage and needing to be restored and preserved by reason." Wimsatt does so quite facilely, as it seems, on the mere strength of Johnson's statement that "languages must be formed quite slavishly on the model of the classics, if our writings are to endure," and without examining the differences crucial to the philosophy of language between the implications of the "classical" (historical)

and the "rational" (*The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson* [New Haven: Yale U. P., 1941], p. 111). Cf. Hans Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England, 1780-1860* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton U. P., 1967); Shoichi Watanabe, *History of English Linguistics*, Vol. XIII of *Outline of English Linguistics*, ed. Akira Ota (Tokyo: Taishukan, 1975).

- 21 Quotations are from *An Essay Toward a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language*, No. 119 of *English Linguistics 1500-1800* (1968), pp. 21, 13.

For an example of Wilkins's method, take *gudgeon* (defined in *Concise Oxford Dictionary* as "n. Small freshwater fish used as bait; credulous person"). In order to find a "real character" of *gudgeon* in Wilkins's philosophical language, first you have to consult the Alphabetical Dictionary at the end of the *Essay*, and know that within the categorical classification of the universe it is placed in the section Fish, IX, 11 in the second part of the book which contains "a regular enumeration and description of all those things and notions to which names are to be assigned" (p. 22). The section IX, "SQUAMOUS RIVER FISH" lists *gudgeon* as belonging to the category of "*Least kind of River Fishes*," living "more towards the *Lower parts of the water*; near the *ground*"; and having "on the back one fin; with a kind of beard on the *mouth*" and "the greater" than lauch, the other member of the subdivision. Thus the fish is located in the true logical system of the natural universe. Now, in order to represent the fish in its real character in universal language, you have to turn to Part IV "Concerning a real Character, and a Philosophical Language," which first teaches you the basic alphabet, each letter representing the basic category: genus in capitals and species in small letters; and the order: "syntax" and grammar of word formation; and then tell you (finally!) that "If Zana be *Salmon*, viz. the second species in the first Nine, them [sic] Zlana must signifie *Gudgeon*, viz. the second in the second Nine; or the eleventh Species under that Difference" (pp. 142-3, 415).

It is a relief to find in Johnson's *Dictionary* a useful common-sense definition of *gudgeon*:

1. A small fish found in brooks and rivers, easily caught, and therefore made a proverbial name for a man easily cheated.

'Tis true, no turbets dignify my boards;

But *gudgeons*, flounders, what my Thames affords.

Pope.

This he did to draw you in, like so many *gudgeons*, to swallow his false arguments. *Swift*.

2. Something to be caught to a man's own disadvantage; a bait, an allurement: *gudgeons* being commonly used as baits for Pike.

But fish not with this melancholy bait,

For the fool's *gudgeon*, this opinion. *Shakes. Merch. of Ven.*

Notice here particularly that Johnson's definition leans toward metaphorical meanings of the word rather than toward factual, encyclopedic information about the thing itself: the latter half of the first entry explains the proverbial usage of the word, and two of the three citations use the word metaphorically. In this connection one may well recall that W. K. Wimsatt in his "Johnson's Dictionary" stresses Johnson's notion of "the liability of scientific terms to undergo the metaphorical process" and "a characteristic direction of reference, from the physical toward the social, psychological, and spiritual" (*New Lights on Dr. Johnson: Essays on the Occasion of his 250th Birthday*, ed. Frederick W. Hillis [New Haven: Yale U. P., 1959], p. 88). (Also see his *Philosophic Words: a Study of Style and Meaning in "The Rambler" and "Dictionary" of Samuel Johnson* [New Haven: Yale U. P., 1948].)

Jorge Luis Borges gives a perceptive insight into the fundamental nature of Wilkins's whole project, saying that "the words in the analytic language of John Wilkins are not stupid arbitrary symbols: each one of the letters which compose them is significant, like those of the Sacred Scripture for Cabalists. Mauthner observes that children would be able to learn that language without knowing that it is artificial; afterwards in school they would discover that it is also a key to the universe and a secret encyclopedia." Borges is equally articulate as to the reason for the ultimate failure of Wilkins's system: "obviously there is no classification of the universe which is not arbitrary or conjectural. The reason is very simple: we do not know what the universe is. . . . we may possibly suspect that there is no organic or unified universe contained in this ambitious language. If there is, we must as yet conjecture its purpose, conjecture the words, definitions, etymologies, synonyms of the secret dictionary of God. It is impossible to penetrate the divine scheme of the universe" ("El Idioma Analítico de John Wilkins," *Prosa Completa*, Vol. II [Barcelona: Burguera, 1980], 223, 224; my translation). The reason is ultimately a theological one:

man is ordained to remain ignorant of the ultimate nature of the universe as well as of the ultimate intention of its creator.

For the reading of Wilkins in a broad intellectual context I have been indebted to Hans Aarsleff, "John Wilkins," *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp. 239-277.

- 22 The quotations are from John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Alexander C. Fraser (New York: Dover, 1959); and from G. E. Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, trans. and ed. by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1981). For the discussion in the following paragraph I owe a great deal to Hans Aarsleff, "Leibniz on Locke on Language," *From Locke to Saussure*, pp. 42-83.

- 23 Locke may deplore the impossibility to "bottom" the truth; notice that for him, unlike for Tooke, the truth is still considered to lie somewhere at the bottom: "Where is the man that has incontestable evidence of the truth of all that he holds, or of the falsehood of all he condemns; or can say that he has examined to the bottom all his own, or other men's opinions?" (IV, xvi, 4). His lamentation, however, was in its essence equivalent to a confident mistrust in a glorious system, like that of his contemporary member of the Royal Society, Robert Boyle, who, as his biographer records, "wanted no capacity or abilities to have worked up a glorious system," but "nobly despised this poor satisfaction and mean gratification, telling us plainly and expressly, that notwithstanding all he had done, all the labour, pains, and experience bestowed in a life of natural inquiries he made he saw nothing but the first drawings of science" (Thomas Birch, *The Life of the Honourable Robert Boyle* [London, 1744], quoted in Aarsleff, "Leibniz on Locke on Language," p. 53).

- 24 Cf. Rackstraw Downes, "Johnson's Theory of Language," *A Review of English Literature*, III, No. 4 (Oct. 1962), 29-41.

- 25 This accounts for Johnson's consistently conservative stance as to the problem of pronunciation and orthography. As early as in the "Plan," he maintains that "all change is of itself an evil, which ought to be hazarded but for evident advantage; and as inconstancy is in every case a mark of weakness, it will add nothing to the reputation of our tongue" (p. 10). And any possible "evident advantage" is categorically denied in the "Preface" which states, quoting

Hooker, that "change . . . is not made without inconvenience, even from worse to better. There is in constancy and stability a general and lasting advantage." Therefore, Johnson "recommend[s] to those, whose thoughts have been, perhaps, employed too anxiously on verbal singularities, not to disturb, upon narrow views, or for minute propriety, the orthography of their fathers. It has been asserted, that for the law to be *known*, is of more importance than to be *right*" ("Preface"). After all, the stubborn inertia of the arbitrary convention, which was so frustrating to orthoepic and orthographic reformists, is for him a great positive medium for his primary goal of preserving such fixture and permanence of language as has been collectively established on the relativistic and historical basis of "common" usage and practice.

- 26 The French influence on British academism was in fact a slanting one: the French Academy was in agreement with British anti-academists like Johnson in their high evaluation of "usage," and the Port-Royal, the greatest anti-academic force in France in the period, was quite visible behind many British academy enthusiasts. (Cf. Shoichi Watanabe, "British Academy and the Eighteenth Century," *op. cit.*) The controversy between the French Academy and the Port-Royal was the one between usage and reason, between an "irrational" history and a "rational" system. The French Academy was so confident in the *established* usage of the French that it did not even think it necessary to cite authoritative authors: the preface to the 1669 edition of *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* declared that the dictionary "has been begun and achieved in the most flowering century of the French language, and it is for this reason that it does not give any citation" (quoted in Tetsuro Hayashi, *A History of English Lexicography*, p. 237). The Port-Royal Grammar, on the other hand, begins by referring all operations of language to the "three operations of the mind: *Perception*, *Judgment*, and *Reasoning*." Two objects (and their terms) in our perception, for example, subject and attribute, are connected by a third term, verb, in our judgment, and formed into one "proposition," both verbal and logical. True, the Port-Royal states that "*the knowledge of what passes in the mind is necessary, to comprehend the foundation of grammar.*" However, "what passes in the mind" knows no dynamic "historical" process in the Lockean sense of the term; rather it passes in an atemporal "time" of logical necessity which connects subject to predicate. History, in what Laurence Sterne called Locke's "history-book of

what passes in a man's own mind," has been successfully reduced to an ahistorical treatise and rule-book on the universal rational mental operations. (Claude Lancelot and Antoine Arnauld, *Grammaire générale et raisonnée* [1660]; the first English translation, attributed to Thomas Nugent, *A General and Rational Grammar* [1753]—note the date: it is only two years before the publication of Johnson's *Dictionary*—; No. 73 of *English Linguistics 1500-1800* [1967].)

- 27 One of the earliest expressions of such sentiment was given by David Garrick, "On JOHNSON'S DICTIONARY" (1755): "Talk of war with a Briton, he'll boldly advance,/That one English soldier will beat ten of France;/Would we alter boast from the sword to the pen,/Our odds are still greater, still greater our men:/... /And Johnson, well arm'd like a hero of yore,/Has beat forty French, and will beat forty more!" (Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. R. W. Chapman, corrected by J. D. Fleeman [Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1970], pp. 214-5). "Forty," of course, refers to the number of the seats ("fauteuils") at the French Academy fixed since 1639.

- 28 Cf. Allen Walker Read, "Suggestions for an Academy in England in the Latter Half of the Eighteenth Century," 145, 146, 153.

- 29 *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. XVIII (May 1748), 216.

- 30 For Smollett as a probable model for Dick Minim, see James G. Basker, "Minim and the Great Cham," *op. cit.*

- 31 *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, I, 13-4.