Jonathan Swift’s Ideal Nation in His Unpublished Political Tracts, 1713-15

Wataru Nakajima

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to look into Jonathan Swift’s (1667-1745) ideal image of the nation as presented explicitly and implicitly in the unpublished tracts of 1713-15 which he wrote without commission from the Harley ministry. I shall read them against the background of the current of political thought at the time.

Swift wrote these works in the unsettled period in which the change of dynasty and government took place in the wake of the death of Queen Anne (1665-1714; r. 1702-14). He could not win the cooperation of Robert Harley, 1st Earl of Oxford (1661-1724), and Henry St John, 1st Viscount Bolingbroke (1678-1751), in publishing The History of the Four Last Years of the Queen (writ. 1713, pub. 1758), because its subjective and candid tone was regarded as likely to provoke the Opposition and to be prejudicial to the government line in favor of peace negotiation. Later, even after the overthrow of the Harley ministry, Swift planned its publication more than once — and in 1736, he had a design for inserting into it, or combining with it, Memoirs, Relating to That Change Which Happened in the Queen’s Ministry in the Year 1710 (written in 1714) and An Enquiry into the Behaviour of the Queen’s Last Ministry (written in 1715) (8: xxxvii; introd.). In other words, he saw that the Memoirs and the Enquiry were “companion pieces” (7: xii; introd.) to the History. The three works do have a homogeneous character, as expressions of his own views on politics in the form of historical writing. Also in Some Free Thoughts upon the Present State of Affairs (writ. 1714, pub. 1741), Swift gave a “cool analysis” of the political situation which “provides in part a defence,” but “in part a criticism of the Treasurer” (8: xxv; introd.). It should
be noted that he did not find any necessity to change its contents for more than twenty years after Anne’s death (xxvii), as in the case of the Enquiry (xxxviii).

Most of these writings were not intended for a general readership; they did not seek to influence public opinion. “[A]t the close of his public life in London,” as Herbert Davis and Irvin Ehrenpreis point out, Swift “gives his views on politics and politicians, writing in the mood of one who has already withdrawn from the centre of action, and was keeping himself aloof even before he went into the country” (8: xxv; introd.). Of the History, Ehrenpreis remarks: “It contains a number of passages revealing Swift’s peculiar views on topics close to him, sometimes contradicting or even censuring the judgment of his ministerial friends” (2: 604).1 He also points out that in Some Free Thoughts Swift obviously expresses his own policies (2: 739-40). These inconspicuous tracts can thus reveal Swift’s consistent political beliefs, enunciated from a standpoint that is more detached from the Tory-Whig tug of war than were his previous Tory-commissioned pamphlets such as The Examiner (1710-11; nos. 13-45) and The Conduct of the Allies (1711).

It has been a controversial matter to determine Swift’s political standpoint. Many scholars have argued about the true meaning and intention of his partisan literary activities. Swift was on the Whig side when he first came to London in 1701, but he “converted” to support of the Tory ministry led by Harley, who used him as a leading agent in the propaganda machine. Since Swift’s political opinions seem to be inconsistent and to change almost tract by tract, it is very difficult to fix a definite view on this question. F. P. Lock, representing the Tory interpretation of Swift (Higgins 2-4; Oakleaf 35), asserts that “Swift was a natural tory” (Swift’s Tory Politics 135), and explains:

Swift had the misfortune to be a “natural” Tory who held certain moderate “Whig” intellectual convictions. [. . .] By temperament Swift was a Tory, inclined to pessimism, to a distrust of innovation, and to a nostalgic attachment to the values (including the political values) of the past. Temperament would finally triumph over intellectual conviction. (“Swift and

1 Lock recognizes in “Swift and English Politics”: “Apart from its vigorous [. . .] character sketches, the most interesting passages in the History are those that expound Swift’s own ideas” (142).
English Politics” 127)

For Lock, Swift was “conservative and authoritarian,” and he was made “a patron and champion of liberty” by “an accident of history,” that is, “the capture and continued occupation of the establishment by the whigs” (Swift’s Tory Politics 179). Swift’s “basic political values” were “order, stability, and hierarchy” (136), and he “remained remarkably constant throughout his long involvement in politics” (169). In contrast, J. A. Downie champions the Whig reading (Higgins 2-4; Oakleaf 35-36). He sees Swift as “a whig who also supported the established Church” (Robert Harley 127) and mentions that “Swift shared Harley’s country prejudices, while retaining his essential whiggery” (54). As for political ideas, Swift “professed a belief in contract theory, not in an ‘ancient constitution’” (128), and “believed in the protection of liberty and property, and championed the rights and privileges of the individual against the oppression of either a king or a ministry. He stood out against arbitrary monarchy and the abuse of prerogative” (Jonathan Swift 259-60). Like Lock, Downie insists that Swift “was not inconsistent. He did not markedly alter his political opinions on entering Harley’s camp” (Robert Harley 128) nor when he confronted the Walpole ministry. One of the biggest difficulties of this topic lies in the diverse interpretations which Swift’s political tracts invite. As Ian Higgins points out, “[t]wo authoritative scholars [Lock and Downie] working on Swift’s politics [. . .] who rehearse much the same evidence in their historical criticism of Swift’s texts and who are in agreement about the ‘Country’ critique [. . .] have arrived at spectacularly opposed verdicts on Swift’s politics” (4). This can make a neutral reading of Swift’s politics seem more equitable, but this too has to be rejected as unpersuasive in many cases, due to the very equivocality of his texts and the complexity of his political involvement.

In spite of this conflict of opinion, not a few scholars, irrespective of the difference between their Tory and Whig interpretations of Swift, agree in recognizing that he held coherent principles beyond party allegiance. W. A. Speck writes in “From Principles to Practice”:

[A]lthough [. . .] inconsistency might be expected of a man who changed from Whig to Tory between 1704 and 1714, Swift’s transference of his
allegiance cannot be attributed to a change of principles. [. . .] Swift never sacrificed consistency with regard to Church and State, and so never fully appreciated the real division between the English parties on these abstract issues [. . .]. (80-83)

I am inclined to follow the neutral view in Swift studies, and I should like to emphasize the importance of his *uncommissioned* pamphlets, which were written in the latter part of his palmy years, in order to deepen the discussion on his political thought. Their potential to help us fathom his real intentions has not been fully exploited; though they have often been drawn on in analyses of his politics, the depth of reading seems to be not yet satisfactory. A closer study of these works should bring out the contours of his vision of an ideal nation.

2. Swift’s Political Creed

The basic principles of Swift’s political outlook are clearly exposed in his writings. He was, in the first place, a loyal adherent of Anglicanism. In *Some Free Thoughts*, he writes:

There are two Points of the highest Importance, wherein a very great Majority of the Kingdom appear perfectly hearty and unanimous. First, that the Church of England should be preserved entire in all Her Rights, Powers and Priviledges; All Doctrines relating to Government discouraged which She condemns; All Schisms, Sects and Heresies discountenanced and kept under due Subjection, as far as consists with the Lenity of our Constitution. Her open Enemies (among whom I include at least Dissenters of all Denominations) not trusted with the smallest Degree of Civil or Military Power; and Her secret Adversaries under the Names of Whigs, Low-Church, Republicans, Moderation-Men, and the like, receive no Marks of Favour from the Crown, but what they should deserve by a sincere Reformation. (8: 88)

As a clergyman of the Church of Ireland as well as an aspirant to high position in England, he upheld the Established Church (especially the High Church) with the King as its head. Any type of dissent — by “Whigs, Low-Church, Republicans, Moderation-Men, and the like” — he regarded as the work of
“Enemies” or “Adversaries.” His hostility to nonconformists is seen in the objection to the naturalization law for foreign Protestants in the History:

[T]he Act for naturalizing Foreign Protestants [. . .] had been contrived under the last Ministry; and, as many People thought, to very evil Purposes. By this Act any Foreigner, who would take the Oaths to the Government, and profess himself a Protestant of whatever Denomination, was immediately Naturalized; and had all the Priviledges of an English-born Subject at the expense of a Schilling. Most Protestants abroad differ from Us in the Point of Church Government; so that all the Acquisitions by this Act would encrease the Number of Dissenters; and therefore the Proposal that such Foreigners should be obliged to conform to the Established Worship, was rejected. (7: 94)

Swift recognizes the uniqueness of the Anglican “Established Worship” system, and foreigners are identified with Dissenters due to their difficulty in conforming to it. He also snaps at Presbyterians in Scotland:

[T]he Act [was] passed to prevent the Disturbing those of the Episcopal Communion in Scotland, in the Exercise of their Religious Worship, and in the Use of the Liturgy of the Church of England. It is well known enough, That the most considerable of the Nobility and Gentry there, as well as great Numbers of the People, dread the Tyrannical Discipline of those Synods and Presbyteries; and, at the same time have the utmost Contempt for the Abilities and Tenets of their Teachers. It was besides thought an Inequality beyond all appearance of Reason or Justice, That Dissenters of every Denomination here, who are the Meanest and most Illiterate Part among us, should possess a Toleration by Law, under colour of which they might upon occasion be bold enough to insult the Religion established; while those of the Episcopal Church in Scotland groaned under a real Persecution. (96)

Here Swift again shows open animosity to “Dissenters of every Denomination.” He further points the finger at Quakers:

The Sect of Quakers among us, whose System of Religion first founded
upon Enthusiasm hath been many years grown into a Craft, held it an
unlawful Action to take an Oath to a Magistrate. This Doctrine was taught
them by the Author of their Sect, from a literal Application of the Text, Swear
not at all. But being a Body of People wholly turned to Trade and Commerce
of all kind, they found themselves on many Occasions deprived of the Benefit
of the Law, as well as of Voting at Elections by a foolish Scruple, which their
Obstinacy would not suffer them to get over. To prevent this Inconvenience,
these People had Credit enough in the late Reign, to have an Act passed, That
their Solemn Affirmation and Declaration should be accepted instead of an
Oath in the usual Form. The great Endeavour in those Times was to lay all
Religion upon a Level [...]. (106)

He maliciously describes Quakers as impious bargainers who have sold their
souls for business — who have “grown into a Craft,” have “wholly turned
to Trade and Commerce of all kind,” and have thus “found themselves [...]
deprived of the Benefit of the Law” (emphasis added). In Swift’s mind there can
be no compromise on the basis for forming an ideal society, namely, recognition
of the Established Church as the foundation of the nation.

Secondly, Swift repeatedly defends securing the Protestant succession by
transferring the royal house to Hanover. Following the first point as cited above,
he declares in Some Free Thoughts:

The other Point of great Importance is the Security of the Protestant
Succession in the House of Hannover; not from any Partiality to that
Illustrious House, further than as it hath had the Honour to mingle with the
Blood Royal of England, and is the nearest Branch of our Regal Line reformed
from Popery. (8: 90)

Then he totally rejects Roman Catholicism and severely criticizes the Old
Pretender, James Francis Edward Stuart (1688-1716):

[I]t may very impartially be pronounced, that the Number of those who
 wished to see the Son of the abdicated Prince upon the Throne, is altogether
inconsiderable. And further, I believe it will be found, that there are None
who so much dread any Attempt he shall make for the Recovery of his imagined Rights, as the Roman-Catholicks of England, who love their Freedom and Properties too well, to desire his Entrance by a French Army, and a Field of Blood [. . .].

As to the Person of this nominall Prince, he lyes under all manner of Disadvantages: The Vulgar imagin him to have been a Child imposed upon the Nation by the fraudulent Zeal of his Parents and their bigotted Councillors; [. . .] and, a counterfeit Conversion will be too gross to pass upon the Kingdom after what we have seen and suffered from the like Practice in his Father. He is likewise said to be of weak Intellectualls, and an unsound Constitution. [. . .] He is utterly unknown in England, which he left in Cradle [. . .]. (91)

While Swift presses the illegitimacy of the Pretender, his father, James II (1633-1701; r. 1685-88), is treated as an “abdicated Prince,” not as one deposed by the people. Swift is unwilling to acknowledge the Glorious Revolution (1688) as a civil one.2 In fact, he insists that the reason for supporting the legitimacy of the Revolution settlement and of the accession of William III (1650-1702; r. 1689-1702), even among Tories, is to justify the Protestant succession in the House of Hanover (92). Furthermore, he advocates that the grandson of George I (1660-1727; r. 1714-27), Frederick Louis (1707-51), be brought to England in his early childhood so that he can be educated in the English style suited to a British monarch (93-95). Even after the start of the Hanoverian dynasty, Swift writes in the Enquiry with a touch of regret:

For my own Part, I freely told my Opinion to the Ministers; and did

---

2 Swift previously writes in Examiner No. 13 (2 Nov. 1710):
Most of the Nobility and Gentry who invited over the Prince of Orange, or attended him in his Expedition, were true Lovers of their Country and its Constitution, in Church and State; and were brought to yield to those Breaches in the Succession of the Crown, out of a Regard to the Necessity of the Kingdom, and the Safety of the People, which did, and could only, make them lawful; but without Intention of drawing such a Practice into Precedent, or making it a standing Measure by which to proceed in all Times to come; and therefore we find their Counsels ever tended to keep Things as much as possible in the old Course. (3: 5-6)
afterwards offer many Reasons for it in a Discourse intended for the Publick, (but stopped by the Queen's Death) that the young Grandson (whose Name I cannot remember) should be invited over to be educated in England; by which I conceived, the Queen might be secure from the Influence of Cabals and Factions, the Zealots who affected to believe the Succession in Danger could have no Pretences to complain, and the Nation might one day hope to be governed by a Prince of English Manners and Language, as well as acquainted with the true Constitution of Church and State; And this was the Judgment of those at the Helm before I offered it; neither were they or their Mistress to be blamed that such a Resolution was not pursued: perhaps from what hath since happened, the Reader will be able to satisfy himself. (8: 179)

Clearly Swift noticed that George was inclined to the Whigs (especially the Court Whigs) — described as “Cabals” and “Factions” — rather than to Anne and the Harley ministry. He inclines to sarcastic remarks about George, who was poor at speaking English and cared little about adapting himself to English manners. But Swift's concern with the continuation of the Protestant line prevails over his misgivings. Even if he disliked the king as an individual, he could never favor Jacobites or Dissenters, so he adhered to the choice which would maintain the Anglican Church regime.

Thirdly, Swift upholds the concept of an ancient constitution. As we can see in the Examiners, he accepts the mixed monarchy of Crown, Lords, and Commons. In the History, he argues:

He [Harley] considered the House of Peers as a Body made up almost a Fourth Part of New Men within Twenty Years past; all Clients or Proselytes to the Leaders of the opposite Party, and consequently stocked with Principles little consistent with the old Constitution: [...] That, where the Two Houses should differ so far as to stop the Course of Business, the Commons must of necessity comply, or be dissolved; which would put the Prince and People

3 Swift states in Examiners No. 15 (16 Nov. 1710): “We live here under a limited Monarchy” (3: 13). A “limited Monarchy” here is synonymous with a mixed monarchy. In Examiners No. 33, he mentions: “[A] supreme, absolute, unlimited Power [...] is lodged in the King or Queen, together with the Lords and Commons of the Kingdom” (3: 113).
under insuperable Difficulties, and make it ruinous, or impossible for the
Ministry to serve: That, the Royal Prerogative could never be more properly
exerted than in such an Exigency as this [. . .]. [. . .] [It was said] That, in
such a Government as this, where the Prince holds the Balance between Two
great Powers, the Nobility and People; It is of the very nature of his Office to
remove from One Scale into Another; or sometimes put his own Weight into
the lightest, so to bring both to an Equilibrium: And lastly, That the other
Party had been above Twenty Years corrupting the Nobility with Republican
Principles, which nothing but the Royal Prerogative could hinder from
overspreading us. (7: 19-21)

While criticizing the Whigs for spreading “Republican Principles,” which are
“little consistent with the old Constitution,” Swift reveals his ideal of how
parliamentary politics should be managed. The Lords and the Commons are
considered as the “Two great Powers,” but he accepts that it is the Commons
which must “comply” when the “Two Houses should differ so far as to stop the
Course of Business,” 4 where the royal prerogative is best employed. He expects
the Crown to work as an arbiter between Lords and Commons, not as an
absolute monarchy. With regard to the succession system, he sees the need for it
to be regulated by law enacted in the legislature. In the History, he denounced
the custom of the succession in France in relation to the settlement of the War

---

4 As he never approves of a civil revolution, Swift does not necessarily support
democracy. He rather seems to be disposed to oligarchy. In Examiner No. 40 (10 May 1711),
he recognizes the merit of birth:

I cannot but take Notice, That of all the Heresies in Politicks, profusely scattered by the
Partisans of the late Administration, none ever displeased me more, or seemed to have more
dangerous Consequences to Monarchy, than that pernicious Talent so much affected, of
discovering a Contempt for Birth, Family, and ancient Nobility. [. . .]

Suppose there be nothing but Opinion in the Difference of Blood; every Body knows,
that Authority is very much founded on Opinion. But surely, that Difference is not wholly
imaginary. The Advantages of a liberal Education, of chusing the best Companions to
converse with; not being under the Necessity of practicing little mean Tricks by a scanty
Allowance; the enlarging of Thought, and acquiring the Knowledge of Men and Things
by Travel; the Example of Ancestors inciting to great and good Actions. These are usually
some of the Opportunities that fall in the Way of those who are born, of what we call
the better Families; and, allowing Genius to be equal in them and the Vulgar, the Odds
of the Spanish Succession (1701-13):

Whilst the Congress at Utrecht remained in this unactive State, the Queen proceeded to perfect that important Article for preventing the Union of France and Spain. It was proposed and accepted, that Philip [V (1683-1746; r. 1700-46)] should renounce France for Himself and his Posterity; And that the Most Christian King and all the Princes of his Blood should in the like manner renounce Spain. It must be confessed that this Project of Renunciation lay under a great Disrepute by the former Practices of this very King Lewis the Fourteenth [1638-1715; r. 1643-1715], pursuant to an absurd Notion among many in that Kingdom, of a Divine Right annexed to the Proximity of Blood, not to be controled by any humane Law [. . .]. (149-50)

Swift recognized the hereditary right to the throne as “most agreeable to our old Constitution” (3: 114; Examiner, no. 33, 22 Mar 1710-11), but he saw “humane Law” as indispensable for the functioning of this system. The point is that he saw parliamentary government as the ideal political structure, but it must be operated compatibly with the monarchical constitution.

are clearly on their Side. Nay, we may observe in some, who by the Appearance of Merit, or Favour of Fortune, have risen to great Stations, from an obscure Birth, that they have still retained some sordid Vices of their Parentage or Education, either insatiable Avarice, or ignominious Falsehood and Corruption. (3: 150)

In Swift’s Tory Politics, Lock argues on this point as follows:

Swift’s ideal political order is hierarchical, based on the exercise of power and influence by a mainly hereditary class whose inherited wealth and social position gives them a natural right to determine public policies. [. . .] He advances several reasons for believing that nobility confers real benefits and advantages. These are the superior education and culture to which it gives (or it ought to give) access; the examples of noble ancestors to emulate; and the political virtue that comes from having property to defend. In the tradition of the classical republicans, Swift thought that political power was best entrusted to those who had a real stake in their country. For, being already wealthy, they would not easily be bribed to betray the national interest which was also their own. (174-75)
3. The Transformation of Tory and Whig Ideologies

We may now proceed to the discussion of the development of political ideology after the Revolution.5

J. R. Western points out that the contemporary meaning of the word “revolution” was “change,” especially “of a natural and moderate kind.” The Revolution was a bloodless one, and it was the outcome of “avoid[ing] radical change,” led by people “at the top of the existing social and political structure.” In other words, it was no more than a “modest progress [...] in securing parliamentary supremacy and individual freedom after 1688” (1-4; emphasis added).

J. H. Plumb focuses on the efficacy and benefit of patronage. Controlling patronage, that is, wielding the authority to appoint and dismiss officials, was the crucial factor in the possession of political power. He contends: “It was patronage that cemented the political system, held it together, and made it an almost impregnable citadel, impervious to defeat, indifferent to social change. [...] Place was power; patronage was power; and power is what men in politics are after” (189). The struggle for political power can be identified with the scramble for patronage among the various political factions. Those in power, whether Whig or Tory, were transformed into conservatives, because they wanted to protect their vested interests in the patronage system. Although the Tories had usually been in opposition, Toryism never disappeared. Even the Whigs, typically in the age of Robert Walpole, 1st Earl of Orford (1676-1745), adopted conservative principles to maintain their influence in political circles. Plumb observes: “The evolution of political stability had gone hand in hand not only with the diminution and close control of the electorate and a more thorough exploitation of patronage, but also with the evolution of single-party government and the proscription of a political opposition” (172). The election system was developed in the first age of party politics. This could be seen as a dawn of democracy, but constituencies, in reality, gradually became privileges limited to men of property, because election expenses continually increased (85-86). The populace were not able to substantially enjoy the “liberty” acquired

---

5 This section includes revised extracts from my previously published articles: Nakajima, “Sir Robert Filmer’s Patriarcha”; “John Locke's Two Treatises.”
in the Revolution. Politics after the Revolution was not characterized by the
development of democracy, but by the success of oligarchy.

As H. T. Dickinson explains, Tory ideology was a "theory of order." It
upheld five features: "absolute monarchy, divine ordination, indefeasible
hereditary succession, non-resistance and passive obedience" (15). Sir Robert
Filmer's (1588-1653) political thought, expounded in Patriarcha (1680), is in
accord with these doctrines. In fact, his patriarchal theory is considered "a good
example of ideas which were commonly — though not universally — held by
seventeenth-century royalists and Tories" (Filmer xxiv). Although "Filmerism"
served as a basis of the Tory ideology due to its thorough conservatism, Toryism
in practice had to be moderated in accordance with the political reality of the
Revolution. The accession of the foreign ruler, William III, forced the moderate
Tories to compromise some of their principles to ensure their survival. As regards
absolute monarchy and its divine ordination, their loyalty to the king shifted to
a loyalty to the ancient constitution, that is, the mixed government of Crown,
Lords, and Commons, which Filmer had attacked. As for indefeasible hereditary
succession, they limited it by refusing to recognize a Catholic monarch who
could not fulfil the role of protector of the interests of the Established Church.
To maintain their ideology of order after the Revolution, the Tories gave a
new sense to the last two doctrines — non-resistance and passive obedience —
through these transitions (Dickinson 27-29). Actually, they had to give priority
to the allegiance to the Anglican Church over the allegiance to the king, since
they had abandoned James II. Those who could not accept these changes
became the extreme right, the Jacobites.

The Whigs, long considered the driving force of the Revolution, did not have
a monolithic solidarity. The republicans, who ardently upheld the rights of the
people, were only a minority within the party. Certainly Whig ideology was
a "theory of liberty," which advocated "the social contract, the natural rights
of man and the ultimate sovereignty of the people," but the Junto, the most
influential faction, took a pragmatic attitude in order to seize and keep political
power in their government offices. As to the moderate Whigs, of whom Sidney
Godolphin, 1st Earl of Godolphin (1645-1712), was a representative, they formed
the coalition government with the Tories. Indeed, the majority of the Whigs
were conservative. "Most active Whigs" were men of means, and they "wanted
a stable, orderly, even hierarchical society which would protect the privileges and property of the wealthy and influential” by entrusting the political power to “responsible men of their own type.” They never hoped “to dismantle the Established Church or to sever all the links between Church and State.” As a matter of fact, the Whigs were afraid of “social revolution” by the common subjects, because it would threaten the profit and influence of men of property (Dickinson 57). So far the political theory which John Locke (1632-1704) expounded in *Two Treatises of Government* (1690) was regarded as the central tenet of the “liberal” Whig ideology (Ashcraft, *Locke’s Two Treatises* 1), but as J. P. Kenyon remarks, “[t]he truth is, the constitutional theories put forward by defenders of the Revolution were not really ‘Lockean’ at all, except for their use of the term ‘contract’, which in any case was part of the common vocabulary of politics long before Locke appeared on the scene” (2). Furthermore, Dickinson claims that the Whigs preferred the “concept of an ancient constitution” to the contract theory. The former “placed limits on the power of the English Crown and recognized the privileges and authority of Parliament,” but “did not advocate a democratic system of government”; the latter, “as put forward by Locke and Algernon Sidney [1622-83],” held “more radical assumptions about the equality of man, the existence of certain universal and inalienable natural rights, and the ultimate sovereignty of the people” (61-62). The Whigs, neither markedly liberal nor close to the people, were simply defenders of their own oligarchic privileges.

The increasing conservativism of the Whigs and the moderation of the Tories in the late Stuart period caused another intense conflict — between Court and Country — especially in the early Hanoverian age (the reign of the first two Georges). Here we can borrow Dickinson’s definition:

> [B]oth parties are often described as alliances of two elements: a ‘Court’ element of professional politicians who wanted power and were anxious for office, and a larger ‘Country’ element of natural backbenchers who cared

---

6 Plumb says, “After 1715, power could not be achieved through party and so the rage of party gave way to the pursuit of place” (189).

7 See also Speck, *Stability and Strife* 4-5.
little for office and who could not always be trusted to support the political ambitions of their party leaders. (91)

The profits of patronage frequently united some of the factions in both parties. For instance, Godolphin and Harley swam with the tide of party strife, controlling the coalition government by distributing places to the members, whether Whig or Tory. Walpole refined this method, cleverly removed enemies, and established the age of the so-called Whig supremacy installed by the “Court” Whigs. The Court interest could easily abandon their original doctrines, whether Whig or Tory, in the face of the attraction — both the influence and the profit — of patronage. On the other hand, the Country opposition in the age of Walpole was strikingly active, combining the “Whig malcontents” who were ambitious to hold office, the “radical Whigs or Commonwealthmen” and the Jacobites (both extreme factions but small in number), and the “Tory country gentlemen” who formed the largest part (166). Although in many cases it was lacking in unity because the principles of each group were fundamentally different, the Country opposition united to resist corruption in high places.

A simple dichotomy between the “conservative” Tories and the “progressive” Whigs had increasingly become less serviceable as an inclusive categorization. Both the Tories and the Whigs of this period had grown conservative at the same rate, each absorbing the principles of the other. This observation suggests that political principles themselves change in precise response to human desire. Swift’s supposed indifference to partisanship indicates that he penetrated deeply into the human motives behind these ideological philosophies.

4. The Character of Swift’s Political Thought

In view of all this, it is a risky venture to characterize Swift’s standpoint in clear-cut political categories. In the Memoirs, he presents his own account as follows:

---

8 The change of dynasty from Stuart to Hanover brought about a change of government, but the noted first ministers of each reign — Godolphin and Harley in the former, and Walpole in the latter — had a common strategy, that is, managing politics by controlling patronage.
I found myself much inclined to be what they called a Whig in politics; and [. . .] besides, I thought it impossible, upon any other principle, to defend or submit to the Revolution: But, as to religion, I confessed myself to be an High-churchman, and that I did not conceive how any one, who wore the habit of a clergyman, could be otherwise [. . .]. (8: 120)

Swift declares himself to be “a Whig in politics.” Certainly we can find a Whiggish tendency in him—he supports the Revolution settlement and espouses parliamentarianism, which would encourage the reduction of the King’s absolute power and admit the people’s right of resistance to the monarchy. His political principles, however, also include Tory elements. In Some Free Thoughts, he refers to the modification of the Tory ideology after their acceptance of William III:

The Logick of the highest Tories is now, that this was the Establishment they found, as soon as they arrived to a Capacity of Judging; that they had no hand in turning out the late King, and therefore have no Crime to answer for, if it were any. That the Inheritance to the Crown is in pursuance of Laws made ever since their Remembrance, by which all Papists are excluded; and they have no other Rule to go by. That they will no more dispute King William the third’s Title, than King William the first’s; since they must have Recourse to History for both: That they have been instructed in the Doctrines of passive Obedience, Non-Resistance and Hereditary Right, and find them all necessary for preserving the present Establishment in Church and State, and for continuing the Succession in the House of Hannover, and must in their own Opinion renounce all those Doctrines by setting up any other Title to the Crown. This I say, seems to be the Politicall Creed of all the high-principled Men, I have for some time met with of forty Years old, and under; which although I am far from justifying in every part, yet I am sure it sets the Protestant Succession upon a much firmer Foundation, than all the indigested Scheams of those who profess to act upon what they call Revolution-Principles. (8: 92)

Though he is “far from justifying in every part” the revised Tory “Doctrines
of passive Obedience, Non-Resistance and Hereditary Right,” he is in basic agreement with them. His advocacy of the ancient constitution can be seen as a clever synthesis of the actual stance of the Whigs and the concessional ideal of the Tories. As to his High Churchism, David Oakleaf points out that “[c]learly aware that popular opinion aligned the high-church position with the Tories, Swift nevertheless avoids calling himself a Tory” (38). In “From Principles to Practice,” Speck observes:

The likeliest explanation of Swift’s anomalous role on the political stage of early eighteenth-century England is that he was a clergyman of the Church of Ireland. James II’s policy of replacing Anglicans with Catholics in key position both in Church and State had gone much farther in Ireland than in England. [. . .] Thereafter there was absolutely no love lost between the Irish clergy and the hereditary Stuart line. [. . .] Their experiences had also given them a deeper hatred of the Catholics than was usual among the English clergy. At the same time the history of Ireland earlier in the seventeenth-century did little to endear them to the dissenters. [. . .] Hatred of what James II had done in Ireland turned the Irish clergy into Whigs. [. . .] On the other hand hatred of what papists and dissenters had done in Ireland turned them towards the Tories. [. . .]

Swift shared the prejudices of the Irish clergy, and English politics therefore presented him with a real dilemma. Neither party both hated James II, the Catholic tyrant, and venerated Charles I, the Anglican martyr. (81)

Actually, in the Memoirs, Swift betrays his puzzlement at the complicated treatment of religion in English political circles:

I confessed [. . .] That I had observed very well with what insolence and haughtiness some Lords of the High-church party treated not only their own chaplains, but all other clergymen whatsoever, and thought this was sufficiently recompensed by their professions of zeal to the church: That I had likewise observed how the Whig Lords took a direct contrary measure, treated the persons of particular clergymen with great curtesy, but shewed much ill-will and contempt for the order in general: That I knew it was necessary
for their party, to make their bottom as wide as they could, by taking all
denominations of Protestants to be members of their body: That I would
not enter into the mutual reproaches made by the violent men on either
side; but, that the connivance, or the encouragement, given by the Whigs
to those writers of pamphlets, who reflected upon the whole body of the
clergy, without any exception, would unite the church, as one man, to oppose
them [. . .]. (8: 120)

Swift could not place full confidence in the Tories, even though they belonged
to the High Church camp. He realized that both parties were carrying on their
calculating schemes under the guise of piety. It seems reasonable to suppose
that for him the Established Church was not so much a citadel of faith as a
fundamental political organ serving to unite the British people, beyond all sects,
and to sustain Britain as the independent state under the rule of law, which
could repel threats from outsiders — not only foreign powers, but also enemies
at home.9

In the last analysis, Swift was a committed disputant who tried to hybridize
with moderation in mind the principles on both sides in order to set an ideal
that would go beyond the bounds of party ideology. Rather than being a hired
moderate propagandist, he was quite extreme in his determination to “correct”
the nation, though not given to extremes in policy itself. His equivocal stance
may appear to be opportunistic, but he was consistent in his political principles
regardless of the changes of the ruling party. Since these unpublished tracts
were written in the twilight or after the fall of the Harley ministry, he could
have availed himself of the opportunities to ingratiate himself with the Whigs
and Walpole or to deliver a fatal blow to Harley and St John, if he had been
so minded. The keynote of his argument, however, had not changed at all
from that of his former “Tory” tracts, in point of his skepticism about the
effectiveness of the dual party system and his rejection of all forms of faith but

9 In “From Principles to Practice,” Speck writes: “Metaphysical sanctions [. . .] Swift
considered to be absolutely necessary to preserve morality in civil society. He was also
persuaded that the State should back them up with the discipline of a State Church” (78).
The Established Church is conceived as indispensable to support the maintenance of
political order from a spiritual aspect.
Anglicanism as heresy.¹⁰

Thus Swift’s minor political works, which have generally been relegated to the periphery, may make a significant contribution to a deeper understanding of his politics. They can reveal his underlying motive irrespective of party bonds. Study of them can help us define his place in the history of political thought in early modern Britain; but to follow up this point would take us beyond the scope of this paper, and requires further investigation.¹¹

Works Consulted


¹⁰ Swift assesses the contemporary British political system in *Examiner* No. 15:

We live here under a limited Monarchy, and under the Doctrine and Discipline of an excellent Church: We are unhappily divided into two Parties, both which pretend a mighty Zeal for our Religion and Government, only they disagree about the Means. The Evils we must fence against are, on one side Fanaticism and Infidelity in Religion; and Anarchy, under the Name of a Commonwealth, in Government: On the other Side, Popery, Slavery, and the Pretender from *France*. (3: 13)

He depicts the party division between Tory and Whig as an unhappy arrangement, and admits that their differences lie in their “Means” rather than their ideas. As to religion, the Anglican Establishment is firmly maintained. Dissent — “Fanaticism and Infidelity” — is to be excluded, and adherence to Roman Catholicism is regarded as equivalent to “Slavery.”

¹¹ We might possibly trace the root of Swift’s “moderate” (or moderate-looking) stance back to the via media philosophy of Richard Hooker (1554-1600) in point of their duality of political thought and their firm Anglicanism. Interestingly enough, the two major contrasting philosophers (Filmer as a leading Tory thinker and Locke as a Whig equivalent) paid due respect to and got hints from Hooker’s *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1593-1661). This seems quite suggestive, but there is much room for argument. For a detailed discussion of Hooker’s politics, see Nakajima, “Richard Hooker.”
Jonathan Swift's Ideal Nation in His Unpublished Political Tracts, 1713-15


