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SAMUEL JOHNSON'S MILITARY WRITINGS

by

Brian Joseph Hanley

A Thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of English.

Chapel Hill

1992

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BRIAN JOSEPH HANLEY. Samuel Johnson's Military Writings
(Under the direction of Professor Robert L. Haig)

ABSTRACT

This thesis contends that a consistent pattern of thought unites Johnson's moral and philological compositions (the Rambler and Idler essays, the Sermons) with his military writings -- those works that have as their subjects soldiers or warfare. Specifically, the essay demonstrates how he embodies five moral concepts in his military pieces, most of which are periodical contributions such as The Bravery of the English Common Soldiers and The Life of Admiral Blake.

Chapters one through three successively discuss the moral goods of charity, courage, and subordination. Chapter four examines the vices of pride and idleness. In each chapter, the given moral concept is defined by various citations from Johnson's works. His military writings are then shown to represent concrete expressions of each moral principle.

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PREFACE

Because Samuel Johnson is best known (apart from Boswell's biography) for his moral and philological writings, the reader may wonder why I chose his military works as a thesis topic. Being an officer in United States Air Force, I naturally take an interest in his ideas about the military. But I also pursued the subject because I noticed an apparent dichotomy in his treatment of soldiers: Boswell's Life often shows a sexagenarian Johnson extolling their courage, yet some of his early Idler essays (1758-9) fiercely satirize the army. Initially, I thought this bifurcated view had something to do with the changing fortunes of England's military during the Seven Years' War (1756-63): the Idlers followed some embarrassing military setbacks; The Bravery of the English Common Soldiers (1760), which lauds the esprit de corps of the enlisted troops, was published shortly after England won several major battles against the French in America. But his biography of Admiral Blake (1740) praises the martial skill and courage of English sailors and his pamphlet on Falkland's Islands (1771) proves that he never was eager to see England provoke war. His view of the military, then, could not be explained by chronology or historical events.

With no philosophy about the military evident, I continued to roam through the Johnson canon, knowing full well that his military essays represented more than mere hack work. It was the Dictionary that prompted me to see these writings in moral terms. For example, he defines "militia" as "the standing force of a nation" while identifying "army" as "a collection of armed men, obliged to obey one man." How could he treat so slightingly England's professional soldiers (his definition does not set apart army regulars from a gang of highwaymen) given Henry V at Agincourt, Drake's defeat of the Spanish Armada, and Marlborough's splendid victories at Blenheim and Ramillies? Clearly, his definition reflects his disapproval of professional armies. And so it went. The following pages are the fruits of my interest in military subjects and my admiration for Samuel Johnson's wisdom.

I am very much indebted to my wife Terry's unyielding, if occasionally strained, patience with my relentless research. Professor Robert Haig deserves great thanks (maybe even a few hosannas) for igniting (and harnessing) my voracious appetite for Johnson's writings. Professor Albrecht Strauss, too, has helped greatly by giving me insightful advice while I indulged my interest in the Johnsonian canon. Finally, I must express deep gratitude to the United States Air Force for sponsoring my research. I hope my work here rewards their confidence.

B.J.H.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| Chapter | Page |
|-----------------------------------------------|------|
| I. Introduction | 1 |
| II. The Moral Good of Charity | 6 |
| III. The Moral Good of Courage | 16 |
| IV. The Moral Good of Subordination | 26 |
| V. The Vices of Pride and Idleness | 41 |
| VI. Conclusion | 52 |
| VII. Works Cited | 60 |

Introduction

In this thesis I will try to illuminate the thematic relationship that connects Samuel Johnson's moral and philological compositions (the Rambler, Idler, Adventurer essays, the Sermons) with his military writings -- those works that discuss or have as their subjects soldiers or warfare. Johnson's military pieces can be found in all periods of his professional life. In the 1740's, he wrote The Life of Admiral Blake, "O.N." On the Fireworks for the Peace of Aix-La-Chapelle, and The Vanity of Human Wishes. At the beginning of the decade he also composed several Parliamentary Debates that discuss the military, two of which are On Incorporating the New-raised Men into the Standing Regiments and On Taking the State of the Army into Consideration. Adventurer 99, written in 1753, comments on famous military leaders. Observations on the Russian and Hessian Treaties, The Bravery of the English Common Soldiers, "Observations" and Correspondence in the Universal Chronicle, and Idlers 5, 8, and 39 are periodical essays that examine the nature and performance of England's armed forces during the Seven Years' War (1756-63).

Johnson continued to write about military subjects in his later years: Thoughts on the Late Transactions Respecting Falkland's Islands, A Journey to the Western

Islands of Scotland, and A Letter to Captain Langton were all written during the 1770's. One additional military piece was published posthumously: A Speech on the Rochefort Expedition, a 1757 work which criticized army incompetence, appeared in the October 1785 issue of the Gentleman's Magazine.

Of these military writings, three things need to be said: first, they constitute only a small portion of the Johnson canon; second, most of them are brief and politically slanted periodical contributions; third, they all appear to deal with issues that are highly topical and strictly contemporary. Because of these features, it is easy to dismiss Johnson's military writings as insignificant or as irrelevant to discussions of his moral thought. But, as my research tries to demonstrate, these military essays are specific, concrete illustrations of broad moral precepts that he identifies and explores in his better-known moral writings. So my thesis contends that a consistent pattern of moral thought unites the compositions of Johnson the moralist with those of Johnson the military commentator.

One other point needs to be made about my primary material. I treat Boswell as a valid source, assuming with W. Jackson Bate that The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D. represents an accurate account of Johnson's thought. Bate considers Boswell's work, especially regarding Johnson's later years, as "the most truthful of biographies" because

of Boswell's meticulous note-taking. "To recount the last twenty years of Johnson's life", says Bate, "is indeed to quote from Boswell."¹ Moreover, the editors of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson frequently refer to Boswell's Life in textual notes to relate his writings to his conversation.² In addition, Johnson's conversation about the military is generally consistent with his writings on the subject: nothing in Boswell's quotations leads me to think that Johnson's remarks are fictitious or distorted.

Another source that requires comment is The Parliamentary Debates. According to Donald Greene, Johnson did not report these debates so much as he transformed them into dissertations in dialogue form: instead of hastily sending his notes to the Gentleman's Magazine for print, he took months to compose and polish his reports -- turning them into moral essays instead of mere transcripts.³ Indeed, Benjamin Hoover claims that Johnson always subordinated the details of the debates to the general principle that he was trying to explain. He does this because he wants to exhibit the great moral questions that are at the root of each of these topical debates.⁴ For example, the debate On Incorporating the New-raised Men into the Standing Regiments ostensibly discusses the best way to augment England's armed forces. But his account goes further by exploring the proper nature and role of an army in any free society.

Moreover, Johnson's editing makes the debates a kind of hybrid of fictional, philosophic dialogues and historical records. The topics are factual and the sequence of speakers is somewhat accurate, but the contents of the debates are, according to Hoover, "ill-adapted to winning over a parliamentary audience but well-suited to setting before a large magazine audience the two extremes of a nationally absorbing issue and the relation of that issue to universal moral truths."⁵ Each debate, then, is a group of largely original essays that explores comprehensively the different approaches to a given issue for the reading English public.

Structurally, my thesis separately examines five moral concepts. Chapters one through three successively discuss the moral goods of charity, courage, and subordination.⁶ Chapter four analyzes the moral vices of pride and idleness. Each chapter is organized in the following way: I begin by citing Johnson's works -- normally his Dictionary -- to define his notion of a given moral concept, such as charity. I then corroborate that definition with other examples from his moral writings, such as the Rambler, Idler, Adventurer, and Sermons. I conclude each chapter by demonstrating how his writings on topical military issues reflect in a specific way his thinking about the given moral principle.

Notes

¹ W. Jackson Bate, The Achievement of Samuel Johnson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955) 44-5.

² The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson frequently cites Boswell's biography. For example, the index of volume 14 (Sermons) lists more than fifty references to Boswell's quotations of Johnson.

³ Donald Greene, The Politics of Samuel Johnson, 2nd edition (Athens & London: University of Georgia Press, 1990) 113. Also see Thomas Kaminski, The Early Career of Samuel Johnson (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) 125.

⁴ Benjamin Beard Hoover, Samuel Johnson's Parliamentary Reporting: Debates in the Senate of Lilliput (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1953) 141. Also see Kaminski 139.

⁵ Hoover 139. Also see Kaminski 124; 128-9.

⁶ I group the concepts of charity, courage, and subordination under the term "moral good" based on Johnson's Dictionary definition of the noun form of "Good": "That which physically contributes to happiness; benefit; advantage; the contrary to evil." The illustrative quotation is from Locke: "'Good is what is apt to cause or increase pleasure, or diminish pain in us; or else to procure or preserve the possession of any other good, or the absence of evil.'"

Chapter 1: The Moral Good of Charity

Johnson uses military situations to illuminate or exemplify such moral goods as charity, courage, and subordination; he also explores the vices of pride and idleness. He is never exclusively a military analyst: his military writings concretely demonstrate the nature and consequences of moral and immoral behavior.

Charity is an appropriate place to start in relating Johnson's moral thought to his treatment of military subjects because for him it is the greatest good. "Charity is the most excellent of all moral virtues", he writes in Sermon 27, "because it conduces most to the happiness of mankind".¹ Charity spreads happiness because it removes pain: the relief of human misery is how he defines it in the Dictionary. Charity is "benevolence" (sense 2), or "the good done". In senses 4 charity means "liberality to the poor". Dryden's comments about Virgil provide the illustrative quotation: "'The heathen poet, in commending the charity of Dido to the Trojans, spoke like a Christian'". Sense 5 largely mirrors 4: charity is "alms; relief given to the poor". The illustrative quotation is also from Dryden: "'The ant did well to reprove the grasshopper for her slothfulness; but she did ill then to refuse her a charity in her distress'". As the citations

clearly show, charity has both secular and religious dimensions.

For Johnson, charity is a moral imperative. In Sermon 4 he declares that "the great lawgiver of the universe, whose will is immutable, and whose decrees are established forever", directs every person to relieve human suffering. This command is amply set forth in the Bible, where charity is identified as "a duty enjoined, explained, and enforced, by Moses and the prophets, by the evangelists and apostles, by the precepts of Solomon, and the example of Christ".²

Moreover, in Rambler 81 Johnson asserts that charity is largely a self-evident duty, a revealed truth to all conscientious people:

The measure of justice prescribed to us . . . is remarkably clear and comprehensive: 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do unto them.' A law by which every claim of right may be immediately adjusted, as far as the private conscience requires to be informed; a law, of which every man may find the exposition in his own breast, and which may always be observed without any other qualifications than honesty of intention, and purity of will.³

Charity is basic to human nature: it appeals to everybody's innate sense of justice and it unites all people by their common humanity.

Charity also serves one's self-interest. Sermon 5 claims that the sure way to heaven is by obedience to God's laws -- the "most excellent" of which is charity.⁴ Indeed, charity reflects "the light of revelation" in its

practitioner.⁵ In contrast, Sermon 19 warns that those who ignore the law of charity jeopardize their chances for eternal happiness:⁶

If we look up to . . . the Supreme Being, we find . . . our Creator, whose infinite power gave us our existence . . . our Preserver, of whose assistance and protection we are, every day and every moment, in need . . . and our Judge, who has already declared that the merciful shall obtain mercy, and that in the awful day, in which every man shall be recompensed according to his works, he that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly.⁷

Charity, while voluntary in this world, is carefully kept account of in the next. Charity on earth strengthens the bonds of mercy between God and man while its antitheses -- malevolence and selfishness -- provoke God's wrath. To be charitable toward others, then, is to secure one's eternal well-being.

Charity also furthers secular ends, as Sermon 4 suggests, because it underpins civil order:

[I]t is not uncommon to find the sentiments of benevolence almost extinguished, and all regard to the welfare of others overborne by a perpetual attention to immediate advantage. . . . If men, formed by education and enlightened by experience . . . can fall before such temptations . . . what may not be expected from him, who is pushed forward into sin by the impulse of poverty[?]. . . . [H]e who feels . . . the faintness of hunger, cannot but be provoked to snatch that bread which is devoured by excess. . . . Resentment may easily combine with want, and incite him to return neglect with violence.⁸

Charity and selfishness directly oppose each other: the practice of one usually comes at the expense of the other. When selfish motives displace charitable ones, it is not long before society itself is imperilled. Selfishness begets cruelty which inevitably fosters resentment and spawns grudges; these antagonisms, in turn, can ignite civil war.

Sermon 24 also spells out how the prevalence of charity safeguards public peace.

Without virtue nothing can be securely possessed, or properly enjoyed. . . . Those that have in their hands the disposal of riches . . . ought to bestow them . . . in such a manner as make them most useful to the publick; and they will be most useful, when they increase the power of beneficence, and enlarge the influence of piety.⁹

Charity reinforces social order because it disposes people to look after the welfare of others. When basic human needs are met, people are less inclined to steal or riot.

Johnson's secular and religious ideas about charity shape his treatment of military topics. Indeed, his military writings are specific, concrete expositions of charity and the baneful consequences of its neglect. "O.N." on the Fireworks for the Peace of Aix-La-Chapelle, a 1749 letter to the Gentleman's Magazine, exemplifies his depiction of charity in military subjects. There, he decries the pointless and exorbitant celebrations that mark the end of the War of Austrian Succession. The great cost of the fireworks display is an outrage: the money

squandered on victory celebrations should have gone to relieve war-related distresses.

[H]ow many widows and orphans, whom the war has ruined, might be relieved, by the expence which is now about to evaporate in smoke, and to be scattered in rockets; . . . there are some who think not only reason, but humanity offended, by such a trifling profusion, when so many sailors are starving, and so many churches sinking into ruins.¹⁰

Johnson thus rails against the "vast sums" that were eagerly spent for the lavish public display.¹¹ The fireworks themselves are a mere "trifling profusion"; they become a moral crime when the gratification of public vanity -- or the vanity of public officials -- takes precedence over urgent social problems.

Johnson's criticism in "O.N." on the Fireworks is entirely consistent with the content of his moral essays. Witness the following remarks from Sermon 27:

Others have carried their benevolence still farther, and taught, that the general duty of life, is the love of our country; these, likewise, were mistaken, not in asserting that this was a duty, but that it was the only duty; that it was to absorb all other considerations. . . . [W]e are to endeavour, indeed, the happiness of our country; but in subordination to the happiness of mankind.¹²

Johnson, in short, ranks charity above patriotism. Both are laudable impulses but charity is the greater of the two because its abiding motive is humanity's welfare. In contrast, patriotism often degenerates into national

arrogance and self-congratulation, as happened with the fireworks.¹³

A letter written to Bennet Langton (31 October 1778) while he was a militia captain also evinces Johnson's view of charity as an eminent moral duty:

When are you to be cantoned in better habitations? The air grows cold, and the ground damp. Longer stay in camp cannot be without much danger to the health of the common men, if even the officers can escape [the squalid conditions]. . . . Take care of your own health; and, as you can, of your men.¹⁴

During the visit with Langton that prompted this letter (summer 1778), Johnson showed great interest in military strategy and technology.¹⁵ But what he noticed most was the disparity between the officers' and enlisted men's lodgings, saying that the gap between inferior and superior living quarters never appeared to him in so striking a manner.¹⁶ Even though military operations fascinate Johnson, when he writes to his military friend charity is the letter's principal subject: he entreats Langton to mind his troops' welfare. Moreover, he is especially concerned for the enlisted men because they suffer from more severe privations.

The Langton episode shows clearly how Johnson applies his general ideas about charity to a specific military situation: the harshness of military life affords striking examples of the need for charity. His Thoughts on the Late Transactions Respecting Falkland's Islands (first

published 16 March 1771 in the London Chronicle) also dramatizes the importance of charity; but here "the most excellent" of virtues provides an anti-war argument. Johnson states that England is being goaded into a needless war with Spain, chiefly by arms merchants and patriotic chauvinists who are untutored or apathetic about the cruelty and mayhem of war.¹⁷ In his lucid, unsparing description of soldiers' miseries, he appeals to his readers' sense of charity.

The life of a modern soldier is ill represented by heroick fiction. . . . Of the thousands and ten thousands that perished in our late contests with France and Spain, a very small part ever felt the stroke of an enemy; the rest languished in tents and ships, amidst damps and putrefaction; pale, torpid, spiritless, and helpless; gasping and groaning, unpitied among men, . . . at last whelmed in pits, or heaved into the ocean, without notice and without remembrance. . . . Thus is a people gradually exhausted, for the most part with little effect.¹⁸

This passage drives home the often untold costs of fighting: many soldiers will die in battle but countless others will perish from squalid living conditions, disease, and malnutrition. In considering the issue, he implores his readers to consult the welfare of their fellow citizens before they support a war that endangers the many so that the avarice and vanity of a few may be gratified.

Johnson's essay makes the Falkland's Islands debate a moral issue. Greed and pride argue for war with Spain; but charity compels the English to avoid wasting lives

for a worthless pair of distant islands.

Notes

- ¹ Samuel Johnson, Sermon 27, ed. Jean Hagstrum and James Gray (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978) 298, vol. 14 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: Sermons.
- ² Johnson, Sermon 4, Yale 14: 39-40.
- ³ Johnson, Rambler 81, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969) 61, vol. 4 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: The Rambler.
- ⁴ Johnson, Sermon 5, Yale 14: 63.
- ⁵ Johnson, Idler 4, ed. W. J. Bate, John M. Bullitt, and L. F. Powell (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963) 13, vol. 2 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: The Idler and the Adventurer.
- ⁶ In annotating Sermon 15 (162, note 8), Hagstrum and Gray cite a quotation from Boswell in which Johnson claims that the surest basis for happiness is a "reasonable hope of a happy futurity."
- ⁷ Johnson, Sermon 19, Yale 14: 206-7.
- ⁸ Johnson, Sermon 4, Yale 14: 40.
- ⁹ Johnson, Sermon 24, Yale 14: 253-7.
- ¹⁰ Johnson, "O.N" On the Fireworks for the Peace of Aix-La-Chapelle, ed. Donald J. Greene (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977) 115, vol. 10 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: Political Writings.
- ¹¹ Johnson, Fireworks, 114, par. 1.

¹² Johnson, Sermon 27, Yale 14: 289-90.

¹³ In The Life of Admiral Blake, Johnson suggests that patriotism reflects a nation's virtuous attainments. But the excessive indulgence of patriotism ironically precipitates a nation's decline: "[D]anger and distress produce unanimity and bravery, virtues which are seldom unattended with success; but success is the parent of pride, and pride of jealousy and faction; faction makes way for calamity, and happy is the nation whose calamities renew their unanimity." (Vol. 6 of The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D. Oxford: Talboys and Wheeler, 1825, 300)

¹⁴ James Boswell, The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D., ed. George Birbeck Hill, rev. L. F. Powell, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934-50) 365, 6 vols.

¹⁵ Apart from his interests at Warley-camp, Johnson recommended that Edward Cave publish a military dictionary (Boswell 1: 138). He also outfitted himself quite well for militia duty (Boswell 4: 319) and he expressed interest in writing a history of the Seven-Years' War (Boswell 1: 354).

¹⁶ Boswell 3: 360-2.

¹⁷ Johnson, Thoughts on the Late Transactions Respecting Falkland's Islands, ed. Donald J. Greene, Political Writings, 370-2.

¹⁸ Johnson, Falkland's Islands, Yale 10: 370-1.

Chapter 2: The Moral Good of Courage

We have seen that Johnson's military pieces concretely express general moral precepts. For example, the opinions set down in "O.N." on Fireworks and Thoughts on Falkland's Islands derive from his theoretical convictions about charity. In the same manner, some of his military writings embody his general ideas about courage.

In the Dictionary Johnson defines courage as "bravery; boldness; spirit of enterprise; active fortitude". Fortitude denotes "greatness of mind; the power of acting or suffering well". He cites Locke to illustrate his definition: "Fortitude is the guard and support of the other virtues; and without courage, a man will scarce keep steady to his duty, and fill up the character of a truly worthy man". By using "greatness of mind" to define fortitude, I think he means the ability to visualize the ultimate good that results from difficult achievements; and that makes courage, which is "active fortitude", a willingness to endeavor what "greatness of mind" can conceive. Moreover, the Locke quotation relates courage to morality: while charity is the "most excellent" of the virtues, courage is their protector.¹ In the context of the Locke quotation, courage upholds the practice of virtue because it fortifies moral behavior: people are courageous

when they continue to act morally in the face of suffering or other distractions. Given the Dictionary definition, a courageous man eagerly strives for virtuous goals in spite of the risks and hardships that may stand in his way.

Courage is the steadfast pursuit ("spirit of enterprise") of high-minded ends ("greatness of mind"), which Johnson often associates with humanitarian service. He asserts in Rambler 129 that human progress depends on courage:

It is the duty of every man to endeavour that something may be added by his industry to the hereditary aggregate of knowledge and happiness. To add much can indeed be the lot of few, but to add something, however little, every one may hope; and of every honest endeavour it is certain, that, however unsuccessful, it will be at last rewarded.²

Courage (connoted by "endeavour") is the prime engine of human advancement. Although individual acts of courage may seem fruitless or imperceptible, it is by the cumulative effort of generations of courageous people that the human condition is improved. Every magnanimous enterprise moves humanity forward by some means; failures illuminate dead ends while successes increase human wisdom and point the way for further advances.

The association of courage and altruism is also evident in Adventurer 99, where Johnson lauds scientific inventors. Human progress cannot move forward without courage: "greatness of mind" conceives noble advancements and the

"spirit of enterprise" guides a person to realize those conceptions.

The folly of projection is very seldom the folly of a fool; it is commonly the ebullition of a capacious mind, crowded with variety of knowledge, and heated with intenseness of thought; it proceeds often from . . . the confidence of those, who having already done much, are easily persuaded that they can do more. . . . That the attempts of such men will often miscarry, we may reasonably expect; yet from such men, and such only, are we to hope for the cultivation of those parts of nature which lie yet waste, and the invention of those arts which are yet wanting to the felicity of life.³

The sometimes bizarre and unproductive outcomes of scientific enquiry warrant the respect and encouragement that are normally paid to bravery. Projectors are courageous because they act on bold and innovative ideas that can potentially benefit humanity. What is more, projectors take risks to bring about their well-intentioned schemes: failure usually means the loss of reputation, and probably, sums of money as well. Adventurer 99, along with Rambler 129, shows that Johnson clearly admires people who take chances in the cause of benevolent or altruistic enterprises.

The projectors in Adventurer 99 exemplify courage because they try to extend human knowledge. That they will often "miscarry" is irrelevant to the purity of their intentions. Virtuous motivation, then, is a crucial feature of courage: Johnson deems an act courageous if it is

prompted by noble aims.

Johnson develops his notions about motives and courage in Rambler 129. There, he postulates that the "just limits of caution and adventurism" are set by motivation.⁴

In an undertaking that involves the happiness, or the safety of many, we have certainly no right to hazard more than is allowed by those who partake the danger; but where only ourselves can suffer by miscarriage, we are not confined within such narrow limits; and still less is the reproach of temerity, when numbers will receive advantage by success, and only one be incommoded by failure.⁵

A man is courageous when he imperils himself in the service of communal or human progress. In contrast, a man who exposes himself (and others) to hazard for private gain or aggrandizement is not courageous, but merely ambitious or avaricious.⁶

Johnson's ideas about courage are consistently evident in his treatment of military subjects. In Boswell's Life he often extolls the courage of military men. "The character of a soldier is high," he told Boswell (3 April 1776), "[because] they who stand forth the foremost in danger, for the community, have the respect of mankind".⁷ That soldiers are accustomed to danger is not what makes them courageous per se; they demonstrate courage by their willingness to die for their fellow citizens.

Johnson illuminates the altruism of military service when he notes that rank-and-file soldiers, as individuals, have little to gain from military campaigns. "'There are

twenty thousand men in an army who will go without scruple to be shot at," he told Goldsmith (7 May 1773), "'and mount a breach for five-pence a day'".⁸ Soldiers exemplify "greatness of mind" because they subordinate their self-interest to their patriotic duties.

Johnson further explores military courage in The Bravery of the English Common Soldiers (printed in the first number, January 1760, of the British Magazine). The essay tries to account for the battlefield bravery of England's military conscripts, most of whom come from the plebeian class. He rules out political or financial motives; the enlistees are indifferent about the the British constitution and have so few material possessions that to risk all in their defense would make no sense.⁹ He instead relates the common soldiers' courage to a form of "greatness of mind":

Whence is the courage of the English vulgar? It proceeds, in my opinion, from that dissolution of dependance which obliges every man to regard his own character. . . . While he [a common soldier] looks for no protection from others, he is naturally roused to be his own protector; and having nothing to abate his esteem of himself, he consequently aspires to the esteem of others. Thus every man that crowds our streets is a man of honor.¹⁰

Military courage originates in a desire for honor: the conscripts -- who are not career army men -- fight bravely primarily to win the admiration of their peers.

Bravery also indicates that the soldiers' "greatness

of mind" transmutes a vice -- insolence -- into the virtue of courage. The men in civilian life are a rude and unproductive lot who loathe authority of any kind: they are "disdainful of obligation" and "impatient of reproach".¹¹ But combat transforms their boorishness into a noble quest for martial attainment and a disgust for losing or retreating. Indeed, Johnson's use of two words in the essay tells the whole story. In their civilian occupations the English "vulgar" are prone to "insolence"; on the battlefield the same trait becomes "bravery"; a term which he defines in his Dictionary as "gallantry; having a noble mein; lofty; graceful; magnificent; grand".

Johnson's ideas about military courage also manifest themselves in A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland. While commenting on Incolmkill's churches and convents, he generalizes about the inspirational value of historical sites such as the battlefield of Marathon.

[W]hatever makes the past . . . predominate over the present, advances us in the dignity of thinking beings. Far from me and from my friends, be such frigid philosophy as may conduct us indifferent and unmoved over any ground which has been dignified by wisdom, bravery, or virtue. That man is little to be envied, whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plain of Marathon . . . !¹²

It was at Marathon that a small group of Greek soldiers overwhelmed a Persian force many times larger by combining tactical shrewdness with a stunning demonstration of courage. At the height of the battle, the Greeks charged

at the Persians in what must have seemed like a desperate act of mass suicide. But against all odds, the Greeks ended up driving out the invaders. No doubt Johnson saw the battle of Marathon as a splendid vindication of his idea of courage: it was the Greeks' "spirit of enterprise" and their willingness to risk all for their country which brought them victory.

Military courage inspires people not only through historical example but it also heartens those who witness it. In Bravery, the English rank-and-file act courageously at least in part to keep up with their peers -- if one fights boldly, the others try to match or surpass his exploits; likewise, Scottish Highlanders fight bravely out of "competition" with each other for glory and the respect of community chieftains.¹³ In Rambler 49, Johnson refers to the Persian Wars to illustrate how courage emboldens others.

When Themistocles complained that the trophies of Miltiades hindered him from sleep, he was animated by them to perform the same services in the same cause. But Caesar, when he wept at the sight of Alexander's picture, having no honest opportunities of action, let his ambition break out to the ruin of his country.¹⁴

Here, courage served the ancient Greeks in two ways: first, the bravery of Miltiades guided him to victory over the Persians at Marathon in 490 B.C. His intrepidity inspired Themistocles, whose astute generalship at Salamis (ca. 480 B.C.) derived from his obsessive desire to outperform

Miltiades. In contrast, Caesar's drive for glory is divorced from any kind of civic or social good. Like Charles XII in The Vanity of Human Wishes, Caesar's quest for self-aggrandizement for its own sake becomes ultimately self-destructive.

The Life of Admiral Blake (first published in a 1740 issue of the Gentleman's Magazine) also suggests that past exhibitions of courage can invigorate the patriotism of current generations. Johnson wrote Blake's biography, hoping that the admiral's skill and bravery would bolster the patriotism of contemporary Englishmen.

At a time when a nation is engaged in a war with an enemy, whose insults, ravages, and barbarities have long called for vengeance, an account of such English commanders as have merited the acknowledgements of posterity, by extending the powers, and raising the honour of their country, seems to be no improper entertainment for our readers.¹⁵

Blake's stalwart defense of his country against the Dutch is meant to invigorate English pride: the Elizabethans didn't brook insults from continental powers, so neither should their decendants. In Johnson's view, the bravery of military men such as Admiral Blake and the Greeks at Marathon provide specific, verifiable examples of courage that can instruct and inspire future generations.

Notes

¹ Johnson apparently had Locke's quotation in mind when he told Boswell and Langton on 5 April 1775 that "'courage is reckoned the greatest of all virtues; because, unless a man has that virtue, he has no security for preserving any other'" (Boswell 2: 339).

² Samuel Johnson, Rambler 129, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969) 325, vol. 4 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: The Rambler.

³ Johnson, Adventurer 99, ed. W. J. Bate, John M. Bullitt, and L. F. Powell (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963) 433-4, vol. 2 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: The Idler and The Adventurer.

⁴ Johnson, Rambler 129, Yale 4: 325.

⁵ Johnson, Rambler 129, Yale 4: 323.

⁶ For a clarification of courage and terms such as these that connote great expectations, see chapter 4.

⁷ Boswell 3: 9-10. Also see Boswell 3: 265-6, where Johnson declares that courage elevates the social status of the military profession.

⁸ Boswell 2: 250.

⁹ Johnson, The Bravery of the English Common Soldiers, ed. Donald J. Greene (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977) 284, vol. 10 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: Political Writings.

- 10 Johnson, Bravery, Yale 10: 284.
- 11 Johnson, Bravery, Yale 10: 284.
- 12 Johnson, A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland, ed. Mary Lascelles (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971) 148, vol. 9 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson.
- 13 Johnson, Journey, Yale 9: 91.
- 14 Johnson, Rambler 49, 266-7, vol. 3 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson.
- 15 Johnson, The Life of Admiral Blake, (Oxford: Talboys and Wheeler, 1825) 293, vol. 6 of The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.

Chapter 3: The Moral Good of Subordination

I have tried to show that Johnson's moral principles manifest themselves in his treatment of military topics. For example, his analysis of military esprit de corps in The Bravery of the English Common Soldiers represents a concrete example of his thinking on the moral good of courage. In this chapter I will argue that, in much the same way, his mistrust of large professional armies and his advocacy of a ready militia embody his ideas about the moral good of subordination.

The Dictionary is a useful place to start in exploring his views about subordination. Although the definitions are devoid of moral connotations, the illustrative quotations suggest that subordination promotes civil peace and reflects the law of God.¹

[1] The state of being inferior to another; 'Nor can a council national decide/ But with subordination to her guide' Dryden. [2] A series regularly descending; 'The natural creatures having a local subordination, the rational having a political, and sometimes a sacred' Holyday. [3] place of rank; 'If we would suppose a ministry where every single person was of distinguished piety, and all great officers of state and law diligent in chusing persons who in their several subordinations would be obliged to follow the examples of their superiors, the empire of irreligion would soon be destroyed' Swift.

The Dryden quotation (sense 1) suggests that a fixed hierarchy favors political processes, thus making subordination a practical way to run human affairs. The Holyday citation (sense 2) indicates that subordination manifests God's method of ordering the universe. The most illuminating of these, however, is the Swift quotation because it suggests, primarily through its reference to "the empire of irreligion", that there is no workable alternative to subordination: its absence ushers in corruption, depravity, and anarchy. "Irreligion", or impiety, means a contempt for God's laws. If people ignore the dictates of religion, they are not likely to honor laws set down by mankind.

The Swift quotation also indicates that subordination means civic-mindedness. Obeying laws and supporting the existing order are the bulwarks against "irreligion", or anarchy. Given the illustrative quotations, subordination is a time-honored reflection of God's plan for human society: without it, civilization would collapse.

Johnson asserts these ideas in Sermon 23, where he explores the consequences of subordination's decay.

The great evil of confusion is that the world is thrown into the hands, not of the best, but of the strongest; that all certainty of possession or acquisition is destroyed; that every man's case is confined to his own interest, and that general negligence for the general good makes way for general licentiousness.²

Barbarism, or the abuse of the weak by the strong, springs

from the unchanging vices of human nature: greed, envy, pride, and ambition. By imposing the rule of law, subordination forestalls the rise barbarism and so guards "the general good" against unchecked human selfishness. Moreover, Johnson's notion of subordination is incompatible with oppressive systems such as a dictatorship, oligarchy or plutocracy; rather, it assumes a rational system, based on defined ranks, that ensures the rights of liberty and property for everyone, rich and poor.³

Sermon 23 relates civil peace to a clearly defined system of subordination: Sermon 24 spells out the ways to preserve it. Most likely delivered by John Taylor to his St. Margaret, Westminster parishioners (many of whom were members of England's governing class), Sermon 24 exhorts civic leaders to abide by the highest standards of probity.

[N]o man is born merely for his own sake, to consult his own advantage or pleasure, unconnected with the good of others; it is yet more evidently true of those who are exalted into high rank, dignified with honors, and invested with authority. Their superiority is not to be considered as a sanction for laziness or a privilege for vice.⁴

Subordination is intended to restrain human passions, to protect people from their own worst instincts. But in any such system final authority rests with political leaders who are themselves fallible. Because their conduct largely controls the health and future of society, Sermon 24 reminds civic authorities that high office entails duty far more

than it does privilege. As stewards of the existing social order, those of high rank have a moral obligation to act for the common welfare and eschew the trappings of power.

The governed also have a role in upholding social order. "The first duty . . . of subjects", Johnson declares in Sermon 24, "is obedience to the laws. . . . [H]e that encourages irreverence . . . to public institutions, weakens all the human securities of peace. . . ." ⁵ Subordination requires fidelity to law, if not to imperfect individuals; so it is unreasonable to denounce government systems because politicians make occasional mistakes. Moreover, government business can be too complex to justify impetuous criticism: Sermon 24 entreats citizens to make certain they understand circumstances before they decry political decisions. ⁶

Johnson's idea of subordination -- that corruption and anarchy spring from its neglect and that it depends on a prevailing civic-mindedness -- shapes his view of the military. Indeed, his ideas about the nature and role of an army in a free society derive from his concept of subordination. He dislikes large standing armies because they are too easily exploited for corrupt ends: political leaders can protect, consolidate, or extend their influence by patronizing the officer corps. In this way, systems of subordination are undermined and the menace of tyranny, if not civil war, arises. ⁷ The Parliamentary Debates and Observations on the Russian and Hessian Treaties reflect his misgivings about the danger of political influence

over large, professional armies.

In the Parliamentary Debates: On Incorporating the New-raised Men into the Standing Regiments and On Taking the State of the Army into Consideration (4-11 December 1740; published in the Gentleman's Magazine between July 1741 and March 1744) Johnson explains, under the names of three speakers, the threat posed by a large standing army. "Mr. Viner" asserts that "every addition to our troops [is] . . . some approach towards the establishment of arbitrary power".⁸ Likewise, "Mr. Pulteney" claims that "an army [is] to be raised . . . in a manner that may furnish the court with an opportunity of extending its influence, by the disposal of great numbers of new commissions."⁹ Lord Carteret's speech, moreover, warns that a large professional army threatens England's constitutional government: "[B]y adding new officers to our army, we shall . . . enable the ministry either to employ an army in defence of their measures, or to obtain such an influence in the senate, as shall make any other security superfluous".¹⁰ Each of these speakers presumes that large standing armies are a menace to subordination because they owe their creation to political self-interest. These speeches, which Johnson composed, all suggest that unprincipled, ambitious ministers are too easily tempted to secure power by controlling the army through patronage. Standing armies, then, are certainly a temptation to corruption but they are not certainly a necessity for the

country's defense.

That large standing armies are open to political intrigue is further explored in Observations on the Russian and Hessian Treaties (published in Literary Magazine, No.3, 15 June-15 July 1756). In this essay, Johnson criticizes the British government for employing foreign troops to protect Hanoverian interests on the continent.

Yet for the defence of this country [Hanover] are these subsidies apparently paid, and these troops evidently levied. The riches of our nation are sent into distant countries, and the strength which should be employed in our own quarrel consequently impaired, for the sake of dominions the interest of which has no connection with ours.¹¹

The Hessian treaties confirm the suspicions set forth in the Parliamentary Debates about politics and standing armies. The British government hires mercenaries to protect King George II's German interests even though England needs the money to finance its war against France in America.

Johnson also thinks large standing armies are redundant. In the Observations on the Russian and Hessian Treaties he asserts that a militia is sufficient and appropriate for England's defence.

That we are able to defend our own country, that arms are most safely intrusted to our own hands, and that we have strength, and skill, and courage equal to the best of the nations of the continent, is the opinion of every Englishman. . . . [T]he story of ancient times will tell us, that the trained-bands were once able to maintain the quiet and safety of

their country. . . .¹²

Here, Johnson draws on patriotism and history to make his case against the need for continental mercenaries. It is an insult, if not a threat, to the English to hand over their country's defense to foreigners. Moreover, there exists no historical precedent for this kind of national strategy; the English, he suggests, are better off abiding by what has worked well in the past.

And what has served England's defense needs so well then, he claims, is the militia because it naturally fits into and supports a scheme of subordination. A militia fortifies subordination in two ways: first, it makes unnecessary a professional army and so removes the potential for political imbalances; second, militia service fosters a widespread respect for community welfare. In A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland, he praises the Scottish Highlanders for their strong sense of civic duty.

It affords a generous and manly pleasure to conceive a little nation . . . where all on the first approach of hostility come together at the call of battle . . . [and] engage the enemy with that competition for hazard and for glory, which operate in men that fight under the eye of those, whose dislike or kindness they have always considered as the greatest evil or the greatest good. . . . Every man was a soldier, who partook of national confidence, and interested himself in national honour. To lose this spirit, is to lose what no small advantage will compensate.¹³

Johnson thus identifies two reasons why militias are

preferable to large standing armies. First, citizen soldiers such as the Scottish Highlanders will naturally fight well because they defend their homes and families. Such armies fight only for the collective good -- they have no reason to tyrannize or despoil communities the way garrisoned but unoccupied professional soldiers often did in mid-eighteenth century England.¹⁴ The militia is formed and disbanded as threats are identified and eliminated; it can never be used against the community or cost it undue amounts of money because it is the community. Militias also reinforce subordination because civilian leaders and war leaders are one and the same; the respect for rank is deepened by militia service because the head of the clan is also the general of the local army.¹⁵ In contrast, professional armies are commanded by officers who owe their commissions to politically influential men.

What is more, the professional military class performs poorly in combat. Johnson's military pieces from the Seven-Years' War period relentlessly criticize England's armed forces for their incompetence against the French. The "Observations" in the Universal Chronicle (published during August and September 1758) and Idler 20 (26 August 1758) scornfully deprecate the celebrations held for the capture of Cherbourg on the French coast and of Louisbourg, Nova Scotia.¹⁶ "We have indeed no opportunity to exert our valour nor can boast of no routed armies," he writes

in "Observation" I (Payne's Universal Chronicle, No. 20, 12-19 August 1758) "but that we ravage the country unopposed, if it does not give any new specimen of English courage, gives at least a proof of the weakness of France".¹⁷ The English soldiers are over-rated: they do not deserve acclaim until they defeat an enemy that puts up a fight. The small territory won from the French in a few skirmishes or the resulting boost in English morale mean little to Johnson. Rather, he wants his readers to examine the heart of the matter; how good, really, are the English troops? No conclusions can be drawn from the pillaging of undefended countryside.

The viewpoint of "Observation" I reflects his suspicions about large armies: the loud applause for a few dubious victories masks the army's marginal combat skills; the public praise is a transparent attempt to compensate for the absence of big wins. If the English soldiers were in truth good fighters, the celebrations would come only after decisive triumphs, the minor victories being commonplace.

The Speech on the Rochefort Expedition¹⁸ is a more strident criticism of the army's doubtful competence:

We have raised a fleet, and an army; we have equipped them; we have paid them; they set out with the favour and good wishes of the whole nation. Great advantage was expected from the secrecy of our counsellors, and the bravery of our commanders. They went out, and they are come back again, not only without doing, but without attempting to do anything; and, therefore,

not without suspicion of treachery or cowardice.¹⁹

The English army is given every advantage, yet it blunders nonetheless; why? Johnson suspects only the worst: the army chose not to fight either because of rabid fear or a sinister contempt for English war aims. What really happened had little to do with either: the English were supposed to attack a French coast arms depot. After overwhelming a minor outpost, they encountered tough defenses and so aborted rather than risk a major defeat.²⁰

However, Johnson's prejudices against professional armies impel him to draw nothing but a cynical conclusion.

He holds equally strong prejudices in favor of militias. As I pointed out earlier, he lauds the martial spirit of Scottish Highlanders: the citizen-soldiers do a great job of safeguarding their communities. Likewise, he asserts in the Observations on the Russian and Hessian Treaties that a militia is England's best defence:

By the [militia] bill . . . sixty thousand men would always be in arms. We have shewn . . . how they may be upon any exigence easily increased to an hundred and fifty thousand, and I believe, neither our friends nor enemies will think it proper to insult our coasts when they expect to find upon them an hundred and fifty thousand Englishmen with swords in their hands.²¹

Here, Johnson is dogmatic about the combat skill of militias to the same degree that he thinks that professional armies will always botch things. Weapons proficiency, tactical battlefield maneuvers, and strategic warplans apparently fall into place for militias because the citizen soldiers

are so earnest. Likewise, the professional army is always incompetent, irrespective of circumstance, because it is not compatible with systems of subordination.²²

What especially makes the last quoted passage a reflection of his views on subordination, and not an incisive example of military analysis, is the remark about "swords". Nothing would look more like a textbook military debacle than sword-wielding English farmers taking on veteran French regulars equipped with firearms.

Clearly, Johnson's ideas about subordination direct his treatment of the military. Professional armies are a menace to subordination because corrupt public officials can use them to secure their positions. Militias, however, reinforce subordination by fostering civic-mindedness and by giving the nation adequate protection. These presumptions influence his commentary on military topics; the efficiency of militias is never subjected to scrutiny while the professional army, as an entity, can apparently do nothing right.

Notes

¹ The Preface to the Dictionary explains the purpose of the illustrative quotations. "[T]hose quotations . . . will often exhibit . . . diversities of significations, or, at least, afford different shades of meaning: one will show the word applied to persons, another to things; one will express an ill, another a good, and a third a neutral sense; . . . the word, how often soever repeated, appears with new associates, and in different combinations, and every quotation contributes something to the stability or enlargement of the language." (Vol. 5 of The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D. Oxford: Talboys and Wheeler, 1825, 41)

² Samuel Johnson, Sermon 23, ed. Jean Hagstrum and James Gray (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978) 246, vol. 14 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: Sermons.

³ Johnson never advocates one specific system of government (Boswell 2: 170-1); indeed, he thought that all governments were flawed (Boswell 2: 102-3). But he nonetheless believed that society needed some kind of authoritative governing system to protect the powerless (Bate, Samuel Johnson, 195-7).

⁴ Johnson, Sermon 24, Yale 14: 251.

⁵ Johnson, Sermon 24, Yale 14: 258-9.

⁶ Johnson, Sermon 24, Yale 14: 259.

⁷ According to Donald Greene, Johnson's mistrust of

professional armies is rooted in his Lichfield upbringing. "At the bottom of Johnson's political thinking, then, there would always have been a vivid awareness of the events of 1640 to 1660", when English armies destroyed communities along with themselves during the Civil Wars (Politics 27). Bitter war memories lingered in Lichfield because it was especially hard hit; Greene compares it in Johnson's time to Atlanta toward the end of the nineteenth century.

⁸ Johnson, Parliamentary Debates: On Incorporating the New-raised Men into the Standing Regiments, (Oxford: Talboys and Wheeler, 1825) 110, vol. 10 of The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.

⁹ Johnson, On New-raised Men, Works 10: 60.

¹⁰ Johnson, Parliamentary Debates: On Taking the State of the Army into Consideration, vol. 10 of The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D., 138-9.

¹¹ Johnson, Observations on the Russian and Hessian Treaties, ed. Donald J. Greene (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977) 181, vol. 10 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: Political Writings.

¹² Johnson, Hessian Treaties, Yale 10: 182-3.

¹³ Johnson, A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland, ed. Mary Lascelles (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971) 91, vol. 9 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson.

¹⁴ A persistent, simmering tension existed between garrisoned troops and local populations in mid-eighteenth

century England: bored with small-town life, soldiers often took out their frustrations on themselves and the town. Indeed, John Fortescue claims that complaints from citizens "nearly drove the Secretary of War to distraction" during the period ("The Army," Johnson's England: An Account of the Life and Manners of his Age, ed. A. S. Turberville, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933, 69).

¹⁵ Refer to note 3 for Johnson on subordination.

¹⁶ Idler 20, narrated from the viewpoint of a French historian, claims that the English troops "'had more to dread from the roughness of the sea, than from the skill or bravery of the defendants'" (Yale 2: 64).

¹⁷ Johnson, "Observation" I in the Universal Chronicle, ed. Donald J. Greene, Political Writings, Yale 10: 269.

¹⁸ Johnson wrote this speech for an unspecified friend who delivered it in Sept 1785, probably before the City of London Common Council. It was published in the Gentleman's Magazine in October 1785.

¹⁹ Johnson, A Speech on the Rochefort Expedition, ed. Donald J. Greene, Political Writings, Yale 10: 263. For other examples of Johnson's criticism of the army during The Seven Years' War, see Idlers 5, 8, and 39.

²⁰ My source for the historical facts surrounding the Rochefort expedition are taken from Donald Greene's introduction to the piece in Political Writings (Yale 10: 261).

²¹ Johnson, Hessian Treaties, Yale 10: 183.

22 The militia regiments were not so great as Johnson supposed. John Fortescue's account of a Yorkshire militia indicates that such units were at best marginally competent, and at worst a threat to their communities: "[T]hey were . . . trusted with the firing of a few ball-cartridges, whereupon they at once began to squander their ammunition upon private shooting matches (they were always betting and gambling) and upon depredations upon the game of the neighbouring squires" (80).

Chapter 4: The Vices of Pride and Idleness

Just as Johnson's military writings represent specific expositions of his thinking on charity, courage, and subordination, so they also embody his views on two vices: pride and idleness.

Johnson's thinking on pride is traditionally Christian; he defines the term in his Dictionary as "Insolence; rude treatment of others; inordinate and unreasonable self-esteem". In Sermon 6, he suggests that pride is the fountainhead for the world's evils.

Pride . . . [is] an over-value set upon man by himself. . . . He that overvalues himself will undervalue others, and he that undervalues others will oppress them. . . . Pride has been able to harden the heart against compassion, and stop the ears against the cries of misery. . . . It produces contempt and injuries, and dissolves the bonds of society.¹

Pride -- the overvaluation of one's worth -- overwhelms a man's social conscience; it divorces his intellect, productivity, and resourcefulness from social responsibility. The prideful man cares only for his own aggrandizement and has no capacity for pity or altruism.

Charles XII in The Vanity of Human Wishes is the quintessential prideful man. Arrogant and compassionless, he is driven by a boundless appetite for conquest.

On what foundation stands the warrior's pride,

How just his hopes let Swedish Charles decide;
 A frame of adamant, a soul of fire,
 No dangers fright him, and no labors tire;

 Peace courts his hand, but spreads her charms in vain;
 'Think nothing gained,' he cries, 'till nought remain,
 'On Moscow's walls till Gothic standards fly,
 'And all be mine beneath the polar sky.' (ll. 191-4;
 201-4)²

The account of Charles XII teaches the foolhardiness of pride. The Swedish monarch is strong, fearless, and brilliant in battle; his victims ineluctably yield before him. Moreover, his procession of victories ignites, rather than sates, his vanity. As a result, he disdains entreaties for peace or compromise; his "inordinate self-esteem" impels him to accept nothing less than the rule of Europe.

Charles' pride and his scorn for others inexorably push him toward self-destruction.

His fall was destined to barren strand,
 A petty fortress, and a dubious hand;
 He left the name, at which the world grew pale,
 To point a moral, or adorn a tale (ll. 219-22)³

The ruin of Charles exhibits the bitter fruits of pride. Russia thwarted his grand scheme of continental domination by soundly defeating him at Pultowa. He then sought help from the Turkish court, where supposedly he was treated with contempt (see ll. 208-13). He was eventually murdered, probably by an anonymous underling who had a score to settle. Charles built an empire not only on his military skills but also on the untold misery of thousands. However

splendid his attainments, they could not insulate him from the final consequences of his inhumanity.

Apart from "rude treatment of others", pride also means "inordinate self-esteem"; thus making it appear to be a synonym of courage, which means "greatness of mind" (see chapter 2 for an analysis of courage). The crucial difference between the two terms, however, is that each presumes different motivations: pride is the unreasonable exaltation of oneself at the expense of others; courage is a high self-worth that prompts bold, altruistic ventures.

The Dictionary's illustrative quotations clarify the meanings of pride and courage. Courage, according to a quotation from Addison, arises from a "sense of duty" to God.⁴ In contrast, an excerpt from Milton gives pride a belligerent connotation: "Wantonness and Pride/Raise out of friendship, hostile deeds in peace." Courage, then, serves God and humanity; prideful acts lead to discord and chaos.

Courage and pride are also set apart in Rambler 49. "The love of fame," Johnson writes, "should be regulated rather than extinguished".⁵ The desire for honor is a moral good (courage) when it inspires humanitarian endeavors; it becomes a vice (pride) when it seeks glory for its own sake or excuses mayhem and destruction, as was the case of Charles XII.

That the desire for honor must at least accommodate, if not serve, the public good is emphasized in Rambler

9: "Every man ought to endeavour at eminence, not by pulling others down, but by raising himself, and enjoy the pleasure of his own superiority . . . without interrupting others in the same felicity".⁶ The desire for honor is morally sound when it exhibits the triumph of human will or intelligence. A quest for glory becomes immoderate when it causes suffering or exalts one person at the expense of others.

The distinction between pride and courage is metaphorically set forth in The Life of Admiral Blake. Johnson portrays the engagement of Blake's fleet with the Dutch Navy on 18 May 1652 as a contest between pride and courage. The Dutch, arrogant from their mercantile wealth and naval power, wage war against the English. The Dutch admiral Van Trump epitomizes his nation's pugnacious self-confidence: he sails into British waters, ignores time-honored chivalric protocols, and leads a surprise mass attack on Blake's unescorted flagship as it was moving to duel with Van Trump's ship so that "a general battle might be prevented".⁷ Blake's badly outnumbered fleet (the Dutch fielded 45 ships; the English 22) repulses the Dutch, destroying two of their ships without losing a single English vessel. Despite being caught off-guard and with inferior numbers, the bravery and skill of Blake's sailors deliver victory. For Johnson, the outcome demonstrates the superiority of virtue (courage) to vice (pride).

It is, indeed, little less than miraculous, that a

thousand great shot [aimed at Blake's ship] should not do more execution; and those who will not admit the interposition of providence, may draw, at least, this inference from it, that the bravest man is not always in the greatest danger.⁸

Blake wins because he is on the side of right -- his boldness represents the moral virtue of courage. In contrast, Van Trump's military advantages are ultimately of little consequence because they originate from pride.

Johnson's account of the battle could be viewed as a moral allegory: Pride (the Dutch, specifically Van Trump), never satisfied with what it has, irresistibly advances along the path of avarice (imperialistic expansion) until it confronts Courage (Blake). In the ensuing struggle, Courage, guided by Providence, is triumphant.

Johnson's military writings also examine the vice of idleness, which the Dictionary tersely describes as "absence of employment" (sense 2). The illustrative quotation from Raleigh gives the term a decidedly unfavorable connotation. "[I]dleness bringeth forth no other fruit than vain thoughts and licentious pleasures." A quotation from Dryden identifies idleness, in traditionally Christian terms, as "the nurse of ill." Idleness, then, is a prime generator of morally corrupted and corrupting habits.

Sermon 26 identifies idleness as the "original or parent vice". The absence of work, or something on which to focus the intellect, forces the mind to wander, where

it soon dwells on the indulgence of gross appetites. These in turn evolve into unyielding habits:

A man whose attention is disengaged, who is neither stimulated by hope, nor agitated by fear, is wholly exposed to the tyranny of his appetites . . . and this irregularity of life necessarily subjects him to the acquaintance of men like himself, who assist him to confirm his habits, and recommend intemperance by example.⁹

Here, Johnson embraces a kind of displacement theory about the way idleness infects the mind and generates vice. A gainfully employed person must use his mind in productive ways. Those productive thoughts required by labor occupy the mind the way a boat displaces water; when the boat is removed, water fills in the space. Likewise, when idleness removes the need for productive thoughts, baser notions -- sensual appetites -- inevitably take their place. Moreover, base thoughts provoke debauched actions which eventually become destructive habits.¹⁰ So vices are best interdicted at the source: idleness.

Johnson's portrayal of garrisoned but unoccupied professional soldiers illustrates his theory about the way idleness begets vice. Idler 8 attributes the English army's series of defeats early in the Seven Years' War to the sloth and indiscipline of the troops. Their long stay in alehouses has atrophied their martial skills and fostered dissolute habits.¹¹ Given the degenerate state of the English soldiers, the essay satirically suggests, why not train them to think of enemy forts as taverns?

Let a fortification be raised on Salisbury-Plain, resembling Brest, Toulon, or Paris itself: . . . let the inclosure be filled with beef and ale: let the soldiers, from some proper eminence, see shirts waving upon the lines, and here and there a plump landlady hurrying about with pots in her hands. . . . By this method our army will soon be brought to look an enemy in the face.¹²

With deliberate absurdity, Johnson suggests that the soldiers' incompetence is its own solution: the troops are so debauched and poorly disciplined that the only way to make them winners is to somehow convert their vices into military assets. The inactivity of garrison life enervates the soldiers: left without useful and challenging duties, the men indulge bad habits to relieve the cheerless boredom of military encampments.

Idler 21, narrated from a former soldier's point of view, also discusses how idleness torments unoccupied military men.

I passed some years in the most contemptible of all human stations, that of a soldier in time of peace. . . . I suppose every man is shocked when he hears how frequently soldiers are wishing for war . . . but those who desire it most, are neither prompted by malevolence nor patriotism . . . but long to be delivered from the tyranny of idleness, and restored to the dignity of active beings.¹³

Idleness is so dehumanizing that it drives soldiers to unnatural or degenerate extremes: anything beats the absence of challenge or purpose. In Idler 8, the untasked soldiers resort to debauchery; here, soldiers prefer the danger

and misery of war to the torture of languishing away in garrison.

Other military writings indicate that idleness-induced frustrations make soldiers a terror for local populations. In A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland, Johnson suggests that the professional soldier -- a man "who places honor only in successful violence" -- is in peacetime "a very troublesome and pernicious animal".¹⁴ Likewise, "Mr. Pulteney" in Parliamentary Debates: On Incorporating the New-raised Men into the Standing Regiments claims that soldiers garrisoned in communities "live at ease upon the labour of industry, only to insult their landlords, and rob the farmers".¹⁵ Soldiers left idle for too long eventually come to undermine their reason for being, which is to protect their fellow citizens.

Idleness, then, is thoroughly corrosive. It engenders vices which transform soldiers from trained professionals into a collection of incompetents who are ironically a menace only to those whom they are supposed to guard.

Notes

- ¹ Samuel Johnson, Sermon 6, ed. Jean Hagstrum and James Gray (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978) 66-7, vol. 14 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: Sermons.
- ² Johnson, The Vanity of Human Wishes, in The Poems of Samuel Johnson, 2nd edition, ed. David Nichol Smith and Edward L. McAdam, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) p. 124-5.
- ³ Johnson, Vanity, p. 126.
- ⁴ Johnson's Dictionary quotes Addison from The Guardian to illustrate "courage": "'That courage which arises from the sense of our duty, and from the fear of offending Him that made us, acts always in a uniform manner, and according to the dictates of right reason.'"
- ⁵ Johnson, Rambler 49, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven and London: The Yale University Press, 1969) 266-7, vol. 3 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: The Rambler.
- ⁶ Johnson, Rambler 9, Yale 3: 50.
- ⁷ Johnson, The Life of Admiral Blake, (Oxford: Talboys and Wheeler, 1825) 297-8, vol. 6 of The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.
- ⁸ Johnson, Life of Blake, Works 6: 298.
- ⁹ Johnson, Sermon 26, Yale 14: 282.
- ¹⁰ Johnson allegorizes the irresistibility of bad habits in The Vision of Theodore, the Hermit of Teneriffe:

"I soon found that the great danger to the followers of Religion was only from Habit. . . . [T]he Habits were so far from growing weaker . . . that if they were not totally overcome, every struggle enlarged their bulk and increased their strength; and a Habit oppos'd and victorious was more than twice as strong as before the contest" (Vol. 16 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: Rasselas and Other Tales, ed. Gwin J. Kolb, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990, 206-7).

¹¹ The Mutiny Act compelled army detachments to be boarded in local communities, which usually meant alehouses (John Fortescue, "The Army," Johnson's England: An Account of the Life and Manners of his Age, ed. A. S. Turberville, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933, 68).

¹² Johnson, Idler 8, ed. W. J. Bate, John M. Bullitt, and L. F. Powell (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963) 27-8, vol. 2 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson.

¹³ Johnson, Idler 21, Yale 2: 66-7. In Boswell's Life, Johnson sums up the dichotomy of military life: "'A soldiers's time is passed in distress and danger, or in idleness and corruption'" (3: 267).

¹⁴ Johnson, A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland, ed. Mary Lascelles (New Haven and London: The Yale University Press) 92, vol. 9 of the The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson.

¹⁵ Johnson, Parliamentary Debates: On Incorporating

the New-raised Men into the Standing Regiments (Oxford:
Talboys and Wheeler, 1825) 52, vol. 10 of The Works of
Samuel Johnson, LL.D.

Conclusion

I have tried to demonstrate that Samuel Johnson's military writings represent concrete embodiments of his moral thought. Specifically, I have examined how the moral goods of charity, courage, and subordination, along with the vices of pride and idleness, manifest themselves in his military pieces.

Because I argue that Johnson's military essays exemplify moral concepts, I also believe that to pigeonhole his writings about soldiers, armies, or the wars that involve them as hack-work or as symptomatic of the popular eighteenth-century English distrust of professional armies is inadequate. To do so seems to be a temptation for critics such as Donald Greene and Maximillian E. Novak who I think overlook or give slight treatment to his military writing. Greene, in my view, gives insufficient analysis of Johnson's thoughts about military subjects in The Politics of Samuel Johnson.

When he looks at The Bravery of the English Common Soldiers, Greene makes three assumptions which are apparently based, quite erroneously, on a view that the essay can be explained entirely in contemporary terms. First, Greene says that Bravery is Johnson's "most thoughtful discussion of the 'military mind'".¹ I disagree:

his most perceptive work on "the military mind" is most likely his Thoughts on the Late Transactions Respecting Falkland's Islands which exhibits, through emotive prose, an incisive knowledge of the miseries (boredom, wretched quarters) and dangers (more from disease than enemy action) of military campaigns. Bravery, in Greene's view, looks for facile economic explanations of soldiers' courage;² I think Falkland's Islands expresses what soldiers really care about, like staying alive and finding respite from the privations of encampments.³

Greene also seems to work from the belief that Bravery is nothing more than a topical piece when he says that it "represents some sort of amends . . . for early Idlers."⁴ There could be some connection between the Idler military satires and Bravery, but probably not a strong one. As I explain in chapter 2, I think Bravery is at heart a moral essay about the nature and consequences of courage; Idler 8 (one of two scathing satires specifically about the military) can be traced back to Johnson's thoughts on the baneful nature and effects of idleness. Bravery and Idler 8 resemble each other insofar as they both embody moral precepts, but I don't believe that one prompted the creation of the other.

A third misconception of Bravery by Greene is that he sees the essay as a turning point in Johnson's view of the military: "Johnson marvels", says Greene about Bravery, "that courage is not the exclusive property of

the intellectually well-endowed".⁵ Again, I think Greene here is too eager to absolutely associate Johnson's military writing with contemporary circumstances, such as the widespread mistrust and contempt for professional armies in eighteenth-century England.⁶ In fact, Johnson enthusiastically cites the bravery of the English rank-and-file in his 1740 The Life of Admiral Blake; Blake is himself applauded at several points for his courage.⁷

Maximillian Novak also thinks that Johnson's military writings are principally topical; in his view they reflect the popular eighteenth-century disdain for the military. In his recent essay "Warfare and its Discontents in Eighteenth-Century Fiction" (Eighteenth-Century Fiction, 4.2 [1992]: 187-8), he asserts that Bravery is "a brilliant study in the unheroic [which is] typical of the anti-heroic impulse that was so dominant among writers during a large part of the century".⁸ According to Novak, Johnson's notion of military courage is basically cynical -- what is abnormal or destructive in peace becomes valuable in war; it takes the violence and cruelty of combat to turn the insubordination of the mob into a useful trait.⁹ But this interpretation ignores the altruistic essence and the inspirational qualities of courage -- prominent themes in several of Johnson's military and moral writings, including Bravery (see my chap. 2). Novak's analysis also disregards Johnson's idealistic definition of "hero" in the Dictionary: "A man eminent for bravery; a man of the

highest class in any respect". One illustrative quotation is from Pope's translation of Homer's Odyssey: "In this view he ceases to be an hero; and his return is no longer a virtue." Clearly, Johnson gives "hero" a morally favorable connotation. If he had wanted to cheapen the idea of "hero", he probably would have done so in the Dictionary -- witness his deprecation of "army" (see my preface, p. v).

Moreover, Novak claims that the dreadfulness of war forces Johnson to handle military subjects gingerly: "[He] treats war as a serious business -- so serious, in fact, that he shies away from treating it directly. . . . [E]ither war is to be avoided as inappropriate for fiction or it is to be treated satirically or humorously."¹⁰ This analysis is faulty on two accounts. First, Johnson was a prolific commentator on military matters -- especially during the Seven years' War when he unremittingly criticized government policy and military performance: Observations on the Russian and Hessian Treaties, "Observations" in the Universal Chronicle, A Speech on the Rochefort Expedition, and Idlers 5, 8, 20, and 39 provide ample evidence of this. What is more, he does in fact consider the military an appropriate topic for fiction because military history and circumstances are fruitful sources for moral lessons. Charles XII in The Vanity of Human Wishes exemplifies the self-destructiveness and inhumanity of pride; the persona of a soldier in Idler 21 illustrates the desperation that

originates from idleness (see my chap. 4). Indeed, Johnson uses the military to demonstrate moral points almost to a fault. His moral presumptions about militias and professional armies prompt him occasionally to reach doubtful conclusions, as is the case for his belief that English militias could defeat absolutely any invasion force (see my pp. 34-5).

Even though I would dispute Novak's effort to relate Johnson's military pieces to entirely contemporary attitudes, he makes a useful observation about his enthusiasm for military history. "His knowledge of eighteenth-century warfare seems to have been considerable and he certainly enjoyed reading military memoirs. . . . But he shared the common distaste of the Enlightenment for what appeared to be the vestige of a barbarous past."¹¹ As my chapter 2 points out (p. 14, note 15), Johnson was indeed interested in military technology, history, and strategy. But he was clearly not ashamed of England's past military heroes, witness his eulogistic and nostalgic treatment of Admiral Blake (see my p. 22). In addition, he was hardly eager to repudiate traditional English mores and embrace, uncritically, "enlightened" political and social ideas. For example, he often bemoans the inevitable substitution of commercial values for martial ones as England moved toward industrialization. In A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland, he expresses uneasiness about the loss of a national "military spirit" when he

asks "whether a great nation ought to be totally commercial? . . . [W]hether the pride of riches must not sometimes have recourse to the protection of courage?"¹² Novak makes an important point about Johnson's military tastes, but again, I think he does him an injustice by insisting that his military writings can be explained solely by the mid-eighteenth-century Zeitgeist.

In Greene's and Novak's efforts to analyze Johnson's military and political thinking, I believe that the connection between his military pieces and his better-known moral compositions is overlooked. My thesis has tried to illuminate that connection: Johnson's military writings are in fact concrete representations of the general moral principles expounded in his better-known works.

Notes

¹ Donald Greene, The Politics of Samuel Johnson, 2nd edition (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1990) 176.

² Greene 177-8.

³ Samuel Johnson Thoughts on the Late Transactions Respecting Falkland's Islands, ed. Donald Greene (New Haven and London: Yale University Press) 370-1, vol. 10 of The Yale Edition of The Works of Samuel Johnson: Political Writings.

⁴ Greene 177.

⁵ Greene 177.

⁶ The army was indeed widely unpopular with English citizens, witness John Fortescue's remarks: "From 1714 until 1739 every man's hand was against the Army" (68); soldiers were "in the eyes of the nation, a curse" (86).

⁷ See The Life of Admiral Blake (vol. 6 of The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D., Oxford: Talboys and Wheeler, 1825, 301,2,5).

⁸ Maximillian E. Novak, "Warfare and Its Discontents in Eighteenth-Century Fiction: Or, Why Eighteenth-Century Fiction Failed to Produce a War and Peace," Eighteenth-Century Fiction, 4.3 (1992): 188.

⁹ Novak 188.

¹⁰ Novak 187.

¹¹ Novak 188.

¹² Johnson, A Journey to the western Islands of

Scotland, ed. Mary Lascelles (New Haven and London: Yale University Press) 91-2, vol. 9 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson. See also Boswell's Life, where Johnson is quoted expressing regret about how the English military spirit has ceded its cultural prominence to the values of commerce (2: 126, 218).

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